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—
Chair

The Honourable Judy Sgro

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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.)): I call to order meeting number 28 of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

This meeting is being recorded on CPAC and will be on air at a later date. Today, of course, is a national day of remembrance and action on violence against women, and that has been acknowledged in the House by all of us.

We will begin our meeting. Before I do, I want to remind all the members you should have received, in a brown envelope in your offices, a copy of the draft report that was sent out. I received it about two hours ago, so I believe it was all sent out at the same time. That is my confirmation from the analysts and the clerk. So everyone should have it. If you would take the time in your busy schedules, prior to tomorrow's meeting, to go over it carefully, we'll have our three-hour meeting tomorrow, and I hope we'll get through that report at the end of the day.

We will now move into our open forum. We have a variety of witnesses with us today. We have the National Council of Women of Canada, represented by Catharine Laidlaw-Sly. We have the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, Leilani Farha; the National Association of Women and the Law, Andrée Côté; and the Native Women's Association of Canada, represented by Sherry Lewis, the executive director. We were to have the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada, but regrettably, they had to cancel.

I will ask that we now go into the forum. You each have five minutes and then we will have rounds of questioning by the members.

We will start with the National Council of Women of Canada, Ms. Laidlaw-Sly.

Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly (Policy Advisor, National Council of Women of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear on behalf of the oldest federation for women in Canada, which was founded almost 114 years ago by women who were working for their rights at that time, which of course included the right to vote.

We are very concerned and we have submitted a brief about the cuts to Status of Women Canada. We are very concerned because Canada signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW. During the

election, the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, signed the CEDAW pledge, as did all other party leaders.

However, our government has now cut funding to the operating budget for Status of Women Canada, in addition to letting women's groups know that they will no longer receive funding from Status of Women Canada for the advocacy, lobbying, and research work that they do. So we are concerned. We ask how this government can keep its commitment to uphold the terms of the CEDAW convention, if they cut funding to the very department that helps to implement it?

In particular we are concerned because in our opinion this action effectively repudiates Canada's signature on the CEDAW treaty, and it casts into doubt the process of preparing a credible CEDAW report, which is due in 2007 and fast coming upon us. How can a truncated department do a credible job?

We are also concerned because article 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that women are to be equal before and under the law. However, while women have equal rights on paper, the reality is that there is still great inequality.

For example, at every education level, women earn less than men. In fact, the 2003 United Nations CEDAW report recommended to Canada that it accelerate its efforts regarding equal pay for work of equal value at the federal level, which is in paragraph 376. Canada has a commitment to produce a quadrennial report, and that is one of the issues that has to be answered. We wonder what capacity there will be to do a credible job.

In addition, we note that there will be no incentive or resources to investigate the real income differential between men and women. The statistical difference cited—72 cents to each dollar earned by a man—does not take into account the fact that women in certain employment or professions can and do earn as much as their male colleagues. In fact sometimes they earn more. Therefore, there could be a greater difference, if one measured just the income levels in employment areas not governed by equal pay legislation or professional rates of payment. Can a truncated department undertake this sort of research? Does its new mandate without the inclusion of the word "equality" actually even allow for that sort of study?

Status of Women Canada was established to help women participate in public policy process and bring gender equality issues to light. These cuts render it unlikely that there will be an effective way to continue doing gender-based analysis, or to ensure gendering proposed legislation when the staff is cut back. The capacity to consult with the stakeholders is reduced, and equality is not part of the mandate.

Additionally, a truncated department will be unable to investigate reported instances of systemic discrimination against women that arise as a result of having legislation and regulations drafted without any input from a seriously weakened department.

How can Canadian women now ensure that they will continue to progress towards complete gender equality? With the 40% cut to Status of Women's administrative budget, research into important issues affecting women's equality will be drastically affected. How will the government be able to monitor issues affecting women to ensure that they are being dealt with fairly and effectively?

Aboriginal, immigrant, and visible minority women especially will find it more difficult to make their voices heard and have their issues addressed.

• (1545)

Canada was rebuked after the last CEDAW report for failing to raise living conditions and health care for aboriginal women in particular. With fewer offices in the field, instead of reaching these disadvantaged women better than before, the National Council of Women of Canada believes that Status of Women Canada will be inaccessible for most of them.

Also, in providing funding for profit groups, it will force non-profit groups into an uneven competition for what have always been limited funds. This will not, and I'm quoting from the reorganization documents, "facilitate women's participation in Canadian society by addressing their economic, social and cultural situation through Canadian organizations." It will further disadvantage all those women's groups representing all marginalized groups, since they are supported mainly by their members and other interested women who donate time, work, and money as best they can.

It is obvious that by cutting back the actual offices in Canada, reducing the budget, and operating with a changed mandate, the department is meant to become a spokesperson for a particular, highly selective, and restrictive interpretation of CEDAW. Considering that CEDAW's text, like all UN documents, was arrived at through an exhaustive process of consensus building and is therefore not a cutting-edge document, these changes do, in our opinion, amount to a repudiation of Canada's signature on the treaty. This is no way to celebrate 25 years of work.

In closing, the National Council of Women of Canada has repeatedly called on the Canadian government to do more, not less, to implement the terms and intent of what is regarded as the United Nations human rights treaty for the world's women. The real long-term effect of these cuts will be to destroy the department and render the terms of the UN treaty non-operational due to lack of capacity and will within the government apparatus itself.

In short, the effects of these cuts could result in the derailment of any further progress towards true equality for women in Canada.

Therefore, the National Council of Women of Canada recommends that the funding to Status of Women Canada be restored and increased by a further 25%, as recommended in this committee's report of last winter, as a result of the hearings that were held in December 2005.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next presenter will be Leilani Farha. I will raise my hand when you have one minute left. Maybe that will help us to keep everything succinct.

Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly: I hope I didn't go over my time.

The Chair: It's okay. We gave you a little bit of leeway.

Ms. Farha.

Ms. Leilani Farha (Co-Chair, Human Rights Committee, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My name is Leilani Farha. I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to this committee on behalf of the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, of which I am a board member and co-chair of the human rights committee.

FAFIA is a pan-Canadian alliance of over 70 women's and human rights' groups across the country. Our member groups include local women's centres, associations of shelters and transition houses, as well as regional, Quebec, and national groups.

FAFIA's mandate is to monitor Canada's domestic implementation of its international human rights obligations under the United Nations treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

I have been an international human rights lawyer for the past ten years. Most of my work has focused on the economic and social rights of women. I have extensive experience working both internationally and domestically, using international human rights law in my work. I am well apprised of the Government of Canada's human rights obligations and I would like to use my expertise to shed further light on the impact of the cuts and changes to Status of Women Canada.

My comments are focused on one central point: the cuts and changes to Status of Women Canada are contrary to the federal government's international human rights obligations to promote women's equality. The obligation to promote women's equality, as I'm sure you are well aware, appears in a number of treaties that Canada has ratified: CEDAW; the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; etc. The Government of Canada has also committed itself politically to this objective in the Beijing platform for action.

In case you have the impulse to dismiss the domestic implementation of our international human rights obligations as perhaps irrelevant, I want to remind you of two things. First, with respect to treaties, these are legal obligations. They are not policy objectives; they are human rights, and they cannot be tossed aside in the name of efficiency.

Second, as my colleague mentioned, Prime Minister Harper made a personal and political commitment to promote women's equality when he declared, in a signed letter to FAFIA earlier this year, and I quote:

Yes, I'm ready to support women's human rights and I agree that Canada has more to do to meet its international obligations to women's equality. If elected, I will take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada.

Why do the cuts and changes to Status of Women Canada contravene the federal government's obligation to promote women's equality? In Canada, it has long been understood that the government alone cannot do all that is necessary to effectively promote women's equality. The women's program of Status of Women Canada recognizes the government's own need for the advice and expertise of women, and in fact this is a mark of a healthy democracy.

Canada's support for women's NGOs through Status of Women Canada has been a means of compensating for the gross under-representation of women in formal political structures. The funds enabled organizations to do the advocacy and lobbying necessary to ensure that women could participate in policy development in other ways. Consequently, the new restrictions on advocacy and lobbying with federal funds and the ban on projects which promote women's participation in public life will dramatically diminish democratic participation for women in Canada.

If the current restrictions stay in place, we expect that organizations like FAFIA, if it receives Status of Women Canada funds, will not be able to do things such as appearing before this committee. In FAFIA's opinion, this government's changes and cuts to Status of Women Canada conflict with its international human rights obligations and commitments, and I can refer you to articles within the treaties where this is so—for example, article 7 of CEDAW, which obliges the government to ensure women the right to participate in the formulation of government policy. This is also noted in the Beijing platform for action in many instances.

•(1555)

Finally, we draw to this committee's attention the impact of eliminating the research arm of Status of Women Canada. Status of Women Canada is one of the only, if not the only, governmental

body that consistently produces solid research on pertinent issues pertaining to women's equality. This research is necessary and an important part of the promotion of women's equality. Also, as a result of this research Status of Women Canada has established an international reputation for producing quality, cutting-edge research that is relied upon by many stakeholders around the world.

In conclusion, FAFIA believes that the cuts and changes to Status of Women Canada seriously call into question this government's commitment to promoting women's equality and are not in compliance with their international human rights obligations. We believe that the Government of Canada has traded in women's equality for the sake of so-called "efficiencies".

At the end of the day, who will be most affected by this? It is the most marginalized women in Canada, who have little access to decision-making structures and now, no means of getting there.

FAFIA calls on the government to reverse the cuts and changes to the mandate of Status of Women Canada.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Farha.

For the National Association of Women and the Law, we have Andrée Côté. Welcome.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andrée Côté (Director, Legislation and Law Reform, National Association of Women and the Law): Good afternoon Madam Chair. I would like to thank you and your colleagues for giving me the opportunity to address your committee.

It is with a great deal of emotion that I appear here today, on December 6, before this important committee. For the rest of my life I will remember the cold silence that fell over Montreal, a heavy chill on the steep road leading to the 14 white caskets of the young women who were gunned down at the École Polytechnique, on December 6, 1989. It was a silence under an open sky, the silence of thousands of women and men who were grief stricken by this deadly attack committed by a man who was consumed by hatred for those that he identified, whether rightly or wrongly, as feminists. Strangely enough, in the decade that followed the École Polytechnique massacre, sexist, misogynist and patriarchal voices that had been silent for almost a quarter of a century began to make themselves heard.

Since then, some areas of the right have done so much to discredit feminism that the current minister for the Status of Women, Ms. Bev Oda, stated, during a meeting with the representatives of women groups last October that those who spoke out against inequality of women were exaggerating, that they were victimizing women and that, when all was said and done, they were all somewhat hysterical. The minister is very much mistaken in her characterization of the status of women living in Canada and she would be well advised to consult the work that has been done by the Policy Research Fund, a program that she has just abolished.

In fact, the decisions announced by the conservative government are detrimental to women and equality will take a step backward; take, for example, the decision to an end to funding for a national childcare network and the decision to not adopt a pay equity legislation.

Moreover, the change in the mandate and funding criteria for the Women's Program is an unprecedented effort by the federal government to silence the feminists, particularly the groups who represent women's rights at the municipal, provincial and federal government levels. The Women's Program will now fund services provided directly to groups of women who are particularly vulnerable, something that is no doubt necessary, but that is not enough.

The Women's Program will no longer support groups like the National Association of Women and the Law, the NAWL, which analyze government policies, consult with women from various communities and regions, bring forward measures to ensure the full respect of women's equality rights and promote rights and policies in Ottawa, as well as in various jurisdictions throughout Canada and Quebec. In other words, there will no longer be funding for the work that is necessary to effect systemic change, to ensure that equity, equality and social justice are the true forces guiding the development of all of the government's policies and practices. Some groups will be hard hit by this decision. Others, like the National Association of Women and the Law, might simply have to close up shop.

