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Thursday, June 10, 2010

Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

I'm going to call the meeting to order.

I want to thank our witnesses for coming.

We are not travelling with the whole committee, only some members, because when you travel when the House is sitting, people are required to be in the House. Quite often people travel with a smaller committee than normal, so what you see here is a representative committee of the four parties in the House.

I know you were told you have 10 minutes to present, but I'm going to propose something to you. If you disagree, that's fine, we'll do a 10-minute thing, but if you don't, we can do it the other way. I thought what might be better, instead of conducting this as a very formal meeting, with seven minutes for questions and five minutes for questions, is to do it more as a round table, so there is a better interaction and an ability for people to talk to each other, as opposed to presenting something stiffly and then somebody asks you specific questions that we can bounce back and forth.

Have you all got written texts? You have. And how long are they? Eight minutes? I was hoping I could give each one of you about three minutes to introduce yourselves, to tell me what you do and what you think the issues are that you want to bring to the table.

We're studying the issue of violence and aboriginal women. We want to talk about the root causes of violence. And when we say "violence", we want to talk about the scope, meaning not just sexual or physical or psychological or systemic violence. Discrimination is a form of violence, stigma, all those kinds of things constitute violence writ large. Then we want to talk about the forms, what forms you believe that violence takes.

So we want to go into this in a different kind of way than just saying here is violence against women, and it's obviously got be something you see—a black eye, that's violence.

We want to talk about it, and then about its impact on aboriginal women and their ability to survive and to function well in society, and then what you think.

We've talked about this for the longest time. Everyone knows this issue has been talked to death. Sisters In Spirit have been doing work on it, commissions have done work on it, but it seems as if it is so pervasive that it is not something anyone seems to have been able to deal with.

We want to look at this from a perspective in which you can give us some recommendations about what the Government of Canada, which cannot fix things, can do that will help to facilitate...if there's legislation, if you think there are things we can do within the federal jurisdiction, if you think things should be done differently from the way they've been done. I want you to be creative, and be as frank as you possibly can and tell us what you really think.

That's what I'm proposing to you, that you each do that for three minutes, if you agree, and then I will have everybody on the committee introduce themselves just for a minute—we don't want parliamentarians to talk too much, you know how we have a tendency to do that; we just want them to just say who they are and what they do, and then we will begin to get to the meat of the thing.

How do you feel about that, or would you just like to do your thing?

All right. Thank you very much.

I'll start with Pamela Shauk from the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal.

Pamela.

Ms. Pamela Shauk (Outreach Worker, Native Friendship Centre of Montreal Inc.): Hi, my name is Pamela. I'm Inuit. I'm from James Bay. I'm an outreach worker. I work with the homeless, not only the homeless, but with people who are homeless and need help, especially women. I work with all ages, from youth to the middle-aged and elderly.

The Chair: Ms. Martin, who is from the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal.

Ms. Carrie Martin (Evaluation Coordinator, Native Women's Shelter of Montreal): Hello.

We actually prepared our presentation, so can we do it that way?

The Chair: Sure, if you prefer to do it that way, go ahead.

Ms. Carrie Martin: Okay. Nakuset is going to start. We have our notes.

Ms. Nakuset (Executive Director, Native Women's Shelter of Montreal): Hello. My name is Nakuset. I'm the executive director of the Native Women's Shelter.

I just wanted to tell you a little bit about what the shelter is and what we are seeing at the shelter.

The Native Women's Shelter was established in 1987, and it's the only shelter in Montreal exclusively serving first nations, Inuit, and Métis women and children. We have placed a strong emphasis on healing from the effects of intergenerational trauma that resulted from the residential school system. Our approach is culturally based and holistic in nature, offering traditional and spiritual services not available through other shelters in the area.

Ms. Carrie Martin: Violence against aboriginal women is one of the most pressing issues in communities today and can be attributed to such factors as substance abuse, social inequalities, systemic discrimination, and the breakdown of families. These issues can all be traced back to the residential school system, the effects of which continue to reverberate in society today.

In 2009-10, 56% of the women who used the in-house services of the shelter reported being victims of violence in one or more forms. This statistic is reflective of the common experience of aboriginal women across the country. Statistics Canada has documented that aboriginal women are three times as likely as their non-aboriginal counterparts to report spousal assault, and the abuse that is suffered is significantly more—

The Chair: Sorry, can you please slow down slightly?

Ms. Carrie Martin: Yes. The abuse suffered is significantly more likely to be life threatening.

Having coordinated the harm reduction project for the past four years at the women's shelter, I saw firsthand the link between socio-economic conditions, such as spousal abuse and addictions, and positive HIV test results. Of the women who were diagnosed with HIV during the project, all were or had been victims of violence of some form.

● (1105)

Ms. Nakuset: According to the coordinator of the outreach program, which was designed to provide follow-up services to our former in-house clients, the incidence of violence is just as prevalent. She estimates that 70% of her clients are victims of domestic violence. Last year one of her clients was murdered. It is her opinion that the cycle of violence begins in childhood and is perpetuated in adult relationships.

These women leave their communities in search of a better life and find the same here in the city. Our front-line workers have observed a higher incidence of domestic violence among their clientele. Also noted is the high percentage of women who go back to their abusive partners. We are now seeing the third generation of women who are caught up in the youth protection system. The vast majority have addiction problems and an inability to manoeuvre through the legal system.

When we reduce the problem of domestic violence to an issue of self-esteem, essentially it is placing blame on the victim. It pathologizes the individual for a basic lack of resources, and in this case, resources are aboriginal-specific. We would like to see services that include counselling for aboriginal men involved in domestic violence and an aboriginal men's shelter that offers the equivalent services to those offered through the Native Women's Shelter.

Ms. Carrie Martin: We would also like to see other urban organizations offer culturally appropriate services concerning aboriginal women and domestic violence, such as exclusive support groups, traditional healing, and other services that offer aboriginal women alternatives to western healing.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Carole Brazeau, from the Quebec Native Women Inc.

Ms. Carole Brazeau (Justice and Public Security Coordinator, Quebec Native Women Inc.): Good morning.

I'm from the Algonquin Nation, and I'm the justice and public security coordinator of Quebec Native Women. It will be Ellen this morning who will be speaking on behalf of our organization.

The Chair: Do you just want to tell us a little bit about yourself, Carole?

Ms. Carole Brazeau: My background includes working for about 17-plus years at the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, providing front-line services to aboriginal women and children.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Robertson.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Robertson (Coordinator for the women's shelter and non-violence file, Quebec Native Women Inc.): My name is France Robertson, and I am coordinator for the women's shelter and non-violence file for Quebec Native Women Inc. I've been in this position for eight years. I am an Innu from Mashteuiatsh and, within Quebec Native Women Inc., I deal with a network of women's shelters, among other things. This year, our members include Inuit women's shelters located in northern Quebec and approximately 12 aboriginal shelters in Quebec which assist both women and children. We also assist men. We rarely provide assistance to men, in view of the demand.

I'm going to let our president, Ellen, talk to you about the situation regarding violence against women in Quebec.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Gabriel.

Ms. Ellen Gabriel (President, Quebec Native Women Inc.): My name is Ellen Gabriel, and I have been the president of the Quebec Native Women's Association since 2004. I am from the community of Kanesatake, a Mohawk community that experienced first-hand violence from the Canadian government during the Oka crisis.

I am an artist and have been an activist for the last 20 years. We like to look at the work we're doing in Quebec Native Women in a holistic way, in terms of how we can make solutions for our community. So we need to include the impact that colonization has had in not just how our communities function or don't function properly, but also how legislation that is currently in discussion in Parliament, proposed by the Conservative government, is just a patchwork remedy of changing the Indian Act. At the end of the day, the Indian Act will still exist. We have been lobbying hard for many years, since the Sisters in Spirit research initiative was created, demanding from the government, along with our colleagues at Amnesty International, a national plan of action so that we can look at the kinds of needs that must be addressed for families, children, and communities to overcome this sad part in our history as aboriginal people that shows no sign of decreasing.

