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Tuesday, February 5, 2008

—
Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

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•(1005)

[*English*]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Order, please.

Committee members, we have with us Minister Verner. I was just speaking to the minister, and I think I spoke to most of you. The minister has prepared notes that we all have had an opportunity to look at. I wonder if the minister would give a brief opening remark.

The committee members would like to engage in a conversation. If we don't get that opportunity of engagement, then we will have disappointed members.

With that, Minister, you would like to make some opening remarks? We have read the speech. If you could keep it brief, we will have an opportunity to have a meaningful discussion with you, and that would be appreciated.

Welcome, Minister, and thank you for being with us.

The floor is yours, Madame Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

If you don't mind, I will make my opening statement, as planned. I will then be available to take questions from members of the Committee.

Madam Chair, Committee members, I am pleased to be here to outline the Government of Canada's commitment to women's full participation in Canadian society and Status of Women Canada's recent accomplishments. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Chair on her re-election, and congratulate Ms. Davidson and Ms. Mathysen on their election as Vice-Chairs.

I am accompanied by Clare Beckton, the Coordinator of Status of Women Canada, whom you have already met twice. I understand the Committee has begun its study on gender budgeting. This is an area of great interest as we prepare for the 2008 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women deliberations, on the theme "Financing of Gender Equality".

In the Speech from the Throne, our government's current five priorities were outlined: strengthening Canada's sovereignty and place in the world; strengthening the federation and democratic institutions; providing effective economic leadership for a prosperous future; tackling crime and strengthening the security of

Canadians; and, improving the environment and health of Canadians.

Status of Women Canada's work is aligned with these priorities, focussing on the broader barriers facing women, by working in several policy areas related to women's economic security and violence against women. Status of Women Canada's two key instruments for action—its strategic policy and partnership function, and its funding mechanisms—are interrelated and inform each other.

This positions the organization well to address the barriers to women's full participation in society—barriers that often go even deeper for visible minority, immigrant, senior and Aboriginal women.

[*English*]

As a demonstration of our firm commitment to the success of Status of Women Canada, Budget 2007 provided \$10 million in funding to the agency, bringing the total budget to \$29.9 million, a record for Status of Women Canada. The women's program of Status of Women Canada now houses both the women's community fund and the new women's partnership fund.

[*Translation*]

In October, I announced \$8 million in funding for 60 projects across the country through the Women's Community Fund from the first call for proposals, issued last June. These projects will positively impact over 260,000 women and girls by addressing barriers, educating them about violence prevention, helping them increase their financial literacy, and encouraging cooperative peer support networks.

In November, I announced a second call for proposals for the Women's Community Fund. That call closed on December 21, 2007. I am pleased to report that 342 applications were received—a significant increase from the first call for proposals. The focus is on projects that promote women's economic security and prosperity, health and safety, and those aimed at ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women. All projects must support the advancement of all women in Canada and serve to foster partnerships to meet women's needs.

At the end of last year, I announced the first initiative under the new Women's Partnership Fund, with my provincial counterpart in Quebec, Mme Christine St-Pierre, and the École nationale d'administration publique.

Through funding over three years of \$1.05 million from the Government of Canada, and \$600,000 from the Government of Quebec, the Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie will provide leadership training for women who mentor other Quebec women seeking to participate in the democratic process.

A strong country means a country in which women can participate, make a contribution and realize their dreams.

Violence against women and girls is a major concern to Canadians. It is, therefore, a key priority for Status of Women Canada to reduce violence directed towards women. In particular, Aboriginal women in the North experience higher rates of violence and unemployment, lower-quality living conditions, and less access to health care, social services and other supports. Renewed attention to Canada's North will promote economic and social development, including better living conditions, directly benefiting the women who live there.

●(1010)

[English]

Status of Women Canada's ongoing partnership with the Native Women's Association of Canada is improving the lives of aboriginal women through the Sisters in Spirit campaign, addressing racialized, sexualized violence against aboriginal women.

At the first National Aboriginal Women's Summit, which took place in June 2007 in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Government of Canada announced funding of almost \$56 million over five years for family violence prevention programs and on-reserve services.