The loss of the NAWL would mean the loss of a unique voice that has been making itself heard for 30 years on the federal scene, one of the rare voices to defend the rights of women in crucial areas such as family law, violence against women, poverty, pay equity, the protection of human rights, immigration law reform and the constitutional and international rights of women.

This will represent a loss for grass roots organizations as well as provincial and national organizations in Quebec and Canada which use our analyses as reference material, participate in our consultations and which, then, can take part in the democratic process that has led us, over the years, to progressively reform our society and make it a place that is more respectful of women's equality. It will also be a loss for the public service, parliamentary committees, members from all parties and ministers who, over the years, have benefited from our expertise, our interventions and our recommendations.

Women remain grossly under represented in political and legal circles, so it is essential that independent feminist organizations be involved in developing the standards for our democratic society.

• (1600)

The NAWL urges the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to defend the reinstatement of the original mandate of the Women's Program, which was based on promoting the equality of women and asks the committee to recommend not only the reinstatement of the funding but an increase in the funding of Status of Women Canada.

Finally, we also urge the committee to consider the recommendations of the expert panel on gender equality which tabled its report

this summer, and seek to determine the best legislative framework to guarantee stable and sustainable action by the federal government to respect and promote equality rights of all women in Quebec, Canada, and among the first nations. We must not allow the voices of women, of women's groups and of feminists to be silenced.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next presenter is Ms. Sherry Lewis, from the Native Women's Association of Canada. Welcome.

Ms. Sherry Lewis (Executive Director, Native Women's Association of Canada): Thank you very much. I bring you greetings and warm wishes from our president, Beverly Jacobs, who couldn't be here with us today. I'd like to also acknowledge the Algonquin people, whose traditional territory we are on here today.

On behalf of the Native Women's Association of Canada, I wish to thank you for inviting me here today to speak on the issue of funding cuts and program changes at Status of Women Canada. The direction this government is taking on women-specific issues is disturbing. These decisions have huge impacts for aboriginal women and children in Canada. My goal here today is to impress upon you, respected committee members, the extent to which grassroots aboriginal women will be affected.

I just want to note as well that, in our rush to get our submission in, it went from a 9-page document to a 500-word document, and we realized that a lot of the meat of what we were trying to say made it very confusing. I'd therefore like to put emphasis on the speaking notes, as opposed to the submission.

First, I'd like to acknowledge how particularly fitting it is for us to be presenting here today, December 6, as we commemorate the national day of remembrance and action on violence against women. Our hearts go out to the families and friends of those fourteen women who were murdered on this day in Montreal in 1989—murdered because they were women.

As the only national organization representing aboriginal women in Canada, we must also take a moment to remember all those who have been taken from us over the years not because they were women, but because they were aboriginal women. The Manitoba aboriginal justice inquiry, in 1999, noted that Helen Betty Osborne might be alive today if she had not been an aboriginal woman. Extensive lobbying in the years following the inquiry by NWAC and other equality-seeking organizations brought about federal support for aboriginal women's issues and enabled us to look more closely at a disturbing trend called racialized sexualized violence.

The following points provide context or background to the position we are presenting here today. This is really a human rights issue. We've worked very hard over the years to help the Canadian government understand that the historical treatment of aboriginal women has resulted in permanent adverse effects. With colonization and assimilation that came through the systemic breakdown of our societies, our connections to the land were severed through legislation intended to civilize. We quickly became disenfranchised from our families and our children, from our communities and our traditional territories. We lost vital connections to our roots. Our traditional roles and matriarchal ways of being were denigrated and ultimately abolished. This experience has translated into alarmingly high rates of violence, incarceration, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, and death. It has resulted in aboriginal women's overall poor health and socio-economic status. Forty percent of our women are living in poverty.

NWAC works toward revitalizing individual and collective human rights, with the main goal of ending violence against aboriginal women. Human rights infringements and legislated discrimination perpetuate the alarming statistics. In order for real change to occur, these root causes must be targeted for change. Without the continued support of Status of Women Canada, our ability to see these changes through will be jeopardized. Our women will not have a national voice, and the families of missing and murdered women across Canada will be devastated. I'll ask you to keep in mind as well, as you deliberate these changes, that aboriginal women today do not have the same rights as every other Canadian woman in this country.

The Sisters in Spirit initiative was a direct result of tireless advocacy work raising the profile of the violence issue. It was only after several months that NWAC and other national supportive agencies finally received attention. Given that the Sisters in Spirit initiative is currently the largest contribution agreement at Status of Women Canada, the question on our minds is the degree to which our ability to advocate on behalf of aboriginal women's issues, through the Sisters in Spirit initiative, will be affected by these cuts and changes at the department.

The funding cuts and proposed changes to the department are extremely upsetting and, quite honestly, confusing. We are struggling to understand the rationale that would support this move. The Sisters in Spirit initiative has a strong research component that is critical for the development of policy positions and effective advocacy measures. We want to express how concerned we are about the security of the Sisters in Spirit initiative and its staff and the overall capacity that we have gained through this initiative.

•(1605)

Sisters in Spirit is about a public safety issue. Research was required in order to show and demonstrate to all that this is a critical issue that's really happening in this country.

The Status of Women has successfully advanced the gender equality portfolio through the accountability agenda of the current government. Great strides have been made this year towards the development of equality legislation, and these are instrumental steps forward validating the work we do. It would be a huge blow to abandon these achievements.

NWAC's work on a culturally relevant, gender-based analysis framework complements the Status of Women's achievements in this area. We were shocked by the recent announcement that almost half of the department's budget has been cut, that 12 regional offices will be closing. These measures fly in the face of election promises to respect and promote women's rights. They are contrary to Minister Prentice's agenda to make aboriginal women and children a priority for this government.

NWAC is almost exclusively dependent on contributions by the Status of Women, unlike other national aboriginal organizations who receive core-like funding from the Department of Indian Affairs. In fact, we've been directed that we will only get project-based funding. They will not consider core-like funding, so these impacts will have a much greater result with NWAC than with any other aboriginal organization.

As an organization, we are particularly susceptible to what's happening here. We've been doing what we can to prepare for the worst. I must tell you, however, that it's been most difficult preparing the families of missing and murdered women. We also look at the risk to the advancements we've made internationally, and specifically the inclusion of indigenous women-specific clauses in the Beijing Plus Ten platform.

I thank you very much for your ear.

Niawen.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you all very much for your very enlightening presentations and for keeping as brief as you did on a very difficult and complex subject.

For some of the issues you may want to get across, you can use your answer time to the various colleagues who will be asking the questions. It's an opportunity to get a point across.

We'll start with our usual seven minutes of questions and answers, beginning with Ms. Stronach.

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

Thank you very much for being here today with us.

Sherry, as you mentioned, I too am struggling with the rationale in trying to understand these cuts. I can appreciate the need for efficiency when we're spending hard-earned tax dollars, but I don't see that efficiency and equality are mutually exclusive.

We have also asked for the reinstatement of the cuts, and also the increase in the budget that was originally called for. We do not see a champion in this current government who champions women's equality rights. I have therefore called for the resignation of the minister.

I have a few questions, but I would first like to ask you what consultations, if there were any, took place to talk about proposed cuts and to examine and understand both the short-term and long-term implications of these cuts?

I direct that to all of you. Were there any consultations?

Ms. Sherry Lewis: Speaking for the Native Women's Association of Canada, which is currently undertaking matrimonial real property consultation across the country, when the disturbing news in the media started to report what was happening to Status of Women Canada, we began to hear comments from grassroots women about how this was going to affect their daily lives, as they already struggle with the barriers that are in place. Now, potentially, additional challenges will result.

Women at our consultations have been saying, "What have you heard from Status of Women? Is this going to affect the work we're doing?" They're very nervous out there about the few supports that are already in place and what the impacts will be.

Ms. Andrée Côté: I didn't personally attend, but NAWL attended a meeting with the minister in early October, and others here may have been present, where the new funding guidelines for the women's program were announced. There was no consultation at all at that moment.

In fact, the extensive consultations that did happen around Status of Women Canada and the women's program for the evaluation of the program indicate that the groups and the stakeholders were very satisfied with the old mandate of the women's program, which was focused around equality and funding groups to promote equality and take different initiatives.

So it's very disappointing to see that after extensive consultations with stakeholders in 2004 and 2005, this government has adopted a policy that goes completely against what was recommended in their own evaluation program that is on Status of Women Canada's website.

Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly: I have no further comment.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: What I would also like to understand is the change in mandate, removing the words "equality" and also "political" and "legal". What are both the short-term implications for you and the longer-term implications for women's equality in society?

I'll go to Ms. Laidlaw-Sly.

Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly: I think removing the word "equality" calls into question the legitimacy of having a status of women department, because if we're not working for equality, then what are we doing? Everything depends on that principle of equality and the end of all kinds of discrimination, whether it's overt or systemic. In particular, systemic discrimination is the most difficult to overcome because it has deep fingers and tendrils throughout the entire governmental process and it tends to make it very easy for people to take it for granted that when you pay lip service to equality that in fact actual equality has been achieved.

•(1615)

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Are you concerned that this may be the first step, or the first several steps, because we're seeing a trend, towards the elimination of Status of Women Canada?

Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly: Yes, we certainly are, and I think we said so in our brief. We're very concerned that this is the first step to take to dismantle the actual effectiveness of the department. It might continue, but we question whether it can be effective.

Ms. Sherry Lewis: With the Native Women's Association of Canada, our concern is that the removal of the word "equality" makes the assumption that all women have equal rights in this country. I said earlier in my speech that it's important to note that aboriginal women today do not have the same rights as every other woman, especially with regard to matrimonial property rights on reserve and the ability to lodge a human rights complaint while living on reserve. So those are two very critical rights that every other woman has that aboriginal women do not.

Ms. Leilani Farha: Not to repeat what my colleagues said, but by removing the three that you mentioned—equality, political, and legal—basically it straps women, it makes women unable, in our opinion, to make the gains necessary to reach equality. They're saying on the one hand that we've reached equality, so don't work on it, and they're taking away the means we would normally use to ensure our equality: political means and legal means.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: To give me a better feel for it, what's going to be the impact on your day-to-day operations, actually, on the ground, with the closure of the offices, which are now reduced to four from 16? How is that going to affect your day-to-day operations?

Ms. Andrée Côté: As far as the National Association of Women and the Law is concerned, this will have a hugely negative impact on our day-to-day operations. Most of our funding does come from the women's program at Status of Women Canada, so we are anticipating layoffs of probably all of our staff, and we are not even sure we can commit to renewing our lease at this point, which will be ending in July.

We are really devastated, as an organization, by the ramifications of these changes, and we are very concerned that Canada is backtracking on its commitments to women, domestically and on the international scene, whether it be at the Beijing World Conference on Women or the Beijing Plus Five, where Canada has systematically acknowledged the importance of supporting the work of women's organizations. Ever since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1971, up until the recent voluntary sector initiative, different instances have recognized that this is a key component of a vibrant democracy, and it is essential for ensuring that governmental agendas do include egalitarian law reform.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next questioner is Ms. Mourani.

[Translation]

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

I would like to thank all of you for your presentations. I have a number of questions to ask. Ms. Stronach has already touched upon some of them.

Today I received a letter from Ms. Oda explaining the reason for the closings and the cutbacks.

Ms. Lewis, the Montreal office will be responsible for everything from Quebec City to Nunavut, because the Sainte-Foy office will be closing. How do you feel about that?

[English]

Ms. Sherry Lewis: Our organization is a collective of 13 provincial-territorial member associations. For sure, our collective voice is going to be impacted, because we don't formulate our national perspective based on what's going on at the national office; it's from our grassroots women who feed into the provincial or territorial member, who then feed into the national level. With the lack of support at the provincial or territorial level, it will limit their ability to talk to grassroots women, to get issues out there in a quick manner. Quite often, discussions require short timeframes to get back. So it sends a ripple through the whole process that's been designed and built on what's here today, with no provision for how you make that adjustment to still hear grassroots women's voices.