We also call upon the police to implement the 2006 protocol, the chiefs of police protocol, where they recognize that there needs to be a specific mechanism for police to respond to not just murdered or missing aboriginal women but also violence. I think the police within the reserves are not adequately trained to deal with domestic violence, sexual violence, or murdered or missing aboriginal women. So there is a huge gap in how our communities are able, just in human resources, to respond to these grave issues.

I think colonization is a major factor in shaping violence against aboriginal women. Amnesty's 2004 report stated that long-standing stereotypes and prejudices in Canadian society have fostered widespread and brutal acts of violence against aboriginal women. This is compounded by government policy and dispossession of indigenous people's land, resources, and territory. They've suffered impoverishment, with the loss of ties to family and community.

In spite of the June 11 apology for the residential school system, there has been no indication from this present government that there is any kind of healthy reconciliation happening in the community to undo those negative impacts that the residential school system had upon aboriginal children, who later, when they became adults, tried to raise families based upon their experiences.

When you have the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there is this expectant result from government that, within *x* amount of time, all should be well.

How can you undo over 100 years of colonization, oppression, and legislation that has been embedded in the psyche of our people? It takes time. It also takes support, honesty, and goodwill from the government to be able to support the communities.

It's not just a matter of money; it's a matter of education. I think one of the things that is sorely lacking in trying to address this issue is the lack of education in government in how colonization has affected aboriginal communities and how it continues to affect aboriginal people in our communities.

We need to think of changing the future for the children who exist today so they will not have to endure any more colonized, oppressive policies under the Indian Act. We have asked for the full endorsement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Our languages have suffered; our sexuality has suffered; our identity as human beings, I believe, has suffered.

There has been no adequate consultation or accommodation to our needs in any kind of engagement sessions the government has conducted in the last four years of its existence.

● (1110)

I'll stop there, because I know there's more discussion to take place.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Vaugrante.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Béatrice Vaugrante (Executive Director, Canada francophone Section, Amnesty International): Good morning, everyone. Thank you again for your invitation.

We are pleased to be presenting to you the work that Amnesty International has done since 2004 on violence against women. My name is Béatrice Vaugrante, and I am Executive Director of the Canada francophone section of Amnesty International.

Since 2004, we have been documenting the situation regarding violence against women in cooperation with our partners in the aboriginal groups representing women in Canada and Quebec. Since 2004, we have been calling for a comprehensive national action plan to combat violence against women.

We hail last March's announcement of the actions that were to be taken. However, we fear that there has been a somewhat reduced reading of the violence that is committed against women, a reading that is restricted to the criminal problem related to the terribly high crime rate and the number of women who are assassinated or disappeared. Since we've been documenting this issue and conducting research on these matters, we have believed that the problems are not merely criminal, but that they are rooted in violations of economic, social and cultural rights of aboriginal women. We're talking about health, we're talking about education, we're talking about housing. There is chronic under-funding of services offered to women, which constitutes other discrimination compared to what is found in non-aboriginal populations.

There are obviously short-term solutions regarding the police and protocols, which would make it possible to conduct better searches. That could be discussed in cooperation with the Association des policières et policiers provinciaux du Québec, which, since 2006, has acknowledged the high rate of crime and the need for a protocol. I especially believe that there are a lot of long-term solutions respecting economic and social rights and under-funding. An effort really must be made to examine how this discriminates against aboriginal women.

In my opinion, cancelling the Kelowna accords has done them a lot of harm. We must obviously endorse, support and implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Aboriginal Peoples together with aboriginal groups. We are talking about deeply rooted problems that will take time to solve.

There is the historic multi-generational trauma of the residential schools and the high child placement rate. Today, that rate is three times higher than at the peak of residential school era. Yes, there is violence, yes there are deplorable living conditions, and the children must be protected, but that has a terrible impact on the communities and culture, on their cultural fabric, on the fabric of the community. It is unacceptable for people to place their children. Women will even refuse to report violence so they do not lose their children. We cannot accept that in Canada.

There is also the denigration of the status of women, languages and institutions, the seizure of lands and the failure to conduct consultations on their lands and resources. These are complex, complicated substantive issues, but they must be addressed.

Thank you.

● (1115)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Gentelet.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Karine Gentelet (Coordinator of aboriginal rights, Canadian Francophone Section, Amnesty International): Good morning. My name is Karine Gentelet, and I am the coordinator of aboriginal rights for Amnesty International. I am a volunteer member and I also sit on the board of directors of Amnesty International.

I'm going to agree with the director that the violence suffered by aboriginal women is a much broader problem than a criminal problem. This violence has economic, social and cultural roots.

She talked about the disposition of lands, the gradual destruction of institutions and of the social fabric in the communities. However, I would add that there is also a statistical problem. It is very hard to have access to figures when you want to work on violence against women.

I know that a joint committee in Saskatchewan has worked in an attempt to collate information, and aboriginal women's organizations also worked to establish data bases, but we lack data bases in Canada on violence against women, on the causes and repercussions of violence. That information would be very useful. I would also say that violence against women is a problem or racism and prejudices within Canadian society.

For example, when the predators were caught after aboriginal women disappeared or were murdered, the Canadian courts showed that those women had been targeted because they were aboriginal, because they were vulnerable and because they were isolated. So there is obvious racism. When we conduct research on the disappearances, we see that the police investigations often took longer to start because there were prejudices. It's often believed that these women left, that they ran away or abandoned their families, but it takes months to start the investigations, whereas often they were kidnapped or are dead.

That's it, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Laliberté.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Émilie-Cloé Laliberté (General Coordinator, Stella): Good afternoon. My name is Émilie-Cloé Laliberté, and I'm the general coordinator of the Stella organization.

Stella was founded in 1995. It's the only organization in Montreal created by and for sex workers. We do an enormous amount of work in the field of health and violence prevention, from an empowerment and harm reduction perspective We offer a medical clinic; we have street workers who go into the field, onto the street, into shooting galleries, to the places where sexual services are exchanged for money, other goods, alcohol or drugs. We have a legal clinic; we also reach out to women in prison. Our partnership with Doctors of the World enables us to take nurses into the street and in the places where there is sex work and substance abuse.

We make contact with a number of people that varies between 4,000 and 6,000 a year. In the past, we had an aboriginal project. Our services to aboriginal sex workers today are incorporated in our street work shifts. Services to aboriginal sex workers are still a priority for Stella. Moreover, we are the only group of sex workers fighting against violence. Stella really cannot talk about the general violence experience by aboriginal women. I believe the groups that are around us today really know the subject better that we do. However, we can talk about our experience in the fight against violence against aboriginal women sex workers.

Fourteen sex workers have been murdered in Quebec since 1990. Four of those victims were aboriginal women. Those incidents teach us a great deal about the lack of appropriate services in the fight against aboriginal street workers and women and about the lack of funding for appropriate services.

Based on our experience, the greatest sources of violence reported by sex workers are spousal abuse and attacks by those who specifically target sex workers. The attackers believe they are protected by a climate of impunity caused in large part by the criminalization and stigmatization of our work.

As regards aboriginal sex workers who are killed in Quebec, who have been mentioned, in at least one of those cases, the attacker was the woman's spouse. In another case, the victim requested help in the moments preceding her death. She was on one of the busiest streets in Montreal, but no one deigned to help her. She approached a bar to which she was denied access because she was a prostitute and drunk.

A number of findings and recommendations were issued following a consultation of aboriginal Stella members. We also consulted existing research and drew on our experience in the field. I don't know whether you want me to give you our recommendations right away or whether a period is set aside for that a little later.