[Translation]

The Government's commitment to re-introduce legislation to repeal section 67 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* is good news for Aboriginal women living on-reserve—providing them with access to the same rights as other Canadian women. This is an issue on which Status of Women Canada has been very engaged, providing evidence of the impact of Section 67 on women.

Trafficking in persons remains a serious and growing concern for women and girls, both in Canada and beyond our borders, which the Committee knows well from its work in this area. I am pleased that it is your intention to continue this work.

Budget 2007 allocated \$6 million to combat the serious, growing issue of child exploitation and trafficking. As the Vancouver 2010 Olympics approach, our Government is taking action to combat the trafficking of young women and girls.

The RCMP leads a team of federal partners and other officials, including Status of Women Canada, which enhances knowledge, skills and enforcement of laws on trafficking and the services required by victims of this deplorable practice.

My ministerial colleagues will have the opportunity to discuss this further at their next appearance before the Standing Committee.

Economic security remains a challenge for many Canadian women. Accordingly, another top priority for Status of Women Canada is advancing women's economic security and prosperity.

[English]

I'm pleased to be working with the forum of federal-provincial-territorial ministers responsible for the Status of Women to promote women's self-sufficiency, safety, and security and to improve the situation of aboriginal women in Canada.

The growth in women's workforce participation, including older workers, will drive economic growth and long-term productivity for the next several decades and beyond, from which all Canadians will benefit.

While women's labour force participation has increased, there is still much work to do. The Department of Finance conducted a gender-based analysis with a focus on tax measures in both Budget 2006 and Budget 2007, and will do so going forward. This is essential if women are to participate fully in the economic life of the country.

[Translation]

Achieving concrete results requires the ability to monitor and measure progress, based on policy and program objectives linked to accountability and measurable outcomes. As a result, Status of Women Canada is working with central agencies and key departments to integrate gender reporting into government accountability mechanisms, and create a set of indicators to measure the situation of women over time.

[English]

The Chair: Minister, perhaps you could wrap up, because your time is up.

Hon. Josée Verner: In conclusion, clearly the Government of Canada is taking action to improve the lives of women and men on many different fronts.

Madam Chair, committee members, our future as a country is closely tied to the safety, security, and prosperity of women and their families.

●(1015)

[Translation]

These values are my priorities as our government works diligently for the advancement of all women.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

I would like to see if we can get five-minute rounds so that everybody can get a turn. We'll start the first round with Madam Minna for five minutes.

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

Minister, thank you for appearing before us today.

I want to start off by saying that my understanding through my involvement for all these years is that the Status of Women Canada was established and exists for the purpose of improving women's equality. Given that your government has removed the word "equality" from its mandate, what are you doing personally to make sure that equality is put back into the mandate so that we can refocus this department?

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you for your question.

Equality of opportunity is a basic value of this government. I am pleased to inform members that the mandate of the women's program of Status of Women Canada has been updated. The mandate of the women's program is now to advance the equality of women across Canada through the improvement of their economy and social—

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm sorry to interrupt, Madam Chair.

I apologize, but I want to be specific, Madam Minister. You're reading, and you're saying it's been updated. Are you saying that you've now changed the policy and you've put the word "equality" back in the mandate? That's what I understood you to say.

The Chair: Is it?

Hon. Josée Verner: Exactly.

Hon. Maria Minna: So the word "equality" is now back in the mandate of Status of Women Canada. So if I read the mandate of the Status of Women Canada, it says that equality is its primary focus in the women's programs.

The Chair: Madam Minister, there is a staff member at the back shaking her head, so perhaps you want to confer.

Does the question make sense? She's asking if the mandate has been amended to include the word "equality".

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Madam Chair, what I have been trying to do for the last little while is answer my colleague's question. What I am saying is that Status of Women Canada's Women's Program has in fact been updated. The mandate of the Women's Program is now as follows: to advance the equality of women across Canada through the improvement of their economic and social conditions and their participation in democratic life.

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm sorry, I'm still not too clear because the minister I think is talking about the funding. The mandate of the whole department has not changed.