Even things like the cancellation of the court challenges program, by which the average aboriginal woman would have an opportunity to bring her voice forward, has now been silenced.

It's a ripple effect that's going through, and every avenue through which she could talk to government about her issues is now shutting down. We're desperate to try to figure out how we still hear from the women every day who are struggling out there.

•(1620)

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: My question, in a way, is for all of the witnesses. Will the closing of 12 offices and the loss of 68 employees cause you any delay in your work? Last summer, the Women's Program had a number of small problems relating to the processing of various grants. Will the fact that you have fewer offices and fewer employees have any real effect on the work that you are expected to do? Does it mean that the grants will take even longer to process? How do you think these delays will impact what Ms. Oda has set out to do?

[English]

Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly: This is slightly beside your question, but closing the different offices means that I have to support my sister speaking on behalf of aboriginal women, and I do so most emphatically. The national council has been very much dismayed with the long and repeated delays in raising conditions of life and standards of living for aboriginal women. We are very much aware that this particular lack cannot be addressed, unless the government is repeatedly reminded of what the actual situation for these women is. There is absolutely no way any group, never mind women already living well below the poverty line, the cut-off line, wherever they are, can access the government when the offices are so distant.

I think the department and the minister should be reminded that there is a large population of aboriginal women in western Canada with one single office. If the staff is reduced, there will be great delays for them in getting replies to their questions. As concerns groups like the National Council of Women that have never been funded and given core funding at all by the department and have always lived off our own dues—we lived on a shoestring and we continue to live on a shoestring—we find that the restrictions in the program will seriously inhibit our ability to even apply for project funding, because what we do is try to do some research, some public opinion evaluations within our large membership, and come back

with recommendations that are advocacy to the government. We're not allowed to do that and we will not be allowed to get funding for our only purpose in existing. It calls into question the good intentions of the government, in our opinion.

Ms. Leilani Farha: For FAFIA, we're a membership organization. We have local organizations across the country. The cuts to Status of Women Canada and the closure of those regional offices, combined with the changes in what will and will not be funded, are having a tremendous effect on our members.

I will read to you an e-mail that I received from a member in the north, in the Yukon. She says:

Instead of accessing service from Vancouver with staff that know and understand the conditions and issues in the Yukon,

—so it used to be that there was an office in Vancouver—

we will be competing for service out of Edmonton by staff who will be stretched to the limit given the huge geographic area they will be required to serve with no new staff. We were already underserved. The changes that are required to help women in the North require systemic changes, and do not happen woman by woman.

That's just one small example. FAFIA feels that the local organizations are getting hit doubly. Not only do they have to deal with the mandate changes, but they're now having to deal with lack of regional offices.

•(1625)

[Translation]

Ms. Andrée Côté: I support my colleagues. Finally, I think that there will be more red tape involved, because women will only have four offices country wide with which to deal. They will have to cover long distances. Moreover, it will impact on the work done by the local program officers. They acted as an interface, they provided information, and through the local women's groups they ensured that that information was circulated. The work that they did at the federal, provincial and territorial level has been eliminated from the mandate.

I think that it is a great loss for a country like Canada. We will be deprived of the information that we require to properly consult with our national and provincial governments in order to promote understanding among women's groups from various regions and various provincial governments and the federal government. It is disheartening to see that the government is weakening its capacity to understand the needs and the status of women from various regions and communities in Canada and Quebec.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Côté.

Our next questioner is Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you so much for joining us today and for being here. I'm very familiar with a lot of the aboriginal concerns. My son is an RCMP officer, married to an Ojibway girl. I meet on a regular basis, from the bottom of my heart, with all these initiatives that are so important.

As I listened to your presentations, I was taken by some things that I think you either don't know about, or you have been lobbied by other groups with inaccurate information. I want to go over some of these things and ask a couple of questions along the way.

The minister has made a commitment to reinvest the \$5 million, as you know, to help women in their communities. There is an application form online so people can not only apply in big cities, they can apply in the rural areas, which didn't happen before. This applies also to a lot of the more remote areas. I've been up to the far reaches of Canada, and there is Internet there. She was needing to make this kind of application more accessible.

I think this is a big improvement from what was there before. You used to have to go to regional offices for people help and things like that. Anybody can apply, and as long as it's a program that is on the ground working with women, everybody has a chance to do that.

I keep hearing about funding cuts. These are cost savings. You still have the money until 2007. In here today, as I've listened to the presentations, it sounds like today you have no money. The money is still in place until 2007, to give some transition. Also, there is opportunity to apply over the Internet if there's a women's program that is really needed. Status of Women Canada has one program, the women's program, and funding for that program right now is \$10.8 million annually. It's still there. It's alive and well. As far as the aboriginal concerns, we still have funded Sisters in Spirit to \$1 million annually, and they tell us they're extremely pleased with that.

For the first time, we've seen guidelines, because there has been a lot of money put out there and a lot of Canadian women are telling us that they never see the programs they need right on the ground. I know, for instance, FAFIA from December 2004 to May 2006—correct me if I'm wrong, and I will look it up—I believe it's close to \$600,000 that has been put in the FAFIA organization. Again, for the National Association of Women and the Law, we have in excess of \$450,000 from October 2000 to March 2006.

I know there is a lot of good work that has been done. I understand that, and it's very good. It has done a lot of good things. But when I listen to the member from the National Council.... That application is on the website. I would invite you to apply. It's there.

What we have seen is a lot of lobbying by members opposite with not accurate information, so we're really happy that you're here today to get as much accurate information as you can, because we want to help women. I'm a woman. I have four daughters, and I have been an advocate for women's rights all my life. I feel very strongly that a lot of women across our nation are going to benefit. You know, taxpayers expect that their money will be used well. They want to see results for their money. Quite honestly, I think we can be very proud when women have programs that actually help them right in their communities.

Interestingly, last November 28, when we passed this budget we had about \$223 million of the \$1 billion in spending restraints announced in September and we had estimates in November, and members all around this table passed this unanimously. Now we're hearing complaints about what they call "cuts". These are not cuts. These are reinvestments in another place. Those programs for women are going to be better than they've ever been before.

• (1630)

I'm going to ask you, where did you get all this information that you came forward with today? This is interesting...misinformation, I must say.

Ms. Andrée Côté: With respect, madam, I think if you look at the Status of Women Canada website you will now see the new guidelines of the women's program. They quite clearly state that equality has been evacuated from the mandate and that advocacy groups will no longer be funded—nor will lobbying, nor will research.

So I don't think there has been any exaggeration. I don't think there's been any exaggeration when we say that there's been a \$5 million cut to Status of Women Canada. It's clear. It's been covered. It's in the budget estimates. I think it's obvious. You're now saying it's being reallocated; we look forward to hearing where it will be reallocated.

In terms of inaccurate information, your minister, Madam Oda, has been saying that NAWL has received \$450,000 this year. In fact that is incorrect. We wrote to her saying that we were very pleased to learn that our funding had been re-established to our previous level. We had a response that in fact we indeed would not be receiving \$450,000 but only \$290,000 up until next September, in 2007, the date at which we will not be eligible for any more funding from the women's program because of the change in criteria.

So I'd like to see who is distributing bad, incorrect information. If you look at any reports—Status of Women, Statistics Canada, or other research reports—women's inequality is ongoing, pervasive, deep, and systemic, especially for certain groups of women.

The piecemeal funding of services—

Mrs. Joy Smith: Could I just ask you a question about that money?

Ms. Andrée Côté: —that will now be provided to for-profit groups, perhaps even religious groups, under your new women's program initiative is not going to be an answer to a systemic problem.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The time is up. We'll move on to our next speaker.

Just to set the record straight, the estimates that were adopted were the 2006-07 estimates. They were adopted unanimously by the committee. The cuts that are being discussed today are cuts that will be effective April 1, 2007. I just wanted to correct that.

Yes, Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: On a point of order, Madam Chair, what I was trying to say was that I do believe the \$450,000 began.... Please check this out, but I believe it was \$450,000 between October 2000 and March 2006. The end of it was in March 2006, and I believe what you got was the ending of that \$450,000.

I would ask that you look it up just to make sure that everything is accurate.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Andrée Côté: If I may, I can send to this committee the letter from the minister so that you can have a copy of what she's been saying to other groups about our funding.

The Chair: Thank you, that would be fine. Please send it to the clerk. She will distribute it to all committee members.

Ms. Mathyssen.

• (1635)

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm thankful that you corrected the record regarding the estimates.

I have a profound sense of turmoil and outrage here. I very much feel that there's been a betrayal by this minister of women across Canada. That's why I too think she has to resign, no question.

I have a number of questions. First, we've heard a great deal over the last few weeks about the work of Status of Women Canada over the last 25 years. I'm wondering if you could put into perspective some of that work. In other words, what would Canada look like if 20 years ago we'd had these kinds of cuts and this change in mandate? What would have happened to the progress that women have made?

Ms. Andrée Côté: Well, 20 or 25 years ago, under the Criminal Code, men were allowed to rape their wives.

Aboriginal women who married non-aboriginal men lost their status.

Rape victims had to deal with discriminatory provisions on how to prove whether they had effectively been raped or whether they had consented to sexual assault. In the 1990s defence attorneys started accessing confidential files of sexual assault survivors to discredit them.

Immigration provisions were explicitly sexist against immigrant women on all sorts of levels. Sponsored women would still be sponsored for over ten years. Now it's been reduced to three years.

Matrimonial property would not have been redefined in such an egalitarian way in family law.

The Employment Equity Act wouldn't exist at the federal level.

I could go on, but I think I've made my point.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: I thank you for that.

We've heard that the \$5 million, which is gone, is going to be reallocated somewhere, although this contradicts the budget revisions we saw at the end of November, where very clearly that money was gone. In light of this, I'm wondering whether the expanded eligibility criteria, in terms of organizations applying for

the little bit that's left, include for-profit organizations and charities. I'm wondering what will the impact be on the not-for-profits. We've heard a little bit, but I'd like to hear more.

In regard to these charities, I also wonder, does this new role fit with current laws that regulate charitable charters? Are we contravening the law here?

Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly: Thank you.

I did raise the issue of the funding to be provided to for-profit groups, as well as for non-profit groups. We see it as an unfair competition. For-profit groups will be able to figure in recovering the costs that they have to put into their presentation, when they go forward to look for these funds, limited though they may be.

Not-for-profit groups are short of women power right from the beginning, they are short of time, and they are short of financial resources to enable them to compete in the same way that any for-profit group can. You're asking apples to compete with very beautiful, ripe oranges. It's not an even playing field; it's not a level playing field.

Furthermore, with the changes in the program as described to us—I have not looked at the new criteria, and certainly I shall look at the new guidelines, as recommended by the member who spoke about this—we still understand that if we are not getting funding for advocacy or work that will lead advocacy, then what is the purpose of the funding? There is no point even applying for it, unless you are willing to lie through your teeth.

Ms. Leilani Farha: Madam Chair, I'd like to correct, or at least clarify, the record, based on what the last honourable speaker said. She mentioned FAFIA's funding, I think in the amount of \$600,000 or \$650,000, between certain years. I want to clarify that a large portion of the money facilitated the participation of Canadian women in the Beijing Plus 10 proceedings in New York.

If I might follow up with an answer to some of your questions, one of the things that I would like to do with your question is slightly turn it. Rather than asking about the effect on non-profits, I'd like to ask, what is the effect on women and the non-profits that service women? For the record, I should say it's news to us that there has been a reallocation of the \$5 million. I suppose I'm pleased to hear it and look forward to more information about that.

I don't want to speak for my colleagues, but certainly we all agree that women on the ground, poor and marginalized women, who struggle day to day in Canada, need services. We don't disagree with that of course. That may be necessary, but is it sufficient for women's equality in this country? It is not sufficient for women's equality.