● (1120)

[*English*]

The Chair: Why don't we open it up and we can go back and forth?

Irene, why don't you start by quickly introducing yourself?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Yes. I'm Irene Mathyssen. I'm the member of Parliament for London—Fanshawe, and I'm the NDP critic for the status of women.

Thank you all for being here.

The Chair: Monsieur Desnoyers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Good afternoon. My name is Luc Desnoyers. I am a Bloc Québécois member and I sit on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Simson.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): I'm Michelle Simson. I'm the member of Parliament for Scarborough Southwest, and I'm a sitting member on the status of women committee.

The Chair: And you are a Liberal.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Absolutely.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Isabelle Dumas (Procedural Clerk): Good afternoon. My name is Isabelle Dumas. I am the clerk of the committee and I am currently travelling with the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm Hedy Fry and I'm a Liberal. I'm also the chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, and I used to be the secretary of state for status of women for six and a half years in the Chrétien government.

Ms. Julie Cool (Committee Researcher): I'm Julie Cool. I'm the research analyst for the committee.

Ms. Laura Munn-Rivard (Committee Researcher): I'm Laura Munn-Rivard. I'm from the Library of Parliament and I'm also helping with the committee.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): I'm Lois Brown, the member of Parliament for Newmarket—Aurora, just north of Toronto, and I'm a Conservative member.

The Chair: Thank you.

I thought we would go around..... Just put your hands up if you want to ask a question.

Let's start the ball rolling.

Who wants to start? Irene?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: I want to thank you again for being here.

I have so many questions, Madam Chair, you'll have to stop me when it becomes overwhelming.

The Chair: Don't worry about it.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: I suspected as much.

I was very interested in the discussion with regard to the harm reduction projects. I know how important and how effective they are.

I'm wondering if you could talk about your experience with harm reduction.

I also want to know what the impact has been of losing the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. I know they say it's now part of Health Canada, but it seems that something on the ground that is vital to address the intergenerational impact of residential schools will be missed.

I'll start there, and I would welcome comments.

The Chair: Perhaps we can have Ms. Laliberté start, because you brought up the issue of harm reduction.

● (1125)

Ms. Émilie-Cloé Laliberté: I'm sorry, I misunderstood the beginning. That's why I started...the translation.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: You mentioned the importance and the effectiveness of harm reduction projects, and I wondered if you could describe their impacts. You also made reference to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

The Chair: Ms. Laliberté will talk about harm reduction, and others will jump in on the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, I'm sure.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Émilie-Cloé Laliberté: The services have to be adapted and there has to be more harm reduction services. Here's a flagrant example: most housing resources ask the women not to arrive inebriated or intoxicated. The result is that the women go and sleep in the street, in shooting galleries or in at times in unclean apartments.

That's why a drunk tank absolutely has to be put in place, for example. In that way, regardless of the fact they are intoxicated, women could go there and have a roof over their heads, without necessarily taking other steps. They would simply have a roof over their heads, and they could cover their basic needs. We can't get into in-depth measures when the basic needs aren't covered.

We also have to be able to reach the women directly where they are, particularly through street work practices. For example, I'm thinking of women's shelters, but a lot more funding is needed to establish a complete team of street workers. In addition, harm reduction services should be provided by aboriginals for aboriginals.

Obviously we could have centres that women go to, we hope. We really have to reach out to the women where they are, which at times means going to the places where they use.

We have to distribute more drug equipment, whether it be crack pipes or needles. Right now in Montreal, crack pipes are sold by Montreal's public health branch. We absolutely have to ensure that all drug paranephelia is distributed free of charge and is accessible.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Does anyone want to deal with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation?

Ms. Carrie Martin: I just want to add to the harm reduction component. We've had a harm reduction project for the past four years. It finished in March of this year.

But just adding to what Emilie was saying...we did work with Emilie actually. She came to the shelter quite a few times and met with our women. It allowed our women who were involved in the sex trade to get involved with Stella, and I know it made their outreach services easier in terms of working with the aboriginal women on the street.

We focused a lot of our attention on sexual health harm reduction and just trying to increase the number of women who were going for HIV tests and hepatitis C tests. Before the project, we had less than 50% of women who knew their status. It increased to a little over 70% within one year, so it's been a very important project. I know we've applied to get new money for that, so that will hopefully come through.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: So your funding ended in March?

Ms. Carrie Martin: Yes, it was a four-year contribution agreement with public health and it ended March 31.

The Chair: And you have reapplied?

Ms. Carrie Martin: Yes.

The Chair: Does anyone else want to jump in? Just put your hand up.

Ms. Vaugrante.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Béatrice Vaugrante: With regard to the more general question of criminalization, what we noted in our research is that the take that police officers have on criminal aboriginal women who are in prostitution rings will often be immediately based on their so-called high-risk lifestyle.

Often they'll disregard the mitigating circumstances as a result of which those women, who have suffered violence and numerous rights violations, wind up in those rings. They're going to manage the criminal problem, but they won't go any further, for lack of a protocol, to see whether there is a story behind all that or rights violations.

These women will immediately be considered as dangerous, since their lifestyle is considered risky. That leads us to judge on prejudices. An aboriginal woman is necessarily at slightly greater risk. This criminalization persists in the system, instead of people looking beneath the surface, at the story of those women, all the violence they have suffered, which has forced them into those rings. It's like other women, of course, but there is a double discrimination against aboriginal women.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Nakuset.

Ms. Nakuset: I just want to talk a little bit about the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

In 2000 the Native Women's Shelter had a project called Moving Towards the Seventh Generation. It was directed at reversing the effects of residential schools. We had it from 2000. It was cut on March 31 of this year, and the implications are humongous. We had so many different physicians over the years in order to help our women heal from the effects of residential school and also the intergenerational effects, because not all the women may have gone to residential school, but their mothers did, and therefore they lost their language, their way of life.

I'm going to try to keep this as short as possible, because I could really talk about it for a long time.

It's really huge that we've lost it. I think there is some documentation saying that residential schools opened in the 1600s, so there are so many years that we had residential schools, and yet they only give us 10 years to heal. It's not enough, and we are trying to make a lot of awareness about this issue and to see how we can have it reinstated, because there are women who come to our shelter for the services we used to provide.

We had an enormous number of services through the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and now we have basic services just for the women, so we actually have to let women know, "Well, we no longer offer that." They would sometimes send women from northern communities, not because they were homeless or for whatever issue, but they were coming because of the services, because they knew they could see an art therapist and a psychotherapist, and that we had traditional healers there. And they were coming for the workshops.

So it's huge. I guess if you have questions later on.... I don't want to say too much.

Thank you.

● (1130)

The Chair: Does anybody else want to jump in?

I'll move on. We have a list of people here.

Ms. Simson.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would just simply like to thank all of you for being here this morning.

We've been studying this for a number of weeks now, and we've heard from witnesses. The common thread that most of the witnesses have brought forward is the impact the residential school system has had on the community in general.

Since you've identified that—and it will take time, and I understand that—how much time do you think it's going to take before it's basically not the same issue that it was? Or is this something that will be carried forward? What sorts of solutions are there? Shelters are great for the women in the short term, to get them out of horrible situations, but how best can the government help you deal with the residential school system having as big an impact as it has right now? Are you having any success stories in terms of the type of work you're doing to help people get beyond it and to become successful and healthy?

The Chair: Ms. Gabriel.

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: I'm not sure if you're addressing the question to Nakuset.

The Chair: We're running a round table here. If you want to jump in, put your hand up and we'll just make sure we have a list of your names.

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: I think one of the weaknesses in things like the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is that it has a time limit; it has an expiry date. What we need in the communities and for the urban aboriginal people are programs that are recurring.