Let me ask you another question, then, just to tie to that, because I need to be sure. If the mandate of the department has been restored to include equality of women, does that mean the advocacy part has also been restored, that is, that organizations that do research are now able to use that research and the funding to advocate on behalf of women to achieve equality in different areas? Am I hearing you say that?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: I am saying that last December, I updated the mandate of the Women's Program at Status of Women Canada. As you know, we allocated additional funding in our last budget. That will allow us to do a number of things, as our second call for proposals clearly demonstrates, including providing assistance to a

larger number of women's groups in Canada, given that our goal is to ensure that more organizations receive government assistance aimed at enhancing gender equality all across the country.

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm sorry, Madam Minister, I'm finding it difficult here, and I need to get a more specific answer from you. I need to know two things.

One is, has the actual mandate changed? I'm not talking about the projects and the programs, where there are projects on the ground and women come for service and those individual women are assisted; I'm talking about women's condition in general. Has the mandate changed, and is the equality provision back?

Furthermore, does the research that is done by any organization...? You're talking about the women's program—I understand that—but can that money then also be used to advocate on behalf of women? Is advocacy allowed or not?

● (1020)

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: My answer is still the same. The mandate was updated to reflect our concern and our commitment to enhance gender equality across the country and, of course, projects that allow us to achieve concrete results, indicators...

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna: Madam, I understand. I think the minister—

The Chair: Your time's up. Sorry, Ms. Minna.

Madame Deschamps, pour cinq minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Minister, to begin with, I want to thank you for your time this morning. I want to raise a question that is of great concern to me with respect to the \$5-million cut made to Status of Women Canada's administrative spending. This has had the effect of decreasing the staff complement at Status of Women Canada, which has gone from 131 to 70. I am wondering whether the fact that SWC has fewer staff could have an impact on Canada's obligations and commitments to the international community. Is it possible that Canada might not be able to meet the goals he has set?

I am a little concerned because, recently, I read a brief presented to Status of Women Canada that refers to an entirely new organization that has been put in place at the United Nations and which is working on the Gender Gap Index. According to that study, the situation has deteriorated in the last two years. The Index shows growing inequality between men and women in Canada. What is even more striking is that, in 2006, Canada ranked 14th in that regard. In 2007, it dropped to 18th place. So, I am concerned to see that we have fewer staff and fewer resources at Status of Women Canada, even as the government is making commitments and pledging to meet its commitments to the United Nations in terms of reducing inequality. We have also pledged, as part of our mandate, to carry out a gender analysis.

How does Status of Women Canada expect to be able to support the government in meeting that commitment?

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you for your question. I would just like to point out, first of all, that there were no budget cuts; rather, there has been a new allocation of funding for Status of Women Canada's programming. As I explained in my introductory remarks, this has meant that we received more project applications on the second call for proposals that was launched in the fall. It is a sign that staff were able to provide the assistance that groups needed in order to apply for funding to carry out their different projects.

In terms of our international commitments—and Ms. Beckton will be able to add to my comments—four policy analysts have been seconded from the Policy Branch to provide support at international women's forums at the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Commonwealth and APEC, to ensure better integration of international and domestic policy.

Ms. Beckton may want to add something more.

• (1025)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: When did that happen?

Ms. Clare Beckton (Coordinator, Office of the Coordinator, Status of Women Canada): In recent months, we have reorganized our policy group in order to better integrate international and domestic activities.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: In that case, could you tell me why we are seeing the kind of results we have today as regards the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, as it is called. That index shows that inequality between men and women is on the rise in Canada.

[English]

The Chair: Wrap up.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I would like your feedback on figures showing that in 2006, Canada was ranked 14th but is now ranked 18th, despite the willingness and efforts of many. I don't understand how that can be the case.

Hon. Josée Verner: I know Ms. Beckton will want to add her own comments.

The fact is, however, that Canada was actually commended for its work in this area. Our ranking results from the fact that other countries took certain initiatives at the time the assessment was

made, which allowed them to gain ground. That is what resulted in a change of rank for Canada. It's not that the situation in Canada worsened.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair. I want to remind members that Ms. Demers had asked that the use of BlackBerrys not be allowed when we have guests.

La présidente: Thank you, Ms. Boucher.