I'll give you an example. I am a member of FAFIA, as well as being on the board, and I work in the area of housing with a lot of low-income women who experience violence. It is absolutely true that they need services. They need social workers, counsellors, and housing help centres. There are all sorts of immediate services that they need.

But let's take an example from the Yukon. Women there don't just need those services; they need people who can advocate for them. Why? Because at the municipal and territorial government levels, priority is not accorded to women who are leaving abusive relationships for social housing. The social housing provider, which is an arm of the government, does not prioritize abuse as a reason for getting social housing.

Under Status of Women Canada's new mandate, organizations are not allowed to lobby or advocate with government. That means women who are fleeing domestic violence have no one there to advocate for a safe place for them to live. Is that really what we all want to happen to women in this country?

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go into the five-minute rounds.

I have Ms. Neville, and then Ms. Minna.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

Again, thank you to all of you for being here today.

I have to advise you that the first we heard of the \$5 million reallocation of funding was yesterday or the day before, when the minister raised it in the House of Commons.

The budget quite clearly shows a cut of \$5 million in operating dollars. When the Status of Women Canada staff were here, they indicated they weren't sure what arrangements were going to be made to account for it. Since there are fewer places to access Status of Women because of the cutbacks in offices, there's a cynic in me who wonders whether there's an intent to slip the money to show there's not really a demand for it, but I hope I'm wrong on that.

We've heard a number of you mention the issue of research. In my community I know of a number of research projects that have ultimately resulted in policy changes by government based on the research that was done, most notably one on the relation between elderly poor women and health.

Could you comment from your perspective on what effects the cutbacks in research funding will have for your organizations and for women generally?

Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly: Thank you for the question.

For an organization like the National Council of Women, the cutbacks, quite simply.... If the applications are being governed by the guidelines that we have seen, it means we will not have funds, and not be able to access funds, to do research on issues like maintaining the health of elderly women, many of whom happen to belong to groups that are still doing the volunteer work that is unpaid, uncounted, and not acknowledged in Canada's gross domestic product. Most of it is being done by senior women. I believe it's between 80% and 85%.

Should this particular workforce, this unsung workforce, become ill or die, which they will eventually, we wonder just who will be left to do the volunteer work that is still not acknowledged by any level of government and, in spite of repeated requests, has not been recognized by previous governments. It's a serious question. Without funding to do research, we can't even establish the validity of maintaining this force of women.

● (1645)

Hon. Anita Neville: Fair enough.

Ms. Sherry Lewis: I think it's important as well. Although Sisters In Spirit has not been affected by the cuts as of yet, there's no guarantee that it won't be impacted in the future.

I also want to ask you to recall that when Sisters in Spirit was initially tabled, it was a \$10 million initiative, and it was cut to \$5 million, based on being able to rely on the infrastructure within Status of Women Canada. They talked about resource sharing and said that we wouldn't have to go out and access different kinds of services that we wanted to from within our budget, because we could rely on the expertise at the Status of Women offices. Now that expertise is starting to go, and the infrastructure that we could rely on is not going to be there either.

When you're looking at streamlining and you're using technology and connectivity to increase access, you have to also balance that with the fact that not all women have equal access to technology and that there are huge gaps among those who have the technology. Newfoundland and Labrador still uses dial-up connections, so they are not able to get access as quickly as other places in the country are. There is no overall connectivity or technology process within the government. It's haphazard. There's no structured process that improves technology or access to technology for women, despite the fact that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has been at the forefront of pushing forward technology on behalf of aboriginal women.

These cuts and this lack of research also stall many issues that for more than 100 years aboriginal women have been talking about. Valuable departments like Status of Women Canada, who take up research, show that from what an independent group says to what aboriginal women themselves say, yes, there's an issue. There are issues such as that of unstated paternity. There is still legislation that says if you're a victim of rape and you cannot name the father of your child, your child will not have access to status because you can't prove that the child is of aboriginal ancestry on both parents' sides. Then the Indian Act kicks in and says this child can have status, but the grandchildren will not. There are lots of impacts that affect no one in this country other than specifically aboriginal women. So I'd kindly ask you to remember all of those provisions that are in there.

Matrimonial property has been in place as an interim measure for 30 years. Even though Status of Woman Canada has helped us, through research, to bring it to the forefront, it's still taken us 30 years to get to where we are today. We can't believe what is going to happen to us now, when we don't have Status of Women Canada saying, "Yes, that's an important equality issue and there's research to back it up." If we say it ourselves, we don't have the impact, and we don't get our issues put forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Lewis.

We have time for one more questioner for this panel.

Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thanks very much, all of you, for being here today.

I made some comments as I've been listening to you, so I'll just go through my notes here. Many times I have actually spoken on the changes that we're making with respect to the funding and it's always been my understanding that the money would be redirected. I'm not sure how there could be a miscommunication out there, except for a lot of rhetoric and politics at play here. Unfortunately, you didn't get that message, but the message has always been there, and it will be redirected. My colleague spoke a bit about where that money will go.

When you're talking about the \$10.8 million that will continue to be maintained in the spending and in the programs, that \$5 million we found in savings is almost 50% of the \$10.8 million that you're going to see that goes back out into the community. I'm hearing such doom and gloom here as I'm listening to all of you. I'm hearing these questions come to you that, "What do you think is going to happen?" Or, "What is going to happen?" And I don't have a crystal ball. I've got to tell you I'm a bit disturbed that you just all of a sudden have just decided to write off any plan that we may have in place, to write off any of the women who are in this caucus and think that we're not going to stand up for women and that our plan isn't going to produce some results. Why are you so determined to completely write off any change?

What's wrong with the Internet? Everybody is using it now. Why can't we have an application? Why can't they go to libraries in the small communities and use the Internet? They still have access to the other offices to give them services and take them through that. That's very forward thinking. If you want to talk about grassroots, you have to be able to reach out to those smaller organizations, to others who want to apply for this money at the same time. So I would like you to comment on that and see if you can try to be a bit more positive about where you think we, as Conservative women, may be going.

Thanks for that, very much. But you know something? We also were elected to take a look at spending. We weren't elected to continue with all of the Liberal programs the way they were. That's not what we were asked to do. We were told very clearly, "Take a look at the spending and if you can do it better, please do it better." And for anyone to expect to believe that every Liberal program and every program that was in place was actually delivering on exactly what it was intended to do is just not realistic. And Canadians know that's not realistic.

Now to give you a bit about me, before you decide that I have no clue about what I'm talking about, I was a volunteer at rape crisis and

trained in crisis intervention. I did seven and a half years and this was about thirteen years ago. And I can tell you that nothing's changed. I don't see any substantial changes, in speaking with even the volunteers who continue to do some of the work that I did with them back then. We haven't seen real hard-core change on the front line in terms of who's been violated and what we're doing to solve that problem. We have some great ideas and we are going to move forward with them. And I do hope that we would have your support when we do that because I think it would be very important to do that.

Please don't just write us off and think that anything we're suggesting here is not valuable or not with the greatest intentions, because it absolutely is.

• (1650)

Ms. Andrée Côté: Just for the record, women's organizations have been fighting tooth and nail for women's equality over the last 25 years and more, and we're certainly going to continue doing that.

Ms. Helena Guergis: And so will we, here.

Ms. Andrée Côté: What we see are measures being taken in the face of such huge surpluses that this government has rarely seen—cutting and change. It's not so much the funding cuts. It's the changing of the mandate and changing of the mission of the women's program that we are all pointing out—

Ms. Helena Guergis: The mandate of the Status of Women Canada has not changed.

Ms. Andrée Côté: There is a huge equality deficit—

The Chair: Ms. Guergis—

Ms. Helena Guergis: This is my time.

The Chair: Allow the witness to answer, please.

Ms. Andrée Côté: There's an equality deficit in this country, and what has been done is a dismantling of the accountability mechanisms within government to ensure that the state does take its constitutional and international human rights obligations seriously. Allowing for-profit organizations or religious organizations to deliver services in communities is a way of ensuring that there is no accountability—

Ms. Helena Guergis: Point of order, Madam Chair.

Ms. Andrée Côté: —and that there is no way of guaranteeing that this will in fact benefit women.

The Chair: Ms. Côté, could I interrupt for one moment please?

A point of order has been raised by Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Thank you.

I do want to clarify here that since 1976 the official legal mandate of Status of Women Canada has been "To coordinate policy with respect to the status of women and administer related programs". That didn't change. We didn't change that. That is the official legal mandate.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have very limited time. There's a minute left for anyone who wanted to complete a response to Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Sherry Lewis: I just want to put forward that at this time of the year it would be nice to be hopeful that things are going to come the way you're planning.

I think you're hearing, as well, that your communications strategy on what your plans are is not effective, because at the forefront of what we're doing, we're the people who come forward with all the voices of grassroots women, and we haven't heard, as a member on this side said, about the redirection of funds.

Had we known, when the cuts were going to occur, that "Here is the enhancement", we would have had a more balanced approach to this. But because we were just hit with cuts, now it's "What are you going to do?"

If it had come in equally, with "here are enhancements"—or "here are enhancements" first, and then, "Now here's what we're going to take away".... It was just the way in which it was delivered.

We certainly have high hopes that you're going to put forward excellent plans that are going to make those improvements. What you're hearing is our experience with the lack of trust, in that what you're taking away was truly going to be beneficial.

We certainly have high hopes that we're going to see an excellent plan come forward from your membership, and that we will be able to truly benefit and continue with the work we have.

You're just hearing a lot of nervousness here. Thank you.

•(1655)

The Chair: Thank you all very much. We have to—

Is there a point of order?

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Madam Chair, on a point of order, we were referring to the women's program—to the change in the mandate of the women's program, not to the department of the Status of Women. The words, "equality", and "political and legal aspects" have been removed from the mandate of the women's program.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Of which none of the funding has changed.

The Chair: Could we please have some order?

I want to thank the presenters very much. It's been very informative. Thank you very much.

We are going to suspend for five minutes for the other panel members to come forward.

To my colleagues, there are some sandwiches here for you.

I will suspend for five minutes. Thank you very much for coming.

•(1655)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1705)

The Chair: I will resume our meeting so that we can continue on.

We have with us in this panel from the Fédération des femmes du Québec, Charlotte Thibault. From the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women—Newfoundland and Labrador, we have Leslie MacLeod, the president. From the United Nations Platform for Action Committee Manitoba, we have Jennifer deGroot, the project coordinator. From the Disabled Women's Network of Canada, we have Monika Chappell. Monika is not here at the

moment, but hopefully she will join us shortly. From the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, we have Lise Martin.

Thank you very much for coming.

I would ask Ms. Thibault to lead off.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charlotte Thibault (Member, Fédération des femmes du Québec): My name is Charlotte Thibault and I have been a member of the Fédération des femmes du Québec since 1979.

I have been interested in the work of Status of Women Canada and the Women's Program since 1982. Seventeen years ago today, 14 young women who were students at the École polytechnique in Montreal were killed by a man who had a grudge against feminists. They were the symbol of our fight for equality. They were young, intelligent and wanted to work in a field that was reserved for men. Seventeen years ago, a friend of mine lost her daughter; at the time I was the Director General of the Fédération des femmes du Québec. Seventeen years ago seems like an eternity, like a mere moment. I'm sure that you understand why, on this highly symbolic day, the Chair of the Fédération des femmes du Québec could not leave Montreal.

The FFQ is an autonomous feminist organization that works in solidarity and alliance with other groups to change the gender relations in all human activities, so as to encourage the full autonomous development of women and the true recognition of what they contribute to society.

Founded in 1976 by Thérèse Casgrain, the FFQ represents 156 associate members and almost 800 individual members from all regions of Quebec. The main objectives of the FFQ are to promote and defend the rights and interests of women and to combat all forms of violence, discrimination, marginalization or exclusion of women.