We also need to get the provinces and territories involved, because they don't contribute anything at all. If we use a clinic, the federal government is the one that pays, and yet the provinces use our territories and resources as well. So we need to get all the crown actors involved to help us create these programs that will be perpetuated, that don't have an expiry date. The inconsistency in creating pilot projects has created more damage than anything, because you get people who are on the road to healing and then we have to say, "I'm sorry, there's no more funding for you." So they either quit the road to healing or they try to find other ways to deal with it.

One of the things that I think is also problematic is that as long as you have assimilation policies that do not recognize the importance and the preciousness of our languages, we are going to lose traditional knowledge, which is the basis for our health and well-being. We are going to continue to lose people.

I've spoken with a front-line worker who works in the James Bay area, and she said she was experiencing a lot of suicides in their community. She said all of them were related to the residential school system. It has not helped. You can give money to people and say, "I'm sorry this happened to you", but unless they are actually supported—and in our community, not just in urban areas—we are burning out our social workers, because there's not enough of them. They go to the grocery store and someone comes up to them and says, "By the way, could you help me with this?" We don't have enough human resources, trained people, in our communities.

We have these projects that give certificates and don't provide enough opportunities for people to have.... It doesn't validate it. It just kind of says, "Okay, we'll give you a bit of knowledge to become social workers or police officers, but you're really not equivalent. You can't work anywhere except on the reserve." Our people are everywhere, and we should be able to have access to those programs.

I can't emphasize enough that the government and all the crown actors have to become involved in the decolonization process. They have to start listening to our needs. They can't just throw a bit of money here and there and say, look at the wonderful things we've done for aboriginal people. The Department of Indian Affairs sucks about 64% to 67% of the money that's allocated for aboriginal people and we're left with crumbs. We have been in the process of trying to get out of the colonization, but we cannot do it if every time there are criteria and policies that restrict our ability and freedom to be able to help our people adequately.

● (1135)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Vaugrante.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Béatrice Vaugrante: I believe that one of the ways of getting over the effects of the residential schools would be to stop perpetuating the phenomenon today. As I said earlier, three times as many children are being placed outside their communities and families today than there were at the peak time of the residential schools.

Social programs are under-funded. Twenty-two per cent fewer child protection services are offered for aboriginal children than for non-aboriginal children. And yet, because they live in remote areas, the costs are higher and, in addition, the needs are much greater. The situation is the same for health and education. There is a systemic factor that doesn't help matters. Some programs are under federal jurisdiction, whereas others are provincial. So there's a lack of coordination between the two orders of government, as a result of which there is now discrimination within a single province.

Furthermore, a case is currently being heard by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, concerning the under-funding of family services for children. The government claims there is no discrimination, that aboriginal children receive the same amount. It's not right to present these kinds of arguments before the tribunal. In Canada today, no one should discriminate between an aboriginal and a non-aboriginal child. So discrimination must stop. What would make a woman and her family stay together? She would have to have a life with dignity, an income and access to health and education services. In that case as well, no one should think based solely on social programs; you also have to think on the basis of economic independence.

I don't believe these people want to live on charity forever. There are funds and programs, but it's like a band-aid on a cancer. We have to work to find solutions so the communities can manage to become economically independent. The same is true for women, so that they no longer suffer violence. This implies consultation and cooperation when it comes to land use. Whether it's to open a mine, build a dam or establish a forest business, the Supreme Court asks that the local populations be consulted. It's not done without them. People have to stop opposing rights, particularly in the regions.

We conducted a research project of international scope in Wendake, Quebec. In the regions, we sense these things. From the point of view of rights, I very well understand why local workers want to have work and a plant. That's clearly important, but, at the government level, they can't always rely on oppositions, such as when people say that aboriginal people are a burden on them. There has to be work for aboriginals and non-aboriginals. We have to try to find solutions together, through consultation.

Not all aboriginal people want to limit themselves to traditional activities. They also want modern economic development in their communities and economic self-sufficiency that enables them to live in dignity. In view of the fact that 40% of housing units are over-populated, there is necessarily tension within families. However, financial resources and economic self-sufficiency would make it possible to build houses. I believe that would contribute a great deal to reducing violence.

● (1140)

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Laliberté.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Émilie-Cloé Laliberté: Obviously, it's already been said that we have to invest in existing aboriginal resources, but we should also implement programs enabling people from the community to become multiplying agents. They themselves could intervene with their peers. Everything should be funded in a sustainable manner.

There also has to be an end to criminalization. I want to raise the veil on a repressive practice that is common in Montreal, the distribution of quadrangles. Women, whether they are homeless or sex workers, are prohibited from moving within a given area. If they don't comply, they are sent directly to prison. The quadrangles are usually between Saint-Urbain, Viau, Notre-Dame and Sherbrooke streets. These women therefore cannot frequent those areas. According to Health Canada statistics, 25% of the correctional population consists of aboriginal women, whereas they represent 3% of the general population. There really has to be an end to quadrangles. The women who live in those neighbourhoods hang around in the dark corners, sheltered from police officers, but they then run risks. That's where they suffer the most violence.

An enormous amount of work also has to be done to educate the police. Earlier we talked about the mere right to file a complaint when you suffer sexual assault or violence. In the past 15 years, we've tried to sensitize and educate the police officers, but it's only in the past year that we've established an agreement with three women police officers. The goal is for women who suffer a sexual assault, whether or not there is an arrest warrant out for them, to be able to file a complaint against their attackers. The agreement shouldn't just involve three female police officers, but other all police services.

[*English*]

The Chair: Anyone else?

Monsieur Desnoyers, do you have something?

Ms. Carrie Martin: May I just add one quick thing?

The Chair: Yes, absolutely, Ms. Martin.

Ms. Carrie Martin: The money that had previously been allocated to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was then redistributed through Health Canada; we have been encouraged to take advantage of what is offered through Health Canada. But the shelter has been leaving numerous messages with the regional director, asking to set up a meeting just to understand what is available to our clients—what funding is available, what services, what programs—and they have yet to call us back. The funding was cut at the end of March, and we still cannot get in touch with Health Canada to find out what we can use.

The Chair: Michelle, was there anything you wanted to say?

Mrs. Michelle Simson: No, thank you.

The Chair: No? Not at the moment. Thanks.

Monsieur Desnoyers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome to our witnesses.

As Ms. Simson said earlier, we've been working on this issue for some time now. Every time we hear what you're telling us, shivers go down our spine. It seems to me that it makes no sense for a government not to deal with the major issues you've raised. You've raised some interesting issues. Ms. Laliberté said, among other things, that nothing was being done against the predators or against those who physically assault and kill people. There's complacency. In the communities, the women are afraid they can't say what they have seen or heard. That bothers me a lot. In fact, what can we do to find a solution within the community?

I was watching a documentary on Radio-Canada that showed aboriginal women leaving their reserve to go to Abitibi-Témiscamingue, on the streets, in the clubs, where there was violence against them and where there was racism.

So there's an important connection in the community. Ms. Gabriel said that there had to be intervention in the language and culture of people, with people in the community. the problem is a big one. What can be done from the community? How can we find adequate solutions that we could recommend to the government?

I'd like to hear what you have to say on that subject, both in Montreal and in the communities outside the city, because this situation exists everywhere.

● (1145)

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: I'm more comfortable in English. So I'm going to answer you in English.

[*English*]

We talk about decolonization, and colonization was also inflicted by the church, and I mean no disrespect to any people who are Christians here. It affected their sexuality. It affected the role of women and the value of women, and equality with men in our communities.

I think what we need within the communities themselves is to educate our own people. It's not just about educating the government; it's also educating our own people, who also practise discrimination legally because of the Indian Act. They can say to a woman, “Well, you married a non-native, so you can't live here”, or “Your children are not important, they're not considered Indians because their father and grandfathers were non-native.”