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm sorry, but if I could answer that, if it has to do with specific information relating to the specific meeting, they're not allowed to access that information. I'm sorry.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I'm sorry for that, but

[Translation]

but that is what was decided with Ms. Demers.

[English]

The Chair: Order.

Madame Boucher, it is your turn for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Minister, as part of a reorganization at Status of Women Canada, policy research funding was eliminated.

How, then, will Status of Women Canada's Policy Branch be able to carry out short- and long-term gender analyses? What resources are currently available to Status of Women Canada to carry out studies on the status of women, and what research is currently underway?

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you very much for your question, Ms. Boucher.

Status of Women Canada is continuing to focus its expertise and knowledge transfer on support for evidence-based strategic analysis of the barriers facing women.

In addition, Status of Women Canada uses the research and statistics coming out of other government departments, including Statistics Canada, Human Resources and Social Development Canada and, of course, Health Canada.

Status of Women Canada is currently working on a gender equality indicator project, in cooperation with other departments, with a view to developing a tool that could be used all across the federal administration for evidence-based decision-making in government policy development. We are expecting to produce the first series of indicators in 2008.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Stanton, do you want to continue at this time?

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

Thank you, Madam Minister, for your presentation here this morning.

I wonder if you could elaborate further in respect of the 2007 budget, which announced upwards of \$20 million for new and expanded programs to reach more communities across the country. I wonder if you could give us some specific examples of the projects these new moneys have enabled in communities to help women and the goals of Status of Women Canada.

• (1030)

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you very much for your question, Mr. Stanton.

Approximately 60 projects were announced in the fall. Let me give you a few examples.

In New Brunswick, funding will support a project aimed at eliminating the unique barriers facing rural women who are victims of violence in a non-urban setting.

In Quebec, funding will support a project aimed at raising awareness among young women between the ages of 9 and 17 with respect to the danger of violence against women.

In Ontario, funding will support a project that will twin immigrant and refugee women with mentors, in order to facilitate their transition to full-time employment or help them start their own business.

In British Columbia, funding will support a project to address the marginalization and social exclusion of visible minority women, as well as Aboriginal women and girls.

At the national level, funding will support a number of projects, including one aimed at enhancing the financial literacy of Aboriginal women, in order to prepare them to return to their community after they have accessed accommodation services.

In Alberta, funding will support a project that will help Aboriginal women living in urban areas to improve their lives through support and mentoring activities, with a view to enhancing their economic status.

As you can see, all of these projects will help women directly, to ensure not only their own economic security, but their ability to contribute to the democratic life of this country.

[English]

The Chair: You have half a minute. If the minister can answer it in 15 seconds, that will be fine.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Perhaps, Minister, just because there seemed to be some confusion on the first question that committee members put this afternoon with respect to the mandate for the women's program of Status of Women Canada, could you reiterate the update that has in fact taken place with regard to the wording of that mandate?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you for your question.

[English]

The mandate is now to advance the equality of women across Canada through the improvement of their economic and social conditions and their participation in democratic life.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We now go to Madam Mathysen for five minutes.

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

I have a number of questions.

Minister, you referenced the meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York in late February of this year. I'm wondering what your plans are in regard to this meeting. As you indicated, the theme had to do with financing for gender equality.

Do you plan to attend the meeting? Just as importantly, does Status of Women Canada intend to support the participation of non-government groups?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you for your question.

As I mentioned earlier, our government is committed to promoting gender equality, both in Canada and abroad. It remains to be seen whether I will have an opportunity to attend that meeting. I would be delighted to do so. I know that Status of Women Canada has staff who are working on our involvement in various international forums. I can also say that, as the former Minister of International Cooperation, I have always considered it to be very important to ensure that women have equal opportunities, wherever they happen to live on the planet.

In closing, Ms. Beckton has just told me that she will be heading the delegation there. I think she would like to add her own comments in that regard.

[English]

Ms. Clare Beckton: I will be the head of the Canadian delegation for the meetings in New York. We definitely will be working with NGO groups throughout the meetings.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: So our NGO groups from Canada will be attending.

Ms. Clare Beckton: There are a number that have status for these meetings and they will be attending, yes.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: That's very good news. I would appreciate knowing in advance who will be there, if you have that information.