The FFQ is a clearing house that represents the pluralism of Quebec society and the diversity of the women's movement, particularly women living in poverty or women who are the victims of discrimination based primarily on their colour, their ethnic origin, their sexual orientation, their disability, their age, their religion, or their lifestyle.

The FFQ has made a series of findings related to the cutbacks at Status of Women Canada and to the changes in the criteria of the Women's Program.

First, we feel that it is unacceptable to remove the equality objective from the department's mandate; it is contrary to the spirit of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the various treaties and conventions signed by Canada, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Cutting the budget for Status of Women Canada means destroying an essential mechanism for the equality of Canadian women. The cuts that were announced affect mainly positions held by women, among them, at least ten visible minority women. Many of them will not be able to find another job because they have no tenure. Besides the 61 positions that have been cut, many others will be downgraded, which means that other employees will be leaving. In Quebec, the Quebec City office will be closing.

The already infrequent consultations with women's groups will become almost non-existent. The lack of funding for independent research will affect the consideration of public policy. The change in the funding criteria to prohibit advocacy or lobbying activities will have an effect on the work of the FFQ. On average, 22 % of the FFQ's budget is funded by the Women's Program.

The situation is even more dramatic for some of our member associations. We fear that some organizations will have to close in the coming year. The situation is even more serious in the rest of Canada because the provincial and territorial governments, unlike Quebec, do not fund advocacy groups.

In closing, the FFQ has a number of questions. How does Status of Women Canada intend to use the comparative gender analysis to ensure a liaison and effect change within the other federal departments? There was to be a five-year action plan in 2006 to identify the government's status of women priorities. Where is the plan and ??? identify the government's status of women priorities? Where is the plan and what are the priorities? How will Status of Women Canada act as the leader and coordinator with provincial and territorial governments? What does Status of Women Canada intend to do to maintain its leadership and promote women's equality at the UN, within the Commonwealth, at the Francophonie and the Organization of American States?

We believe that, with these cuts, the minister is jeopardizing her department while undermining the equality of all Canadian women. We hope that the government will change its mind.

Thank you very much.

• (1710)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Thibault.

Next will be Leslie MacLeod.

Ms. Leslie MacLeod (President, Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women - Newfoundland and Labrador): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm at a bit of a disadvantage because I wear hearing aids and the loop system is not working. I'm going to be in and out and I'll do my best to hear you all.

I am here from Newfoundland and Labrador. I come here with the women in the province with me in spirit. They had a message for me to bring, and that is that women are not equal simply because somebody says this is so. We know that women are not equal. We have not achieved equality yet.

My apologies to the translators; these are speaking notes and I'm not sticking exactly to the script.

The snapshot I want to bring to you is the work that's been done by the very vibrant grassroots women's community in Newfoundland and Labrador on a number of issues, specifically with funding from Status of Women Canada through the women's program. I won't repeat that each time. Each project that I mention in fact has been in collaboration with Status of Women Canada, with the program officer, with the use of women's program funding.

On violence and justice, in 2003 in Newfoundland and Labrador the police reported that females are victims in the majority of murder, attempted murder, and conspiracy to commit murder reports in our province. Women comprised 82% of sexual assault victims, 75% of other sex crime victims, and 70% of reported harassment victims.

There was a woman in our province named Nellie Nippard, who was brutally attacked by her husband, who, without question, meant to kill her. She survived the attempted murder and went on to speak to other women to bring forward her story. She began working with women who were involved in the Gander Status of Women Centre as well as some other groups. Together they set out to change the policies of parole board hearings, because as she survived, as her attacker was put in jail, inevitably the parole hearings were coming up.

Victims had no voice in parole hearings. Thanks to Nellie, who nearly died, and her determination, persistence, and collaboration with other women, and funding from Status of Women Canada, those rules were changed. That is systemic advocacy. That happens because a woman is hurt, other women are hurt, women understand the issue, and we join forces together to create change for everyone.

The Gander Status of Women went on to do much more work in the areas of women's access to civil legal aid, custody and access issues, and other justice issues. The catalyst was a horrifying event.

On women's poverty, approximately 44% of single parents in Newfoundland and Labrador, almost exclusively women, fall below the low income cut-off. The Bay St. George Status of Women Council researched, advocated, and collaborated with a number of partners to work within the province to eliminate the barriers faced by women who had been supported to get access to education and training but were not being supported to actually find a job. This is advocacy. This is one woman being supported to education, but not being able to get a job. It takes a group of women, working together with other partners, to change the policies that get in the way.

In 2003, 45.9% of single senior women in Newfoundland and Labrador were living in poverty. They still are. The Central Status of Women Council in Grand Falls-Windsor is in the midst of a project that is identifying the impact of public policies and programs on rural women in the province over 50. They are gathering the full intersectionality of women's experiences and will be advocating for change based on that information.

On housing, many women in our province and across the country live in inadequate, unaffordable housing. Single women, women who have disabilities, many families, and mature women are all vulnerable to the risk of homelessness. It's a sad fact in our country. The St. John's Status of Women Council has existed for 30 years. It has put a huge effort into researching women's housing issues, developing recommendations, and advocating for change. Some of the pieces they have been advocating for have been put into effect. Policies have changed in our province. They are making a difference.

• (1715)

They are currently developing long-term housing, hoping to develop a shelter and programming for women who are at risk of homelessness, particularly the single over-thirties, perhaps experiencing mental illness, the women who are on the streets. Again, Status of Women Canada, women's programming.

Advancing women's employment: Women make up 70% of the minimum-wage earners in Newfoundland and Labrador—70%. In 2003 Newfoundland women had the lowest earned income in Canada, averaging \$19,000 per year, which is 64% of the men's average income that year.

The Women in Resource Development Committee is opening up opportunities for women in the natural resource sector, in which Newfoundland and Labrador is very rich, while we are still very poor. This committee is bringing down barriers in the workplace, company by company. They are opening up avenues for women, they are helping women get the exploration, get the training, get moving forward in a very lucrative employment market. Their work is deeply rooted in gender analysis and equity principles. Research funded by Status of Women Canada has been essential and critical to form the basis of their work.

Multicultural women.... A recent study conducted in Newfoundland and Labrador revealed that finding appropriate employment is the key barrier to immigrant women from all levels of education, with all kinds of previous experiences in our province. The Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland and Labrador, working closely together with the Status of Women Canada program officer in our province, has been bringing women together, working to advance their equality, increasing their knowledge of their rights and freedoms and responsibilities within our country, and also connecting them to community.

We know that women with disabilities have significant barriers. In Newfoundland and Labrador, 40% of women who have disabilities are unemployed. I need say nothing else.

Aboriginal women.... We have heard the experience from NWAC at the earlier presentation. In our province, aboriginal women from across the province and all cultural groups have come together for two provincially orchestrated, funded, supported conferences this year—in March and only two weeks ago—in Newfoundland and Labrador. Aboriginal women in our province are beginning to find true voices and are beginning to be heard at the right places, but there is so much work that needs to be done.

Concluding remarks: This work, which is a snapshot only of the essential equality work to move us forward, has been done through

social development, delivery of wisdom, experience and knowledge, working with women who are real women with real experiences, and organizations that are prepared to do the advocacy work. The federal government must accept its role and responsibility. The cuts and changes must be reversed.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. MacLeod.

Our next presenter will be Jennifer deGroot. Welcome.

Ms. Jennifer deGroot (Project Coordinator, United Nations Platform for Action Committee Manitoba): Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

I'd like to start with a story.

Last week my co-worker and I facilitated a workshop with 16 immigrant women. The women were originally from Iran, the Philippines, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Macedonia, and China. Some had been in Canada for six years. One had arrived only a week ago.

During the course of the day, the women learned about the political process in Canada, specifically that related to the government budget. They looked at a cartoon showing them the budget process, from throne speech to estimates to budget day. They put their hands on colourful laminated pie pieces representing different areas of government spending, guessing which piece of the pie went with which area. They talked about their own priorities for government spending—programs that work for them, programs that don't work—and ideas they have for increasing government revenue.

Near the end of the day, the women did some role playing, acting out a meeting with a politician. As we closed our time together, a gentle and quiet Filipina woman said, "I'm a shy person. Before this workshop, I would have never imagined I could meet with a government representative. Now I know that this is something that I can do."

This is the work of the group I represent, the UN Platform for Action Committee in Manitoba, or UNPAC. In accessible and engaging ways, we give Manitoba women, particularly those who are vulnerable, the tools they need to participate fully in economic and political life.

We have received funding from Status of Women Canada since our inception in 1995. We have used these funds for a wide range of activities related to making international human rights commitments to women relevant at the local level.

Since the year 2000, our work has uniquely focused on promoting women's economic literacy. We have developed popular education resources and tools to engage women on the economic issues that impact their lives. One of our resources is a video about women and the economy; more than 600 copies of *Banging the Door Down* have been distributed.

At the moment our work takes us across Manitoba, where we hold interactive full-day workshops on the government budget. In the past 18 months, we have worked with roughly 400 women from 16 communities across the province. The women include single mothers, women living with disabilities, and northern, rural, aboriginal, immigrant, francophone, and senior women.

We offer our workshops at times that work for women. We provide lunch and child care, and we use a methodology that acknowledges different kinds of learners and that recognizes women's lived experiences.

We chose to hold workshops on the budget because the government budget does not impact women and men in the same way. Budgets are not gender-neutral. Because budgets reflect the government's priorities, talking about the budget is key to promoting women's economic equality.

At the same time, we see women as budget experts. Many women are used to making a little go a long way, something that governments favour. We have found that women have many good ideas to contribute to budgetary discussions.

Women are also very concerned about accountability, another critical concern of governments. A government budget that works for women will contribute to more accountability and to a more effective and efficient budget. This will benefit all citizens.

For many women, participation in our workshop is the first time they have talked about a government budget. Many had no idea their voice mattered or that government policy and programming is something they can understand. Many never realized that they had a right and a responsibility to make their voice heard.

After our workshops, we heard women make comments like this one: "Every woman should know about the...budget. I had no clue. Now I know more and am confident to mention it to others." Another woman said, "*J'ai appris que ma voix peut être entendue et peut changer quelque chose.*"

We provide grassroots women with tools to advocate on their own behalf. Over half of women who participate in our workshops write letters to their elected officials, naming their budget priorities. For many, this is the first time they have written a letter to a politician.

One woman chose to run for elected office, citing her involvement in our video on women and the economy as one of the catalysts for her decision. Other women have attended provincial pre-budget consultations, been interviewed by their local media, or organized meetings with their elected representatives.

• (1725)

We teach skills that empower women to advocate for their own equality, economic and otherwise. We provide resources and ongoing dialogue with women, supporting their full participation in the political and economic process. Many countries would never support this kind of work, work which is essential to a healthy and accountable democracy.

Our understanding of the new terms and conditions of Status of Women Canada is that the type of work we do with grassroots

women no longer fits. We are an advocacy organization, and we have been told that advocacy will no longer be funded.

Administrative cuts will also affect us. The closure of our Winnipeg office will mean a distant and reduced relationship with Status of Women personnel. Staff of Status of Women have been tremendously supportive of our work. They have attended our workshops, translated our materials, connected us with other groups and resources, and provided ongoing support.

We need these funds, and the people who administer them, to continue working to create a true democracy in which all women of this country have a voice.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Lise Martin.

Ms. Lise Martin (Executive Director, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women): Thanks.

I'm from the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, a national non-profit bilingual organization whose work centres on providing research and tools to facilitate organizations taking action to advance social justice and equality for all women. We believe that information and knowledge are key to empowerment. CRIAW has a long and successful track record of providing reliable, accessible and relevant information on key women's equality issues. The impacts of both the cuts to Status of Women Canada and the changes to the terms and conditions of the women's program, are enormous.

First, I'd like to make a few clarifications before the committee, as there has been a certain level of confusion that has been once again repeated here at the hearings. In terms of the cuts, these are by no means administrative. Complete programs have been eliminated, such as the Status of Women Canada policy research fund, as has almost 50% of the workforce.