To me, we need a lot of work in the community and to discuss among ourselves, but we're busy surviving. We're busy making do with the money that is allocated to each community, done in piecemeal kinds of ways.

I think what we need is in the education system itself, in primary school and in high school, it should be the requirement of anybody who wants to run as chief to know what is the impact of violence. How has colonization impacted us in regard to the level of violence that we see in the communities?

Let's look at the Catholic church. The Pope says don't use condoms. Well, you know what that means to a man who has contracted HIV/AIDS, and he says to his wife or his girlfriend that if she really loved him, she wouldn't make him wear a condom. So we find that aboriginal women, even though we're a small percentage of the population, also have the fastest growing rate of contracting AIDS. Another part of the coin that we fail to include in the discussions with government is how the church or religion is used against us.

Education is I think one of the key factors in educating police, lawyers, social workers, especially Québécois social workers, and I'm just going to talk about Quebec here. One of the things we find with social workers is that they will take away the children of a woman who lives in poverty simply because she's poor. We've asked the Quebec government not to include poverty in their definition of negligence. We have to look at what is the situation in the community—high unemployment, poverty. We can't address this issue of violence without looking at some of the factors that contribute to it, and legislation and how it contributes to the devaluing of women by saying, “Well, you and your children are not good enough to live on the reserve.” INAC creates the membership code, the criteria, and there are four different kinds of membership codes the band can have. It doesn't follow our customs, it doesn't follow our traditions, but it can legally discriminate against an aboriginal woman in moving back into her community. She can have status in Ottawa, but she can't have her membership and access to services in the community.

So what the Indian Act has done is it has broken the family unit. It has broken that and it has severed us from those kinds of wonderful cultural values that make everyone equal, that make everyone know they are precious and that they are part of the world we live in.

I know I can wax philosophical on this, but education at every single level, on what violence is, whether it's sexual violence, institutionalized violence, racism.... The women who are heading to urban areas are doing that out of survival. If they work on the street, they're doing it out of survival, and especially if you're an anglophone in Quebec. If you don't speak French, you're not going to get a job. I'm sorry, you're not going to get a job. So this is another challenge for us in Quebec, if we do not speak French.

We have to learn French and English. What about our indigenous language?

● (1150)

The Chair: Yes, Nakuset.

Ms. Nakuset: I want to reiterate that what we're finding in the city is that there is a lack of services for men. So if we want our men to get counselling, if they abuse women or they have violent tendencies, there's nothing out there for them. There's no men's shelter for aboriginal men, as there is one for women, and that's definitely needed, and at the same time, services where they have counselling, where they can work on their issues. I think it would be great if we could also include, as we have at the shelter, the traditional elements—or that we had at the shelter, but we still instill anyway. That's lacking, and it needs to be addressed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Vaugrante, and then, Ms. Brown, you can jump in.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Béatrice Vaugrante: To provide a concrete response, as far as possible based on resources, in the very concrete aspects of the fight against violence in the community, I believe that there's one important aspect, and that is that the safe houses should be close to the women suffering the violence.

The problem that I've most often seen when I've visited reserves of Indian communities is that the closest centre was 100 kilometers away. They won't go there. They don't have any means of transportation to get there, not to mention the costs. There have to be safe houses that also take in the children. With the safe house come the court workers for the women to then dare file complaints—this is the eternal problem of violence against women in general. Everywhere in the entire world, women must dare to file complaints and break the silence. There has to be a police protocol and court workers who recognize this violence. That would be very concrete result in the community.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Gentelet.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Karine Gentelet: To that, which constitutes more of a micro component of the fight against violence, I would add a macro component. Amnesty International has developed an action plan to try to increase the awareness of agencies that work with women on the specific problem of aboriginal women, on the violence they suffer.

I think that, if a lot of women felt supported politically, it would be a little easier to move forward and develop initiatives to combat violence. There has to be something at the federal and provincial levels. Often, with regard to violence, people act at the community and city levels. There has to be an action plan that is much more widespread, much more extensive.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, ladies, for your most interesting comments.

I have a question, first of all, for Nakuset, if you don't mind. You talked about counselling for aboriginal men. Who would provide that?

And that works into a question I have for you, Ms. Gabriel, if I may. You talked about education being so important. You say it's a lack of education in government. Could I ask you to specify what you see there that needs to happen?

You also talked about economic independence. I recently read an article by Chief Commissioner Manny Jules. He talks about economic independence as well, in a variety of ways for your aboriginal people. He's working on a specific issue: fee-simple land ownership. That may be something you want to talk about.

I guess the question for me is, where does the education start? How do we encourage young people from aboriginal communities to stay in school so that they can become the counsellors and the social workers within their own communities, or the police officers, if they're in their own communities? What I'm hearing from all of you is that it's people who understand the cultural values and the history who need to be providing this. So how do we encourage young people to stay in school and to get those certificates, and beyond certificates, that you say are required within their own community?

Nakuset, I don't know whether you'd like to talk first about all of this, about who you see providing the counselling. And then perhaps we can move to Ms. Gabriel—

● (1155)

The Chair: And anyone else who wants to jump in....

Ms. Lois Brown: Yes.

Ms. Nakuset: Who do I see providing the counselling? I know someone who recently got her master's degree, and that's what she was focused on—dealing with violent men, though not necessarily aboriginal. I guess she would have to do more studies on that, but that's a start. Then it's trying to train them to know about the aboriginal population and the challenges.

We definitely need some kind of shelter or centre for the aboriginal men to turn to, because the women are getting stronger and stronger. We have excellent aboriginal organizations, but they're for women. We can have women and children at the shelter, but if their son is 19 and he needs services—and he received the services a year before because he was allowed at the shelter—he falls through the cracks now. We're not supposed to allow them to come back when they're 19 to receive services. It's a huge issue, and we need to start addressing that.

In a way we are already addressing that through the Montreal urban aboriginal community strategy that's going on right now. There are plans to perhaps work with PAQ—Projets Autochtones du Québec, which is a shelter for both men and women. But it needs to be built up. There need to be more surveys, needs assessments proven in order to get this kind of funding.

It's apparent that there's a need out there, and it's up to us to bring it to your attention, because I don't know if you realize that.

Ms. Lois Brown: As a supplementary question to that, would an aboriginal man accept counselling from a woman, and would he accept counselling on violence from a non-aboriginal woman? Is that culturally acceptable?

Ms. Nakuset: I don't know. I think maybe Ellen needs to answer this question. It's a hard question, because what happens if they don't get the counselling? Then they go to jail, right?

I think something will have to be implemented at some time. I'm sure there's going to be a time in their lives when they're going to have to say they need help.

But we do have staff at the shelters who are non-native and the women do speak to them.

Ms. Lois Brown: I guess that rolls into my question to Ms. Gabriel.

How do we encourage our aboriginal people to stay and get the qualifications that are necessary to provide to people in the shelters?

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: There are two native women's shelters that actually help to counsel violent men. One is in Sept-Îles and the other is Haven House.

Ms. Lois Brown: And the men accept that? That's not a problem?

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: Yes. It's actually a requirement.

I know it has been said many times, but I just want to repeat it again: violence against aboriginal women, or women in general, is a man's problem. Men need to get on board with this. It's not just a women's issue. Men of every race, at every level of society, have to become involved. Men have to start denouncing it. The government has to denounce it publicly. Quebec Native Women was part of a group of organizations from Justice Québec.

Justice Québec created a working group, the women and justice tripartite committee, which issued a report in 2003 with recommendations that talked about educating lawyers, judges, and police officers. They didn't go so far as to recommend educating government, but I think government really needs to become involved.