• (1035)

Ms. Clare Beckton: I will see if we can find that information for you.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

I have another question, Minister.

I have a letter here that I received in November in response to a number of access to information requests I made in June of last year. The letter indicates that as a result of the review in SWC, and the cuts—the \$5 million in efficiency savings—the staff has been reduced. As a result, there aren't enough people to do the work. Only one staff member is available to respond to access to information requests.

You know, Minister, that these requests must be responded to within 30 days. By virtue of the fact that I didn't receive a response, and there seems to be understaffing there, I'm quite concerned about some of the other tasks that are required by law to be performed by SWC.

Are you having trouble coping with the problems with the work that SWC needs to do?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you for your question. Ms. Beckton may want to add something. It's important to realize that this is a year of change, transition and renewal for Status of Women Canada. Having said that, Status of Women Canada has hired one employee and set aside additional resources for work relating to access to information and privacy.

Ms. Beckton, please.

[*English*]

Ms. Clare Beckton: In addition to hiring an additional resource, we have hired a consultant who is a specialist in the area to help us catch up, because there was a backlog. As we explained earlier, there has been a huge increase in demand over the last couple of years. We are in a position now to start catching up and getting on top of this.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: When do you anticipate that you'll have met the obligations? When will the backlog be cleared?

Ms. Clare Beckton: I wouldn't want to give you an exact date, but I'm hoping that within the next three to six months we'll have all the backlog cleared.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Minister, I also had the opportunity to see another ATI request. It showed that Status of Women Canada recommended to Minister Oda that the existing terms and conditions of the women's program be renewed. Yet those conditions and terms, as we know, were significantly altered.

Can you comment on why the decision was made to change the mandate and alter the conditions against the advice of your staff, the bureaucracy?

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, I will let the minister keep that question because the time is up and we are running short.

Minister, you can answer that question in the next round.

Ms. Neville, for five minutes.

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

Minister, thank you very much for coming here this morning.

I must confess I'm having some difficulty following what I believe to be wordsmithing around the word “equality”. I need some clarity. Well, I have two lines of questioning, but I need some clarity.

Is the Status of Women program, the overall program, now dedicated to advancing the equality of women in Canada? And does that mean that organizations such as Women and the Law will now receive funding? Will it mean that organizations that have had their funding cut because they advocate on behalf of women's equality in a whole host of areas will receive funding? That's my first line of questioning.

We've looked at your website. There was an objection because we were looking at our BlackBerrys, but we were looking at your website. Quite frankly, we found one insertion, but only one insertion there. So I'm fearful we're being wordsmithed somewhat here, as are the groups that are applying for funding in the field. I'm hearing from them about the wordsmithing they're having to do in order to access funding. I find the whole process somewhat duplicitous and misleading.

My other line of questioning—which I want to get on the record before my time runs out—is that you've frequently referenced international organizations here, such as the UN and your work internationally. When we were studying the impact of the court challenges program, we were commenting on CEDAW. We heard from REAL Women that CEDAW is not to be taken seriously and that we shouldn't pay attention to what CEDAW says. I'd like to know whether you believe that we do have obligations to CEDAW.

In the election campaign, the Prime Minister—as I'm sure you're aware—signed the CEDAW pledge, which we believe has not been honoured. So I'd like to know whether you agree with REAL Women and if that's why it has not been honoured.

As an aside, I'd like to know whether REAL Women has received funding from your program.

● (1040)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: There were several questions there, which I will try to answer as best I can.

As regards the mandate of Status of Women Canada's Women's Program, I have reviewed and updated it, and included the word “equality”. Groups with concrete projects whose specific goal is to help women can apply for funding. Funds are available.

With respect to the group you mentioned, I know that it received funding last year to carry out a specific project. However, Ms. Beckton tells me that it did not apply for funding this year.

[English]

Hon. Anita Neville: Madam Minister, they haven't made any funding proposal because they were forced to close their doors for lack of funding. That's why they haven't made any proposal.

I guess what I'm looking for is to know what the role of advocacy is within the mandate of Status of Women, because I'm not hearing it from you. I'm really hearing a playing with words in order to incorporate the word "equality" into your presentation.