A number of statements have been made indicating that women's groups would no longer receive funding following the cuts. While it is true that the women's program budget has remained intact for the moment, the reasons why groups such as CRIAW will not get funding are much more serious. In fact, denying funding for research, lobbying and advocacy, reneges on two key values that are held dearly by Canadians: equality and democracy.

When CRIAW speaks about equality, we are not merely talking about equality between women and men, but also between many different groups of women. Society cannot simply be lumped into two neat categories of women and men. This is highly simplistic and not at all visionary. If we want Canada to move forward, we need to have the capacity to provide a critical eye. This is what research provides.

Moving forward means looking at the picture and being able to constantly question the angle under which it is taken. What does this mean for those in the picture, as well as for those not in the picture? By no longer funding research, which poses difficult questions and tries to unpack the multiple layers of systemic discrimination, we are essentially saying that we can live with the status quo. By denying funding for research and advocacy, we are in fact closing the door on democracy for a vast portion of the population.

Let's be honest, the private sector is not interested in funding organizations that question systemic discrimination. We are not fools and neither are they. The hard-hitting questions that we ask are for the most part counter indicative to their profit motives. It's all about the bottom line, and that bottom line has nothing to do with the aboriginal, racialized and disabled women who are, indeed, too often at the bottom of society's priorities.

One of the rationales advanced for no longer funding research is that it is no longer needed, that we have all the answers. Again, what this says to me is that the status quo is okay. This is denying that we are in a constantly evolving world. In fact, the ground on which we stand is constantly shifting.

I would like to come back to the values of democracy and equality and how these values are being undermined by the cuts to Status of Women Canada and the changes to the terms and conditions of the Women's Program. As I indicated earlier, research can lead to empowerment. The research methodologies practised by CRIAW not only empower women, but strive to give them a voice in shaping their future.

To illustrate this, I would like to draw on our recently completed study on the impact of the changes to the Canada social transfer on aboriginal, immigrant, and disabled women. This study was funded by the now defunct Status of Women Canada policy research fund. The study responded to the question, Are women's voices being heard? Its objective was to bring the voices of these women to policy tables and policy-makers. Unfortunately, the current federal government has very little interest in this matter, as well as to any other issues linked to poverty, social assistance, clawbacks, etc.

We had envisaged bringing the results of the study to the human resources standing committee and had hoped that some of the women who participated in the study could express themselves firsthand at the proposed cross-country hearings on the Canada social transfer. To no surprise, these hearings have also been axed.

• (1730)

The following quotes are from our study.

From a woman living with a disability in Winnipeg:

I myself cannot afford fruits and vegetables. As a result, my health has suffered because of lack of nutrition, and now I have permanent problems, because I'm simply too poor to feed myself properly. It's resulted in some lifelong issues that will never be cured because, as thankful as I am to be receiving assistance, it's well below the poverty line, and sometimes I don't have money to eat for a few days in a row, and now my health is also suffering.

From another woman living with a disability:

I ended up living in a place that was extremely unsafe. I've been attacked several times. I'm scared to live there, and I have to move, and there's nothing out there. You can't even rent; you go into a rooming house and they're charging the welfare rate. My last three roommates have been strangers from the paper, and it's all

resulted in disaster and them splitting and me spending all my food money to cover people's rent, or I get evicted.

Interestingly, issues linked to telephone access were brought up by the women. Telephones were a luxury for many of the participants. Lack of a telephone has a direct impact on ability to find paid work; it also posed significant safety concerns for women in ill health, women with disabilities, and mothers.

One woman said:

...it's unsafe...to be living without at least a home phone, especially if you have kids and there's some kind of emergency, and it's also impossible to look for work if you don't have some way for people to get hold of you.

Unlike what Minister Oda may believe, equality for many women is not just a phone call away.

An aboriginal woman in Vancouver said:

I work for a dollar an hour at an organization, volunteering, to make sure that I have toothpaste, ass wipe, face soap, shampoo, dish soap, laundry detergent. That's what the coupons I make at the organization help pay for. If I didn't have that dollar-an-hour job, I wouldn't have those, because I can't afford to buy them on my cheque, because my disability cheque is not enough.

I would like to ask those who made the decision on the cuts and changes to the terms and conditions whether they feel these voices are not deemed worthy to be heard. If they do feel that yes, everyone deserves a chance to have input into the policies that truly affect them, do they seriously think the current climate will provide these women with the safe space to express their concerns?

Dealing with the issues expressed by the women living in poverty requires much more than a few donated business suits. They require a concerted effort that brings together research and front-line services, which will deliver long-term change.

As we all know, under the new terms and conditions most research will no longer be funded. Funding will no longer be available to create CRIAW's fact sheets. We will no longer receive funding to answer some of the difficult questions that need to be addressed, such as: why is it, in a country such as Canada, which has experienced substantial economic growth, that poverty continues to persist and deepen?

It is clear that the new terms and conditions reflect a charity model that essentially denies that systemic discrimination exists. Our research clearly demonstrates that far too many women in Canada have not benefited from the equality that has to date only been available to them on paper.

It's for this reason that we recommend that the cuts and changes be reversed immediately.

• (1735)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Martin.

We will now go to Ms. Monika Chappell, from the Disabled Women's Network. Welcome to our committee.

Ms. Monika Chappell (Chair, Disabled Women's Network of Canada): *Tansi*, everyone. Thank you very much for asking me to speak.

I want you to know that I've also been given the privilege and the responsibility of carrying the Cree name that means "Eagle woman who watches over the sacred fire". I take that name and that responsibility very seriously.

As a visitor to the lands of the Six Nations peoples, I want to acknowledge the fact that this meeting is taking place on aboriginal lands, and I want to thank the Haudenosaunee people for the use of their lands for us to come together. All of us, I'm assuming, are visitors here.

I also want to thank the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for the opportunity to speak to the committee on this important issue. In particular, I'd like to thank the committee for moving their venue so the room could be accessible and for ensuring that a taxi could bring me to the door of the Parliament Buildings, as I wouldn't have been able to speak to you if this hadn't occurred.

I am the national chair of the Disabled Women's Network of Canada. On this important day, the 75th anniversary of the first female MP in Canada, I speak to you for the very first time. It's the very first time that a national organization of women with disabilities has ever been able to speak to this august body. It's an amazing fact, I think.

I'm going to tell you a little bit about DAWN Canada, assuming that perhaps many of you don't know what and who we are. DAWN Canada is a national cross-disability network of self-identified women with disabilities, and we have representation in all areas of Canada.

In 1985, a small group of women with disabilities who were part of a national umbrella group, which later became the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, met in Ottawa after they had trouble getting women-specific issues addressed in an all male umbrella group—not too surprising. This historic meeting lasted three days, during which the women identified a number of issues of priority for them, including violence against women with disabilities, mothering, self-image, and employment. After the meeting, the women went home and started to organize locally, and grassroots groups sprang up in many locations.

The group applied for and received funding to conduct research on these four priority issues. This research was groundbreaking and served to make Canada a leader in this area worldwide. In 1992, we became a national non-profit and continued conducting research on issues that women told us were important to them. We developed ethical guidelines for research that ensured our research would always be based on grassroots involvement and would identify policy and organizational changes and would always have an impact on the women who were involved and the women in our network.

This research was a venue where we could work on community development. Since women with disabilities are in large part isolated, lack social and organizing skills, and face discrimination and huge barriers to participation in society, both internal self-confidence and external accessibility barriers, community development is an essential piece of our network.

In 1998 we received core funding from ODI and hired a national coordinator, and our focus changed, in part to follow government funding to focus on employment and IT skills building. Another change was a gradual loss of our grassroots connections and community development. Unfortunately, in 2003 we lost our core funding and have been working to rebuild since then.

One of our stronger affiliates, Pacific DAWN, which covers the B.C.-Yukon, worked locally with a Vancouver office to build their network. With their support and additional guidance, we overcame our barriers to participating—actually, barriers that are even within the women's movement—and after ten years finally got to the point we could apply for regional funding.

This very successful regional project focused on renewal and rebuilding, and it's almost complete. In fact, we just held our annual general meeting a week ago, and that affiliate is finally, after ten years, a non-profit.

● (1740)

This pilot was used nationally to apply for funding for the first time from Status of Women Canada's national office by our national group. We've just completed a six-month project designed to rebuild our governance, identify current priorities for action, and renew our board.

We have taken the opportunity to forward you our three strategic plans for action over the next 18 months. At least I hope Michelle was able to get them to everyone on the committee.

We've also just received a grant of almost \$200,000 from Status of Women to carry out work on two of the priorities: violence against women and children with disabilities, and developing long-term housing options for women with disabilities.

Our third strategic plan has to do with employment, and we're seeking funding elsewhere with that.

With the additional help of the national office, we have rebuilt our relationship with ODI, the Office for Disability Issues, and we are in the process of reapplying for core funding with them.

We agree with the words of Minister Oda that it's time to put money into taking direct action for women. However, we disagree with the idea that funding places such as the YWCA or the Salvation Army will be of much benefit for our members.

We also disagree with the idea that all the research has been done. Indeed it has not. In reviewing the most recent Stats Canada document on violence against women, I found that we were not even mentioned. Nor were we identified as a group needing more research, despite our own research and that of others worldwide that identifies violence against women with disabilities as a silent epidemic.

For some of our communities, such as deaf women, we have not even asked the questions about what they need to be safe in a way that they can answer. Working across the barriers of language, culture, disability, and a lack of resources for ASL, or American sign language, reaching and connecting to deaf women, and supporting them to even begin organizing is a monumental task, but it's one we're committed to.

We are also very pleased that Minister Oda recognized that some communities of women face additional barriers to participation and will require additional help from SWC staff. However, we strongly disagree with the restriction by Minister Oda to the four communities of women who can receive additional help from SWC offices.

Indeed, I would have to say that our needs are just as huge if not larger than those of the four groups mentioned. Both provincially and nationally, we have required large investments of time and resources by SWC staff, in order to overcome the many barriers we face. Despite the many issues we face regarding participation, we just don't make the cut and are consistently left off the list. We would request that Minister Oda revisit this restriction with an eye to adding women with disabilities to the list.

We're pleased that Minister Oda kept the grants and contributions area untouched. However, by closing the offices and cutting staff, the impact on our network will be enormous. It takes time and support to work past our extremely low self-esteem and self-confidence, and often our low literacy levels. For deaf women, the average literacy level is grade three.

It takes time to work past our mistrust, bureaucratic intimidation, and our own internal beliefs that we just don't matter. It will take resources to be able to travel so much further to gain the support and guidance of new staff—that is, if we're actually even allowed to get the support. Time and resources we don't have.

• (1745)

The Chair: Could you bring it to a close, Ms. Chappell?

Ms. Monika Chappell: I have one more item.

The final item I would like to touch on is the opening to for-profits to apply for funding. As you can tell from my presentation, we have barely the resources to organize nationally or locally, despite the huge need. To put our poor resources in competition with for-profits is shocking. There is no way we can compete.

Thanks for listening.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Chappell.

Sometimes if there are other points that you wanted to get through to our members, you can do so while you are answering a question.

We will now start our questioning, for seven minutes each, and we will start with Ms. Minna.

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

Thank you for coming here today.

I want to start off with a couple of things first before I ask my question, to correct the record.

On the money, the \$5 million, the members from the government side are saying that it was understood all along that it was going to be redirected. First of all, that's not true. It was in the budget. It was a direct cut. The minister mentioned that for the first time yesterday. From what she said today, it would go to the front line and not to the organizations that are here today.

I want to read into the record what the minister did say, in fact, when she appeared in front of this committee:

After over 30 years of existence, Status of Women Canada must deliver real, measurable results directly affecting women and their families. Through our expenditure review, announced early last week, the new government has concluded that \$5 million can be saved through greater efficiencies in administrative operations at Status of Women Canada. The women's program's grants and contributions will have the same annual budget of \$10.8 million.