There should be some kind of training before a person enters a ministry of any kind, to talk about all these different issues that are considered social issues, such as violence, to educate them on what we as indigenous people have experienced in the last 500 or so years. Where does it start? It starts when children are young. If we're going to stop this cycle of violence, whether it's within aboriginal communities or in the rest of Canadian society, it starts with mothers and fathers, if that's possible, teaching their children at home.

Discussion about violence should be an integral part of the school system. Violence is wrong. We teach children about good touch, bad touch. We should also be teaching them about another kind of good touch, bad touch, which is violence. It's violence against their mothers. It's violence from the residential schools.

I'm going to quote something from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, article 14:

> Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

That's why we hope the Canadian government will fully endorse this declaration without any qualifications, because this is really a guide on how to decolonize. This is a decolonization process.

In terms of staying in school, the Auditor General of Canada, in her 2008 or 2009 report, said it would take 28 years for on-reserve schools to catch up with the quality of education in the rest of Canadian schools. So there in itself we have a huge gap in regard to the quality of education for aboriginal children.

Music and art are the first things to go in any educational system, but music and art are part of the basis of our culture. It's an expression of all our relations. Our languages, as I said before, are all our indigenous knowledge. It's our way of knowing. It's our way of being. So we have to have education systems that do not make traditional languages, indigenous languages, secondary, but that actually support curricula that are developed, that actually support the teachers, whether they're native or non-native, who come to teach in our schools so they can motivate children to love education, to love to learn. If you have excellent teachers, you can be sure that the child is going to want to learn more.

I'll just end with a quote that an elder told me. He had this Hopi friend whose son became a lawyer, and after he graduated he said, "Dad, I'm going to come back and help our people." The father said to him, "Son, you've learned western culture. Now you're going to come back and learn our ways, and then you're going to be able to help our people."

Thank you.

● (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Gentelet, do you want to respond?

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Karine Gentelet: Yes, absolutely.

We at Amnesty International have been working for a number of years now with a concept which is dignity. This concept is very interesting because—I'm sorry, I'm going to be "Ms. Global" for this meeting—it makes it possible to have an overview of one way of proceeding and of one conception of life.

I'm a volunteer for Amnesty International. In my occupation, I'm a researcher, and I've had to meet a lot of young people, young drop-outs. Those young people don't see any interest in staying in school because they don't have a future. They have trouble contemplating the future and seeing what the past was. In many cases, they don't have the same lives as their ancestors did. So it's very hard for them to find their place.

Some communities are working in an attempt to develop role models, people who could inspire these young people by providing them with positive stories. I believe that working to develop dignity, by leading these young people to be proud of what they are and to instill in them the desire to move forward, would definitely be one way for men and women to fight against the drop-out phenomenon. It would also have positive consequences for violence in the communities and their place in Canadian society.

I know that's very extensive and that it will definitely take a number of generations, but that also goes to what I was saying earlier about this business of an overall plan. I believe we have to fight in the short term, but we also have to fight in the long term for the pride of being what we are, for the place we have in the community and the place we leave behind.

● (1205)

[*English*]

The Chair: Irene.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Sisters In Spirit program was mentioned, and I wonder if you've heard anything about that. I know that $10 million was promised, but that money doesn't seem to be flowing. NWAC is in a situation where they now have to lay off staff because the money is not there.

I wonder if anyone has any additional information about that or could comment about why it's so important that this program get going. I know you've referenced the fact that it's part of dealing with the research that has been done and putting that research into action, but I wonder if you have any additional comments.

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: I'll speak because Quebec Native Women is part of the board. I know there are challenges in regard to how the funding flows, and cabinet has to decide when and if that money does flow. There was no clear indication or detail on whether that $10 million was for organizations across Canada to access or whether that $10 million...I think it's over two years—I can't remember the details of the Speech from the Throne.

The importance of research is that no policies, programs, or even legislation are created without statistics and research. It's important for us to continue that, especially given the challenges the Sisters In Spirit research program has experienced, with some of the authorities being very reticent to divulge certain statistics or details. We have to overcome some of those hurdles. But at the same time, I think there needs to be more education. It's a lot of money.

You have communities that have been under a funding cap since I think 1996. When they see that, they think okay, let's go, and they end up fighting. I think a bit of it is a political kind of issue. Does AFN get it? Does NFCP get it? But I'm just assuming...so I really couldn't say.

We support the Sisters In Spirit research. I think our only critique is that there is not enough done in this province because they don't have francophone researchers. That's something we would like to see.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Can I continue, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: During the presentation the need for consultation was mentioned, the fact that there is a top-down, "we know best" attitude that we have to get past. There has to be a dialogue. The question has to be asked of how you, as a community, can expect the kinds of changes...and where do we fit in terms of helping or facilitating that.

It reminded me of the consultation that happened around matrimonial real property rights. Things have been very, very quiet in that regard. Does anybody know where that is, and was that consultation at all adequate?

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: I'll answer again, because I just presented this Monday on matrimonial real property, to the standing committee.

I've just been told that this $10 million of funding you're talking about on violence against aboriginal women is going to police agencies. If it's going to police agencies, then it's not going to go to the communities. I thank Carole for reminding me of that.

● (1210)

The Chair: Can you tell me, is this $10 million for the Sisters in Spirit funding, or did they specify?

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: They didn't specify. I think if we look at the details of the Speech from the Throne, it was $10 million to address the issue of violence against aboriginal women. It didn't specifically say it would go back to research.

I think NWAC did receive a funding renewal for another year or two for Sisters in Spirit. That's the last I heard, so it must have changed.

The Chair: We know it's going to policing. I just wanted to clarify that.

Thank you.

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: I told the standing committee you cannot create legislation in a vacuum, considering there is Bill C-3. You have the repeal of section 67.

Oh, Mrs. Brown, I forgot to talk about fee simple. That just reminded me.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: I was going to throw it in there. One of the challenges we face with regard to matrimonial real property is that there is a housing shortage in the community, so it's difficult to start a business. The other thing is that a judge will have to look at matrimonial real property and know the Indian Act. How many civil court judges know the Indian Act? If they don't know it, how is the community supposed to filter through this?

The other issue is that in remote communities, those women do not have access to legal aid, as we do closer to cities like Montreal or Quebec City. So there's a vacuum with regard to their access to justice. The bill does not address that particular section and that reality of aboriginal women.

There was a lack of adequate consultation. We had a month and a half to consult. I think most Canadians, if there are going to be legislative changes in Canada, are granted a year. There was a 500-page report from Wendy Grant-John, who was the minister's appointed representative. There were hardly any, if any, recommendations from that report: 500 pages and nothing in it talks about what the communities were saying.

I think the problem we have among ourselves is a lot of our communities don't even know what MRP is. They don't know the details involved in MRP. From what I've heard, they're asking for the rejection of this MRP bill, which we don't want to happen. We want the MRP bill to pass with amendments, just as we want Bill C-3 to pass with amendments, but the government is not listening. They're not accommodating our concerns.

Consultation...it's not just about our opinions. It's about accommodating our concerns. It's about a dialogue. It's about a partnership. That has not happened in any of the engagement sessions I have been involved in, nor the brief consultations there were on MRP.

For fee simple, yes, we have certificates of possession. Yes, we have these tiny pieces of land that are reserved for our benefit and use. I think what has not been discussed for our communities is that we want to be able to have the same kinds of economic opportunities that other people have. If we're to put up our land as collateral and we lose that land, it's taking what little we do have from our communities.

I know Mr. Jules is travelling right across Canada. For me, it's just another form of the white paper policy that was rejected in the 1970s. It's not adequate. You can't take what happens in the rest of Canada and put it in our communities. It doesn't work.

We want to have protection for our land, for future generations and for the present generation. Fee simple is not the best idea, I think, to help economic development. We need access to our land, to our resources. We need to sit down and dialogue with government. We should not have this “talk down” or “talking at”.