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: What is important for our government is most certainly to assist women whose needs relate to their economic security, and to ensure that they can also aspire to economic prosperity.

As you know, we increased the budget for the Women's Program, and it is now at its highest level in many years. The amount we have provided in terms of additional funding is almost double. That will allow organizations to develop projects that will provide direct and concrete assistance to women.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We now go to Mr. Stanton for five minutes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: No, it's Ms. Nina and then Mr. Norlock.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Ms. Grewal.

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

Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

Minister, could you please tell us what the strategy of the Government of Canada is to help women?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you for your question.

Our government pledged to promote women's equality, as well as their full participation in the economic, social and cultural life of this country. Among other things, we have introduced the Universal Child Care Benefit. We have also increased the pension income tax credit and amended the Guaranteed Income Supplement, allowing some women, including older women, to receive more money. We have also undertaken specific initiatives aimed at women entrepreneurs. As well, we have taken steps related to crime prevention, the justice system and security with a view, in particular, to protecting children from sexual exploitation.

[English]

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Madam Minister, the application deadline for the community fund of the women's program was just before Christmas. Can you tell us how many proposals Status of Women Canada has received to date?

• (1045)

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: We have, in fact, begun to analyze projects received through the second call for proposals. We received a record number of them—some 342 very high quality proposals. Rather than contacting groups through the regional offices, as was the case previously, Status of Women Canada's representatives criss-cross the country to meet with groups and help them to better understand our programs. As a result, groups are now better informed and are able to bring forward better quality applications.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Madam Minister, thank you for coming this morning.

Since this past October, approximately 60 projects have been approved through the Women's Community Fund. In your opinion, what impacts will these projects make in advancing women's full participation in Canadian society?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Almost 60 projects have been approved, which represent an investment of more than \$8 million in gender equality promotion across the country. Those projects will benefit more than 260,000 women and will have spinoffs in two strategic areas: improving women's economic security and combating violence against women.

I am very pleased to announce a project aimed at young single mothers in the Outaouais area. That project will allow some of them to go back to school and receive the training they need to secure employment. It will also allow women who have already completed their studies to benefit from internships and actually occupy a job, thereby ensuring their economic security.

An information component has also been developed with a view to raising awareness among young women of the dangers of violence against women and equipping them to combat that violence. Even though they may have had a child very young, these young women most certainly aspire to economic security, as a means of escaping the cycle of poverty. We know that very often, the challenge facing young mothers is to come to terms with their new role as a mother, while at the same time ensuring their economic security.

[English]

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Stanton, you'll have to get the next round.

We now go to *Madame Demers, pour cinq minutes.*

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister and Ms. Beckton, thank you for being with us this morning.

Minister, having heard your opening statement, I have four questions for you. I would like to ask them one after the other, and you can answer them in the same manner.

First of all, with respect to gender budgeting, previously there was a person who had been trained in the departments by Status of Women Canada and was responsible for gender analysis. It would seem that these individuals are no longer receiving training from Status of Women Canada. Are you able to confirm, or not confirm, that information?

Also, shelters for Aboriginal women received special funding this year in order to meet the needs of Aboriginal communities. However, we know that the money provided is not enough. Is it your intention to increase funding for Aboriginal women who are victims of violence on an ongoing basis?

Thirdly, you mentioned that you went to Afghanistan and met with the Minister responsible for the Status of Women in that country. However, the Afghan Parliament included only one woman, Ms. Malalai Joya. She was expelled from the Government for speaking out against the warlords. Have you pressured the Afghan government to demand that Ms. Joya be reinstated?

And, here is my last question: you say that you want to improve women's economic security. Do you think it could be important to introduce new, proactive legislation to achieve pay equity?

• (1050)

Hon. Josée Verner: I wish you a prompt recovery.

I am going to ask Ms. Beckton to immediately address your first question.

Ms. Clare Beckton: We will continue to provide training to the departments.