There was no redirection there at all from her own statement to this committee at this time. So let's not go on about how we all understood that. I just want to make that very clear.

The next thing I want to talk about, Madam Chair, is that we have had some discussion here today, but what I want to go to are the specifics. In addition to the cuts and the closing of offices, and now I understand that the money is being redirected—that's good—it still leaves the fact that the mandate of the department has been changed and the criteria have still been changed. The previous mandate of the department clearly stated there was financial support to women's organizations and other partners seeking to “advance equality for women by addressing women's economic, social, political and legal situation”. The equality, political, and legal status are gone. We know that, so I think that's important to say.

The objectives talked about “to facilitate the involvement of women's organizations in the public policy process”—so we're talking about advocacy—and “to increase public understanding in order to encourage action on women's equality issues”, and so on. I won't read all of the stuff, because it's all here. That's all gone. What's left is two little paragraphs that talk about very generic and not-for-profit and what have you.

The fact of the matter is that those provisions are gone. My question to you then is this. It's great that the money is going to be redirected, and in fact there should be an increase. But on the actual changes to the criteria, how will that impact? In effect, any organization that works to advocate, to research, to try to inform women to fight for their rights is no longer there. How will that affect your specific organizations with the elimination of those criteria specifically?

The Chair: Whoever would like to respond may do so.

Ms. Lise Martin: It's clear that, given that we do research, it would no longer be eligible under the current criteria.

Before we go further, I would like your confirmation that the \$10.2 million to the women's program will now be \$15 million. Is that what you're saying?

The Chair: Witnesses can't ask questions.

Ms. Lise Martin: I can't ask questions.

The Chair: No.

Ms. Lise Martin: It's a one-way street, I'm afraid.

Voices: Oh, oh.

The Chair: You certainly could write to the minister and ask that question.

Hon. Maria Minna: It's \$10.8 million, by the way, that's left for the program.

Ms. Lise Martin: Okay, right. We've actually done the calculations, and that \$10.8 million, although it might sound big, is basically 52¢ per woman and girl child per year—less than a cup of coffee—that the women's program invests in women. I think that's important.

It's clear that we will not receive funding from the women's program. As I said in my presentation, I don't think the private sector is out there on our doors as well. I really question your.... You said to trust you, the Conservative women, and that you have a commitment to women, but you've just basically cut 50% of the workforce from the ministry of Status of Women Canada. To me, that's a complete contradiction.

• (1750)

The Chair: Are there further comments to Ms. Minna?

[Translation]

Ms. Charlotte Thibault: I would just like to say a few words about the effect that the changes to the Women's Program will have on the Fédération des femmes du Québec. Our funding is guaranteed until the 2007-2008 fiscal year, but after that, we will lose 21 % of our funding. We have determined that, on average, 21 % of our funding was provided by the Women's Program. We don't know how many of our current projects would be eligible. We have discussed this with a number of program officers, but we still don't know what we can do to qualify. That is one of the effects of the decision.

[English]

Ms. Leslie MacLeod: Ah, the journey of equality for women in Canada.

The Provincial Advisory Council of the Status of Women that I'm involved with does not receive, nor does it seek, Status of Women

Canada funding. We're fully provincially funded to be the advocacy voice in our province. However, the grassroots women's organizations—the local status-of-women councils and other organizations that I've mentioned—in fact must seek the advocacy funding of Status of Women Canada in order to remove the systemic discrimination and move equality forward. These are interesting times, because our province currently will fund provincial women's organizations and local organizations to deliver services. They did that when Status of Women Canada, a number of years ago, decided it would no longer provide core funding, and went to project funding based exclusively on advocacy pieces, so the women's movement has struggled over the years with lots of changes to programming and funding.

This is probably the most devastating one, because the groups in my province and across the country do not see how they can use and access this funding to actually move the agenda forward, so there are significant problems at play.

Website application cannot deliver social development. Women have never complained in our province that they were unable to make an application to Status of Women Canada. There was a program officer in the province who knew the women, was easy to connect with, and had a budget to travel. No one ever said they were denied access to Status of Women Canada or its funding—but they will be now. A website doesn't replace communication.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Chappel.

Ms. Monika Chappell: The very short answer I could give you, Madam Minna, is that it's like cutting off your nose to spite your face. Seriously, how will the government go about addressing the issues of women, including women with disabilities, if they're not properly informed by accurate information based on all the issues that we face? Some of those issues we don't even know yet. That's a really short and sweet answer.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. deGroot.

Ms. Jennifer deGroot: All our funding is project-based funding. We have no core funding. For this past project we received a small grant from another body, but besides that we don't know anyone else who will give us funding for this kind of work, because we don't have charitable status. It will mean closing our office and not having any staff. We may not even be able to fund our website anymore.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Mourani is next.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you Madam Chair.

I would like to thank you for your presentations. I have two questions for Ms. Thibault.

You said earlier that 21 % of the FFQ's budget would be lost because of these cuts. Can you give me a concrete example of the projects that you have done? The minister speaks a great deal about concrete action, but she does not seem to have found that in any of the work that has been done. Moreover, the minister no longer seems to feel that grassroots equality is a problem, since she feels that women are equal. What she has done reflects her view of the situation.

Would you, through some concrete examples of your work, demonstrate how they have contributed to women's equality? I am looking for something very concrete to demonstrate to the minister that she is mistaken.

Would you also comment on the fact that in Quebec there is only one office, in Montreal, which appears to be responsible for all of Quebec as well as Nunavut? I don't understand why it would be responsible for Nunavut and not some other region. More particularly, what will be the effect of having only one office to deal with all of Quebec and Nunavut? Also, do they really have the expertise and a proper grasp of the needs of the Nunavut groups, in Montreal? I'm not saying that these people are not competent, but, for example, I know nothing about Nunavut, and slightly more about Montreal. So, if I were to evaluate files from Montreal, I would be able to understand them better than the files from Nunavut. I have some issues with that.

Will this not once again cause delays in processing the files and in providing grants, which means that the organizations will be constantly struggling to survive? This question is for you, Ms. Thibault?

The question about concrete action is for all of you. I would like each one of you to give us some examples of something concrete that was accomplished thanks to the Women's Program, since advocacy was removed because the minister found it too esoteric. I would like you to be as concrete as possible.

Thank you very much.

● (1755)

Ms. Charlotte Thibault: I am sure you will understand that it would take me hours to answer all of those questions, but I will try to be brief.

I know it seems strange for the Montreal office to cover Nunavut, but Quebec already had a mandate for Nunavut for a number of years. So there is nothing surprising about it. I simply wanted to explain, for the record, that the Montreal office was for Status of Women Canada, and not only for the Women's Program. This office was the link with the provincial government, it was supposed to monitor what was happening in the province so as to be on top of the issues. It also provided an interface with all of the federal departments so as to promote gender integration, to inform them about the status of women and to monitor what was happening. All of that will disappear. Moreover, the Montreal office will be reduced, and the Quebec office will disappear. Those are the consequences.

Obviously, it has sometimes taken between six months to a year to process some grant applications. We are extremely concerned about the time required to process an application. We are also extremely concerned about the guidelines. We are told that elderly women,

young women, women from cultural communities and aboriginal women will be taken care of. The Fédération des femmes du Québec brings together a number of these women, but it is not the specific representative for anyone of these groups. Would it be possible for the Fédération to have some help from program officers to prepare a grant application? That is what we are wondering.

With respect to equality, in my opinion, it is not something that you take out and wear on special occasions, and then put it away. Equality is something that we have been fighting for for years. We are fighting for equality between men and women and equality among all women. We are very worried about the cuts to Status of Women Canada. I am not referring to the grants, but to the operation side of Status of Women Canada. When you take away half of the staff, it is obvious that Status of Women Canada will have a harder time getting the work done.

Some of our projects were done in conjunction with young women. They told us about their needs, about what they would like and what they want to do with their lives. Among our member groups is one group that is working on pay equity. However, the unions are also working on pay equity. This is being discussed throughout Quebec. We want non unionized women to also be entitled to pay equity where they work. This group, which is a member of the federation, may no longer be able to receive funding for this type of work. A lot of this type of work will end in the coming months or within a year and a half because the Women's Program has changed its criteria.

● (1800)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you all very much.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I would like to ask the other witnesses the same question.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Would you answer please, Ms. Martin?

[English]

The Chair: A short response.

[Translation]

Ms. Lise Martin: With respect to projects and the information sheets that we have provided over the years, many groups use these sheets, including police officers in Calgary and a national association of Canadian priests. This information is necessary and it is provided in a way that is accessible.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you all very much.

Mr. Stanton.

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

Thanks to all of you for taking the time to attend today. I have to say that it's a great honour to participate on this standing committee, especially dealing with the kinds of issues we deal with here.

As I listened to your presentations this afternoon, I couldn't help but be struck by the fact that while you concluded by saying that these savings or measures that the government has proposed should be reversed, as I listened to you describe the kind of programs you in fact engage in on behalf of women, and then I look at the actual terms and conditions that the government currently provides for program funding under the women's program—Sisters in Spirit, of course, is added to that—the government has given strong signals that there in fact will be more dollars coming for programs that give direct support to women in their communities.

When I look at the actual design of the program and at what the women's program funds, which is essentially focused on supporting women in the areas of achieving full participation in economic, social, and cultural aspects of women in Canada, these to me are very specific things that speak right to the heart of the issues, as you mentioned, around equality.

There was some discussion about advocacy as well. While I appreciate the point, I consider that as you go ahead and as you look at these new terms and conditions, and considering that there is in fact perhaps even an increasing pool of dollars that will be available to get these kinds of programs expressly to women, have you considered how you could adapt your program proposals in a way that would essentially meet these program requirements or mandates? And would you not agree that these would be programs that would give direct benefit to women? Certainly there's a tremendous amount of wisdom here, and experience, in dealing with these issues.

I'm sorry my preamble took so long. I'll just leave it at that. If each of you could give a brief response, I would greatly appreciate it. Perhaps you would speak to the question of why these programs wouldn't in fact be very effective for women in their communities.

The Chair: I'd like to start with Ms. Chappel.

Ms. Monika Chappell: Thanks very much for asking the question.

I believe I did address this in my speech. I think the focus of those dollars would be of advantage to women, absolutely. I think it's time we put our money into action. Often we say amongst ourselves that we're tired of being studied. It's time to do things. This is true. At the same time, as I mentioned with regard to deaf women, there are areas that still need to be looked at. It's not true that it's all been done.

Certainly we have looked at already, albeit in not a lot of time, how we can adapt our applications for funding to meet the guidelines. I think there may be ways to do that. I at least don't read them as being totally restrictive. Rather, whatever you're doing, it must have an impact directly on women's lives. And how you say it is going to be important.

•(1805)

The Chair: Anyone else?

Ms. Lise Martin: As I read the new guidelines, there is a very strong local push. A number of us here are national organizations, so I really see it as a way of squeezing the national organizations.

I really don't see within those guidelines an openness to discussing systemic discrimination, and that is part of what we do. We question things. We also bring women together, as umbrella national

organizations, and there seems to be little support within the guidelines to do that.

I really think that part of what's going on also is trying to set up front line services and national. Both are necessary, I think, and part of the whole picture. This new increase is a nice little manoeuvre in that all of a sudden, this new \$5 million is coming into the program now that there has been so much coming up in terms of how these cuts are devastating to women across the country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charlotte Thibault: Of course, I would never refuse to take money, even if there were \$5 million somewhere earmarked for women, for example. Direct services for women are usually in education, health and social services, which are provincial jurisdictions. As a Quebec woman, I would tend to think that we will have problems accessing those areas in Quebec.