The government deals with the issues of aboriginal people in a very archaic, paternalistic way. It's 2010, for goodness' sake. We know all about your culture, but it's as if our culture is irrelevant: “It's going to be put in a museum, so you should be happy. That's how we're going to protect your culture.” It just doesn't work.

Thank you.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Simson.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you.

In your opening remarks, Ms. Gabriel and Ms. Vaugrante, you both mentioned something similar, saying that what is required in the long term is a national plan of action. You both used the same expression.

I just wonder how you envision that rolling out, or how we can get to that point. I ask because part of what this committee is doing is looking at a lot of similarities in this country among aboriginals on various reserves, but there are also so many differences that we are travelling across the country to get a feel both for the differences and similarities.

To refer to Ms. Mathyssen's point, a national plan of action can't be top down. We can't sit at the federal level and try to figure it out by ourselves. As part of it, I think we would have to include the provincial legislators to make it work, because there are differences provincially in how they address aboriginal issues.

I'm just trying to get a feel for this. If you had a magic wand and could bring about this national plan of action, what would the infrastructure be to get this under way? How do you see it? How do we develop it?

The Chair: Do we have a taker for that?

Ms. Vaugrante, Madame Gabriel, Ms. Gentelet?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Béatrice Vaugrante: I wanted to give the honour of speaking to Ellen, but I believe she's preparing a good answer for you.

We've been asking for this since 2004, and nothing has happened since that time. We have to start by sitting down together and having the desire to solve the problem of violence against women. We haven't perceived that desire to date, except in the Speech from the Throne, which contained the only interesting news in some time.

There has to—

[*English*]

Mrs. Michelle Simson: *Oui*, thank you, but can I just interrupt you for one second to pick up on what you said?

You mentioned a willingness to sit down together. So who would you envision the stakeholders being in order to develop this national action plan? Would they be the band leaders, the provincial government, and the federal government, so it would almost be like a giant summit, as it were?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Béatrice Vaugrante: There absolutely has to be participation by provincial authorities. As I've often mentioned, discrimination in the case of many cultural and socio-economic issues depends on the provinces.

We clearly need the cooperation of the various departments. Moreover, rapporteurs often handle aboriginal issues within the Government of Quebec. There has to be representation of the departments, aboriginal representation and the representation of aboriginal women as well; that's clear, especially at the federal level.

They'll have to agree on the urgent short-term and long-term needs, which will require other approaches and other consultations. However, the short-term, among other things, is everything that concerns the police and the safe houses. That depends on the provincial level. The police report to the municipal, provincial and sometimes federal levels with regard to security.

Together with the aboriginal groups, we must define the short-term action plans and then address the long-term, economic self-sufficiency, employment access, land consultation. These are much more complex, much more difficult subjects. One day or another, we'll have to establish a round table, a consultation table.

In addition, some things are incredible. Canada's image is tarnished because the country is being told what's happening in the country through UN bodies, through Amnesty International and through aboriginal groups. There has to be a federal government initiative through the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. In particular, our Prime Minister has to show some political will. They have to say they want to do it, that they are inviting you to consultations and say that they are going to invite people to sit around the table. First there has to be a reading of the issues.

I don't believe we necessarily always have the same reading of the issues. Amnesty International and I are afraid of one thing. In the action plan that contained that $10 million amount that was put on the table, the reading was reduced to the criminal analysis of matters. We're going to solve the problem of women who have disappeared and the problems association with assassinated women. This is very far from being a uniquely criminal issue. Together we have to agree on the scope of the problem. It will take work just to do that.

● (1220)

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Robertson.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Robertson: I simply want to add something on the issue of the federal and provincial governments.

When we live in a province, in Quebec, for example, and you come from an aboriginal community, you often wind up stuck in this opposition between the federal and provincial governments. It's every day; it's constant.

With regard to consultations, who's in the best position? We, the aboriginal peoples, know our history, our situation and what our needs are. It's important to take the time to consult. Often there's very little consultation of the aboriginal populations about their situation. I believe they know it very well.

At the time, we had a health system, a political system and a way of doing things. Today they think we are unable to take care of our people. And yet, as regards existing aboriginal resources, as I told you a little earlier, there are only 12 safe houses, but there are 58 communities, if you count the Inuit communities.

The comparison is always made with the non-aboriginal population. There are approximately 90 safe houses for the Quebec people, whereas there are only 12 aboriginal safe houses. When you know that there is three times as much violence in our communities, that's not right.

In the case of these aboriginal resources, the caseworkers are aboriginal, and they speak the language. They say that, to be a caseworker, you have to speak the language, but it takes more than that. It's the approach you use.

In the non-aboriginal safe houses, they talk a lot about feminist approaches, and women are encouraged to find a certain self-sufficiency when they are victims of violence. They are encouraged to take care of themselves. They often talk about being self-sufficient and taking care of themselves. However, we don't talk like that to aboriginal women. These women don't want to leave their husbands. They want to unite the family. In their minds, when you're married, you're married for life.

That's why the resources, including the safe houses that assist women, aren't the choice. You also have to help the man and the family. That's why we have to provide truly appropriate assistance. We must no longer see this break between the federal and the provincial levels.

With regard to funding, the safe houses are a good example. Since 2000, Quebec Native Women Inc., or QNW, has exercised a lot of pressure for increased funding for safe houses. I'd like to provide an update of that information.

We've been exercising pressure since 2000. Yes, funding has increased, but, at the same time, at the time when we were making demands, the gap between the provincial funding received by the aboriginal safe houses and that received by Quebec safe houses was $100,000. The more the gap increased, the more we demanded that it be corrected. At one point, the gap was $300,000.

The federal government announced an increase in funding for safe houses and basic funding was increased in 2008. So we've come back to the original gap of $100,000. That's currently the gap that exists between safe houses governed by the provincial government and those regulated by the federal level. That's a flagrant example.

And yet, those houses assist people in crisis, who are trying to commit suicide, substance abusers and the families of disappeared women. It isn't just a matter of awareness and assistance for women victims of violence.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Who wants to add something?

Ms. Gabriel.

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: We looked at all levels of contributing factors —and this comes from the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence—including individual factors, family factors, community factors, and culture and society. You have to involve every single member of society for a national action plan to be successful. That means you have to get governments sensitized to these issues. You have to get the police, judges, lawyers, and social workers, and then you have to get the communities themselves to come on board.

What we see all the time is that we're in a crisis situation and the attitude is, let's try to put out the fires. But we also need to have prevention. That's what I was talking about before when I mentioned education.

So a national action plan is something that reflects not just the immediate needs, but also the needs and experiences we have as aboriginal people, which can help foster a healthier community to stop this violence.

If we look at the globalization of culture, we see that violence and sex are what sell in the media and the entertainment industry. It's not just about government legislation; it's about what our children are watching, it's about what our youth are watching. I think it's a really sad state we find ourselves in. Everybody likes to be entertained, but we're forgetting that the media has an extremely powerful role in whether or not society wants to end violence.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

Luc.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Gabriel. You mentioned a report on aboriginal women and justice, which has been finalized by Quebec's department of justice. When was that report produced? When was it completed?

I think it would be interesting to get a copy of that document.

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: It was in 2003. That report concerned aboriginal women and non-aboriginal women. I believe there are a lot of recommendations. It's available at the website of Quebec's department of justice. We could always send you a copy.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: We'd really like to get a copy to see the recommendations.

When that report was submitted, did your association submit a brief? If so, would it be possible to get a copy of that brief?

A little earlier, Ms. Simson mentioned the national action plan, but if we could see what is being done in Quebec, perhaps we could important to the national level things that are being done in Quebec. We'd very much like to get a copy of your report or of the reports of the various organizations.