Hon. Josée Verner: Ms. Demers, you talked about funding for Aboriginal shelters. We are very proud of that and we have already increased funding under the different programs. Since 2002, funding available under programs delivered by Status of Women Canada was about \$10.2 million. However, this year, it will be \$19 million, or even a little more than that. There is no doubt that organizations will now be receiving additional funding.

Among the many projects that are proposed, we will have to determine which ones stand out from the rest. Of course, we need to receive project proposals in order to help Aboriginal women. Some time ago, a \$56-million initiative over five years was launched with a view to assisting Aboriginal women.

In answer to your question regarding the Afghan parliamentarian, I can tell you that, as Minister of International Cooperation at the time, and as Minister currently responsible for the Status of Women, human rights and gender equality remain an important objective. It is my hope that all across the globe, in every country and on every continent, women will continue to advance that goal.

I'm sorry, but I don't remember what your last question was.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Was she the Minister responsible for the Status of Women?

Hon. Josée Verner: No. She was not the Minister responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms. Nicole Demers: There was only one woman in Parliament. So, I wondered about that.

Hon. Josée Verner: I will have to check that, because I don't recall how many women parliamentarians there were. However, I know that the Afghan minister who was a woman was not the one expelled from Parliament.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Did you pressure the government to have her reinstated?

Hon. Josée Verner: If there had been a need to pressure the government, that would have to have been done by the Department of Foreign Affairs. As you know, involving oneself in the internal politics of another country is always a delicate matter.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup.*

Ms. Mathysen for five minutes.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Minister.

I have a question, and I'd also like you to answer my question in regard to why the previous minister did not take the advice of the bureaucracy in regard to the program change. Also, in regard to your statements about the mandate change, we've looked at the website and, yes, you've changed the front page, but there are no changes in funding, and this concerns me.

You've talked to this committee about all these positive changes you've made, but I hearken back to last June. I went to Kampala with the Minister of State to the eighth Commonwealth women's summit. The booklet that was presented to members of the Commonwealth showed the old mandate. It indicated that Canada, that SWC, was still funding advocacy, research, lobbying, and it had been months and months and months since that change was made. I fear, Minister, that SWC and the Government of Canada and the Minister of State were misleading the members of the Commonwealth. I fear that in this semantic prescription of the mandate in regard to Status of Women now, you're misrepresenting the reality.

I'd like you to comment on the failure to follow the advice of the bureaucrats in regard to not changing the mandate, the fact that the funding hasn't changed, and that in the Commonwealth meeting misinformation was presented to members of the Commonwealth.

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you for your question.

I will let Ms. Beckton answer your question with respect to the booklet and the events of June 2007 that you just referred to, because I am unaware of what may have happened at that time.

There is no doubt that our government announced additional funding in the last 2007 budget, with a view to meeting specific goals and achieving concrete results for women. Thanks to that funding, we have achieved the highest level of funding ever allocated for Status of Women Canada's programming. Those funds will certainly make it possible to fund a larger number of groups and achieve our goals more quickly—something that we all hope for.

I would remind you, once again, that the mandate of Status of Women Canada's Women's Program has been updated. The word "equality" is certainly part of that mandate, which is to advance the equality of women across Canada through the improvement of their economic and social conditions and their participation in democratic life.

Ms. Beckton, would you like to address the question regarding the Commonwealth?

[English]

Ms. Clare Beckton: Thank you.

Madam Mathysen, I'm not aware of what you're raising, so I will go back and look at the material we've prepared to ensure it was the right material. If it wasn't, then I will want to know why that was the case.

So I'll go back and check on that and get back to you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Mr. Stanton for three minutes.

I'm very mindful that the minister was a little delayed, but we'll have three minutes and three minutes, and then we will have to wrap up. Thank you.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just wanted to expand again on the updated wording in the mandate. We've heard on occasion that words are important and that they can be aspirational, that they can give hope to those who are looking at our programs for guidance and direction.

I wonder if you could expand on just what this wording change will really mean for the guidance and direction of the women's program.

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: I will not reread it, because it seems your colleagues are reading it on the website as we speak.

Our government supports projects that will make a difference for the women of Canada. We have taken the necessary steps to meet the major challenges, which are economic insecurity, a lack of training and violence against women. Projects funded under the Women's Program and increased budgets allocated to that end will affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of women and girls in Canada. I think we have every reason to be very proud of that.