I can tell you that at this time, the women's groups are putting their heads together. They're trying to see how they will submit their grant applications. They are taking a very close look at what Ms. Oda has said so as to understand what will be eligible for funding. It isn't because we don't want to apply for subsidies, it's because things are not yet clear.

I just want you to understand something. We have realized that, in Quebec, advocacy is a real necessity. That is why the World March of Women was created and, before that, the Bread and Roses March. Women's groups realized that they were not being heard by the provincial government of the day. The women decided to walk to Quebec City to make their demands known. They were involved in advocacy, lobbying and demonstrations. This type of organization will no longer be funded by the Women's Program.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. MacLeod.

Ms. Leslie MacLeod: Full participation of women in our society is what we all want. The way the terms and conditions are written, they certainly confuse us as to how this can be accomplished with women's program funding.

Somehow, local women through local groups are going to be given something that enables them and enhances their ability for full participation. The cynics in us ask, what is that, a bus pass? That's very cynical, and I don't mean to be rude to you, but this is the kind of conversation we're having.

The full participation of women, and at the same time—and it's blazed in our brains—the prohibition of any domestic advocacy activities.... And I have to tell you, the use of the word “domestic” in that phrase put us all over the edge altogether. That's where we decided you were trying to send us back to the kitchen. Prohibiting “domestic advocacy activities”: we can say that in our sleep.

How on earth are women going to participate fully when we cannot go at the systemic discrimination? The rules of EI, maternity benefits, access to civil legal aid; we can name all of the issues. Women cannot access those, unless laws and policy and programs change, and that requires systemic advocacy.

I can't see how this balances out in this plan that is supposed to help individual women in individual communities, when the solutions are systemically based.

• (1810)

The Chair: Ms. deGroot.

Ms. Jennifer deGroot: Thank you for your question. I'm concerned that your question implies that we are not providing direct services. In our organization, we are providing a direct service, but it's advocacy.

We did a workshop in a women's shelter in northern Manitoba, in a small community. Some of the women in our workshop could not leave the shelter because they could not find a house to live in. Their children were not allowed to go to school, because children in women's shelters can't go to school as part of the policy.

The idea that we could not advocate for more social housing—and in this particular community there's a four-year waiting list for social housing—that we cannot advocate for that as part of our direct service to women and cannot encourage this particular woman, who probably had never met with a politician, had never written a letter to a politician; that we can't encourage her and support her in that work.... I don't understand how that works.

As to national organizations, we're a provincial organization, but we rely heavily on research from organizations like CRIAW, who provide the fact sheets on women's situation in Canada. Those are widely used in our work.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, chair.

Some time ago I put forward a motion to establish core funding and a budget of \$100 million for Status of Women Canada. I'm wondering what the budget of SWC should be, and were core funding to change, what could be accomplished.

Ms. Monika Chappell: Can you clarify: core funding for whom?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I mean for the equality-seeking groups.

A voice: Is this question for everyone?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes.

Ms. Monika Chappell: Thanks very much. Again, these are all very good questions.

In terms of what the budget should be for Status of Women Canada, I actually don't know what the budget is right now.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: It's \$23.8 million, except for the \$5 million that's taken away.

Ms. Monika Chappell: I certainly know that what the budget is right now is not adequate for the work that needs to be done. I realize there's probably not much appetite within the government for increasing the budget, but certainly I know, speaking for women with disabilities, that we are the primary providers of income for our families in a vast majority of the cases. I think if we got adequate help from Status of Women, we could be greater contributors to the economy. That adequate help requires, I think, a larger budget.

For us to be able to take action, we really need additional help, and part of that additional help requires being able to meet face to face to take part in little workshops like those the other witness was speaking about, and to take advantage of research that CRIAW is doing.

I would say that probably you would need to at least double, or perhaps triple, the budget that's there currently in order to really adequately fund the services.

I'm sorry, you had a second question—"Would core funding help?", or something like that.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes. What would it change?

Ms. Monika Chappell: DAWN Canada is an organization that began in 1985. Basically, we didn't have core funding for most of our existence. We had a national office that was in the main room of a woman's apartment. Her bed was above the office—she had a tiny little loft. Her walls were stacked almost to the ceiling with paper.

How do you run a national office without any core funding? Well, we're doing it right now. The office is in my home, in the place I rent; it takes up one room. Would core funding make a difference? Absolutely. We can't respond.

This is the first time we've ever come to speak here. We can't respond to requests for information; we can't respond to issues; we don't have staff to be able to analyze policies. I have to write funding applications on my own, and it's a good thing that I have a little practice at it, because we'd be in a lot of trouble.

So yes, core funding would make a very big difference.

• (1815)

Ms. Jennifer deGroot: For our organization, core funding would mean stability. We'd be able to actually think of projects as they came to us, instead of looking at the funding applications and saying, "How can we make this fit, and how can it also respond to women's needs?"

We've had several requests in the last couple of weeks around more groups wanting more training on advocacy and lobbying, which does not fit exactly, within our current mandate, into the budget.

Just in terms of office space, our office used to be located in my living room as well. Knowing where we're going to be and when, and just being able to plan long term and to think long term, and to not be constantly focusing on writing out new grant applications.... It's not to say we wouldn't still do projects; we certainly would. But it would just bring some stability in, and that would lead to more creativity.

[Translation]

Ms. Charlotte Thibault: I also think that the danger with projects—and, incidentally, this was discussed in committee—lies in the fact that you must continuously try to drum up funding to complete the project. If Status of Women Canada provides funding, if some other department or foundation does the same then, if one of the partners decides to withdraw its funding, everything falls apart. There is no stability in terms of staff, etc.

Our federation receives \$73,000 in core funding from the Quebec government. I think it is the only province that provides that type of funding.

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I have a quick question.

One of the things that I've learned is that policy in law affects women far differently from men. In terms of the change of mandate, the loss of regional offices, and the loss of support of SWC, is gender-based analysis at risk?

Ms. Lise Martin: Definitely. I think the unit has been merged. When you cut 50% of the staff who were supposed to be providing leadership to the other ministries in this area, how could it not be affected?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have ten minutes left.

We are going for a five-minute round to Ms. Stronach or Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: We're sharing it.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: We're going to share our time.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: I just want to make note of the announcement on September 25 from Minister Flaherty and the Honourable John Baird, in which they announced that Canada's new government had eliminated wasteful and ineffective programs, reduced government spending, and that they were trimming the fat. In the \$1 billion of program savings identified—so they've categorized this as savings, and nowhere does it talk about reinvestment anywhere—they've listed under Canadian Heritage, Status of Women Canada, administrative savings, \$5 million. Again, this is something new. Perhaps they've realized they've made a terrible mistake and are trying to backtrack.

I just say that without advocacy you're going to have the status quo, and I don't think any of us here are happy with the status quo. There is much work to be done.

I want to talk about research. Perhaps you can give us some idea of what future projects or studies were under way that you feel might be compromised, or even in the past, if research and advocacy has been eliminated, what would have never come about, to give a sense of what the future holds.

This is to Lise or Monika.

Ms. Monika Chappell: Sure. I'll start with that, because we did get funding from Status of Women Canada. The funding came under

the old guidelines, so we were probably one of the last organizations to receive funding. This is our first major project with Status of Women Canada, and indeed it's almost all research-based. We are doing some research on updating... As I mentioned, the violence against women statistics don't even talk about us, while we know that violence is an epidemic in our communities. So we're going to update our statistics on violence against women.

We want to know whether women with disabilities can actually get into services like a transition house. Our research is about 10 to 15 years old, and at that point it showed, no. Has there been any difference? We want to know that. We want to look at the research on children with disabilities. Are they actually finding the violence that is happening to them, that we know exists?

There are a number of areas that we wouldn't be able to do if we hadn't got that application in.

● (1820)

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Okay, thank you.

Does anyone else want to comment on that?

Ms. Lise Martin: We're currently working on women's economic and social justice and, more specifically, wanting to look at alternative models and approaches as to what women are doing in different communities to address economic and social justice, and also looking at the issues of intersectionality. We're looking at racism, globalization—different factors—that affect women's economic situation, which is a priority under the new terms and conditions. But economic autonomy is much more than just having a job, and even when it is a job, it's so often a minimum wage job.

My feeling in terms of, again, the new guidelines, is that what comes out of it is looking for feel-good projects. When the minister, in her presentation to this committee, was asked for an example, she talked about a cultural presentation, an award presentation. That's what we've been told, but I don't think it's a question of looking at the hard issues.

Ms. Leslie MacLeod: I'm just agreeing with all of that.

In terms of something that wouldn't have happened in the past, Nellie Nippard and the women of Gander would not have changed the parole board hearing regulations. Our justice system doesn't change because somebody within it thinks there's a good idea and equality is required. It only changes when people are knocking at the door, and that's advocacy.

Ms. Lise Martin: The shadow reports put together by FAFIA with the information from a wide number of women's groups and presented to the United Nations would never happen.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. deGroot.

Ms. Jennifer deGroot: In your opening comments you mentioned something about inefficiencies and trimming the fat. I want to address that, because we do workshops on the budget; that's what our project is about. Women know all about trimming the fat; they know budgets are about priorities.

One of the questions we ask in our workshops is whether you would pay your mortgage all in one year and not feed your children, or not let them have recreation services, or not give them running shoes. Very clearly, you wouldn't do that.

Budgets are about priorities, and there are certain things that you don't cut. Poverty and inequality, when it comes to budgets, are extremely expensive. I live in inner-city Winnipeg; I can tell you the cost of poverty is very expensive in the area of the city where I live.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Stanton is our last questioner.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As a matter of record, I'll just make a general comment. I think to a degree we might be getting ahead of ourselves here with respect to ruling out things like research and advocacy. For example, under the terms and conditions, research and polling activities that aren't directly tied to the project would not be eligible, but research when it's inherently part of the project that's put forward is an absolutely legitimate part of an exercise that would advance the cause and advance the kinds of issues that are being talked about, the objectives here in the cases.

Similarly, it falls to the applicant to try to define the scope of how these objectives should be put forward. In fact, what they say is essentially that the applicant must demonstrate through the content of the project proposal just how these objectives could be achieved. I think there's a fairly broad berth here in terms of how one can frame these proposals to get the outcomes you're looking for. That's just in the greatest of respect to the previous comments.

I also note in here issues around entrepreneurship specifically relating to violence against women. These are all part and parcel of the kinds of issues that I think speak directly to notions around inequality that have been roundly discussed here this afternoon.

I would invite your comments on that thought, but I would certainly encourage your wise and experienced organizations to look at how these terms and conditions can in fact be put to good use for the women you represent.

I encourage any response to that.

• (1825)

Ms. Lise Martin: It's hard to respond without asking a question.

Ms. Leslie MacLeod: We've always had to use our creativity. It sounds like we're being encouraged to do that even more.

Research that can go nowhere is not helpful. As for the terms and conditions, women have been meeting objectives in their project applications for a long time. That's not new. We're still at a loss; respectfully, we're still very much at a loss—but creativity? Yes, rather than advocacy, we may be experts in something soon; I don't know.

The Chair: Please go ahead, Ms. Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charlotte Thibault: I agree with you, research is often required in order to define the objectives of a project. That is obvious, and there will probably be some way to tie in some aspect of research. However, in many cases, a great deal of research has to be done in order to identify the issue before undertaking a series of projects, and that is where the problem lies. That's the main problem that will be caused by the cuts to independent research. More extensive research, research that is carried out over a year or 18 months for the benefit of groups that are working on concrete projects will be subjected to cuts, and that is what we are worried about. I understand what you are saying and I am convinced that it will be possible to cover some research aspects in a given project.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you all very much for your participation today. It has been very interesting. Ms. Chappell, especially for you, for overcoming the barriers as you had to do to get here today, thank you very much.

We will have another session of hearings next Wednesday evening. Following the break we'll attempt to submit a report based on what we've heard in our hearings.

We will adjourn now. We will get together tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock to go over our draft report on human trafficking.

Thank you all very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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