I would just like to point out that the word "equality" and the concept behind it have always been clearly available on Status of Women Canada's website. That being the case, I made the decision to update the mandate, in order to express and enhance that concept, which is very important to me.

• (1100)

[English]

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stanton.

Ms. Barnes.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I do need clarity here, and I think Canadian women's groups need clarity.

First of all, will advocacy groups striving for equality be funded under the funding programs now? It's equality that we're talking about in the funding guidelines—and, I'm sorry, Minister, there is nothing about that in your women's programs and the funding guidelines. There is a lot of talk in aspirational ways, and you have revised the front sections but not the funding guidelines.

Will advocacy for equality now be funded? Have you changed that?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make the following clarification.

We do not provide funding to groups on the basis of what they are, but rather, on the basis of the types of projects that they propose. In the past, some groups presented projects for which they received funding. I am thinking, in particular, of the specific group you referred to, which did not submit a proposal this year. The projects, along with concrete results and an analysis grid presented by the groups, whatever they may be, will certainly be analyzed. Our goal is to secure concrete results for women and girls in Canada.

[English]

Hon. Sue Barnes: Minister, you have just confirmed that advocacy for equality is not permissible under your funding guidelines. That's why groups closed; that's why the research can't be done. And yes, we have service to Canadians—every government department should do service to Canadians—but that's not the mandate of the funding of the women's programs that all of the groups in this country need.

Thank you.

The Chair: Minister, this brings us to the close of the meeting. What I'd like to do is just wrap up. Generally the chair does not take advantage of this, but I have been listening to you, and there are two things that are of grave concern to me. That grave concern is that you've been talking about economic security for women. We had rural women come before us who were accessing the regional offices to help their economic enhancement. We are a little concerned that with the closing of those offices, it is the rural women, the very vulnerable women, whom you're not helping.

Could you give us an idea, in your closing remarks, what you're going to do with the twelve regional offices that you have closed? This is now debilitating women's economic enhancement.

Second, you have been stating—and I read your paper very carefully—that the government has increased the budget by 40% over 2006. In 2007, you increased the budget by 40%, but in 2006 you cut the operational budget by 100%. So if you increased it by 40%, you still have a shortfall of 60% of the budget for the operating office.

If you're not able to answer that question because it is operational, perhaps you can send us some information back on that specific issue, because wordsmithing will not help me. The mindset is that if you cut 100%, yes, year over year you've increased by 40%, but really that doesn't help economic enhancement.

So if you could wrap up your remarks, I'd really appreciate it.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: I am going to turn it over to Ms. Beckton to answer your second question, because she has some information for you.

[*English*]

Ms. Clare Beckton: Concerning the budget, there was a \$5 million cut from Status of Women, which went primarily to the reduction of regional offices, the research fund, and some specific areas of administration.

The new money that was added was \$10 million, focused on the women's program, and there were administrative dollars included in that for the administration of the women's program and the supporting services that are needed to do it. So it was not a 100% cut.

The Chair: It's okay. From an accounting perspective, yes, it was: you cut \$5 million; you give me back my \$5 million and another \$5 million to continue the program.

But that's okay. I would just like the minister to respond.

•(1105)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: I want to come back to the services provided to women's groups. Over the course of the last year, we have spoken to several hundred women's groups in every region of the country, either by phone or at briefings, to help them apply for funding for their projects. Of course, the result of that process has been more proposals in the second round. The simple fact that more funding is now available to carry out the projects proposed by women's groups all across the country has also helped to achieve that result.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much on behalf of the committee—

Hon. Maria Minna: Could we ask the minister to table a list of the projects that have been funded?

The Chair: Fair enough.

Madam Minister, there's been a request for tabling of the document that shows the additional projects that have been funded under the new program. Could that be made available? Perhaps Ms. Beckton might have it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: I believe you already received the list of the first group—the 60 projects. As soon as the second round is underway and decisions have been made, we will be pleased to send along that other list as well, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you for being here. I'm sure everybody appreciated the engagement. Have a good day. Thanks.

The meeting is adjourned.

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