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: In recent years, we've submitted reports to Quebec's National Assembly about commitments on this violence issue, as well as to the federal government.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: The most recent report that you've submitted —

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: In 2008, we submitted a brief on spousal abuse.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: There are a number of recommendations—

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: I could submit to you—

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You can submit it to our analysts, and we could get a copy.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, send copies to the clerk and they will be distributed to the MPs. The clerk can tell you what format she wants it in.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: A little earlier, we talked about statistics. Amnesty International stated some of those statistics. Do you have a document that would enable the committee to see statistics in Quebec? It isn't easy to get those kinds of documents.

Does this report generally concern violence against women, or are we talking about 582 cases of women who were killed in Canada?

Do we have that report, Madam Chair?

● (1230)

[*English*]

The Chair: The committee has that, yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I'd like to know whether there are any statistics. Amnesty International stated a few.

Ms. Béatrice Vaugrante: At the end of this report, there are notes, with all the references to government studies that have been conducted by the federal government.

In addition, with respect to the national action plan, I believe that Manitoba is quite advanced. You must be aware of that. There's a task force there that includes the police and a lot of social and economic players. I believe Manitoba is one of the most advanced provinces because they're trying to address violence against women in a slightly more holistic and comprehensive way. I think that's a model.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Émilie-Cloé Laliberté.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Émilie-Cloé Laliberté: At the end of the recommendations, you'll find a number of references to research projects that have been done in Canada. We did a research project on the legal system, and a project on HIV/AIDS was conducted for Canada. If we compare that to Montreal, they met with an enormous number of aboriginal women who were living on the street. That research contained some very interesting statistics and recommendations.

There's also the pivot legal society in Vancouver, which has surveyed sworn statements and testimony that can be admitted in court. These people have produced a publication for which I gave you the reference. They met with aboriginal women from the downtown east side. Those statistics and recommendations are quite extensive.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I have a final question.

We talked about grants and funding. Ms. Gabriel said that this was an important part, but there's also the entire aspect of colonization that really has to be addressed.

My question is this: are there any organizations such as yours whose grants have been cut? If so, for what reasons?

[*English*]

Ms. Nakuset: You're referring to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation cuts?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Yes, there was that. Were there any other organizations? Does this affect a number of organizations?

[*English*]

Ms. Nakuset: I can only speak for the shelter, and it was the government that decided they no longer wanted to give money to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. I was on maternity leave, so I remember speaking to AHS, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, maybe at the beginning of March, when the government was prorogued. They were expecting money from the government. That's why we were all very surprised when they put an announcement on the website saying the government would not be....

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: All right.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Madam Chair—

The Chair: Oh, just one moment, please.

We do have recommendations from Stella that have not been sent out to the committee yet because we need to just translate a few sentences that were in the brief. We have to do everything in English and French, so you will be getting the Stella recommendations.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just wanted to clarify, first of all, that the money for Sisters in Spirit was part of our 2010 budget, which is still in the process of being passed, so I don't expect that money will be able to flow until the budget goes through the House of Commons and then through the Senate. But that money, in my recollection of reading the budget document, was for research and policy. It was not money set aside for policing.

I think you will find that that money will be available once the budget gets through, and then the status of women minister will have the opportunity to have a look at where that money is going to go.

The Chair: As a point of information, I think it was suggested by Ms. Gabriel that she wasn't discussing the Sisters in Spirit money. She was discussing the $10 million in the Speech from the Throne that was earmarked for violence against women in general. No one knows what's happened to it, and then she was told that the $10 million was earmarked for policing.

Ms. Lois Brown: Madam Chair, more money was set aside in the budget for Sisters in Spirit, but that is part of the 2010 budget and the budget is not yet passed. I think that is very important to keep in mind.

I wanted to ask Ms. France Robertson and Ms. Brazeau about the shelters. We heard the comment that there are not enough shelters. One comment was that it could be 100 kilometres to get to a shelter. With the disparity in geography that we have in Canada, what is the optimum accessibility? I suppose that would be the question that needs to be asked. I don't know that it's feasible to have a shelter in every community. Certainly I don't have shelters in every community in my area either.

And what is the repeat usage? Is it a revolving door or are we seeing the women who are coming...?

We had a witness in Ottawa who was talking about the skill sets that are being given to some of the women coming through their shelter doors. Is that happening here in Quebec? Is there more that needs to be done in that area? How can we help in that area? What is the repetition level that we see?

● (1235)

The Chair: Ms. Gabriel, do you want to respond?

Ms. Lois Brown: Anyone can answer it. I just thought I would address the issue of shelters.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Robertson: In an ideal world, it would be great to have safe houses for aboriginal people near the communities, but we know that isn't the case today. I don't think that in a potential long-term action plan, it would be possible to have a safe house or an aboriginal resource.

However, since there aren't any in all the communities, the best thing right now would be crisis centres. If you have to drive an hour or two to get to a resource, that's very far. Often the women won't go there, or they'll stay in the community and everyone will know that. It's a matter of confidentiality. There should be crisis centres. That would make it possible to manage the situation, which is a matter of violence, regardless of the form it takes. We can also talk about suicide crisis centres. There should be adapted places of that kind.

A lot of aboriginal women wind up in non-aboriginal safe houses. Those houses are deprived because they don't know how to respond appropriately to these women in distress. I've been told that children often had to act as interpreters for their distressed mothers because they didn't speak English or French. When you're in distress, and you don't speak English or French, you speak your aboriginal language. So the children had to interpret for their mothers. Imagine the problem that caused for those children. They are witnesses, but they're also victims of violence in a way.

These women often come back to the safe house for a bit of respite. One caseworker told me that the process is very long. If you compare a non-aboriginal woman with an aboriginal woman, a non-aboriginal woman will somewhat understand that she is experiencing a violence cycle. So she will question herself and wonder what she'll have to do in order to take charge of her life. For an aboriginal woman, violence is normal; that's the way it is in her community. We also see that the subject is taboo; you must not talk about it. You have to become aware of everything she is going through. There is also the cycle of residential schools and all that. The healing process can taken two years, three years, before she realizes that and wonders what she's going to do with her life. She's going to think of herself because she has always thought about the greater well-being of her family, her children and the community.

During this respite time, she will rest, but she will always go back to her husband. Often it's because she has no choice. You didn't talk about marital property a little earlier. If she left her husband, she would lose everything. She'll lose her house and often she has no job. Most of the women don't work. She won't have a place to stay, and we know the vacancy rate is very low. So this is often a time to start over a little, to take a break. The cycle comes around often. These women often come back to the safe house with their four or five children. There are also very few suitable resources for those children.

Nakuset must have some statistics on the occupancy rate.

● (1240)

[*English*]

Ms. Nakuset: I don't know about statistics right now. I just got back from maternity leave, so you're going to have to bear with me. But I did want to address this.

France deals a lot with the shelters that are on reserve, and there are two that are off reserve: one in Quebec City and the one in Montreal. I can't really address what it's like in each community, because I don't know, but I do know that the women who come through Montreal are not always coming because of domestic violence, but sometimes because of homelessness. Sometimes they're coming from across Canada, so sometimes we see, as you said, the revolving door; there are some.

It's always different. It's an interesting point. I remember the first client who came through our door. That was in 1987, almost 25 years ago. We see her on occasion now. It takes a while for people to heal. This is why it's so strange that they would stop the funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, that they would cut the funding so soon, because it takes time—in 25 years, if you haven't healed from, let's say, domestic violence and all the issues that stem from domestic violence, the addictions and all the other issues....

I'm not sure whether I answered your question properly. Is there something else you need to...?

Ms. Lois Brown: Well, could any of you address the issue of skills that are being provided? They were saying that in the shelter in Ottawa there is opportunity for the women to take courses and get some skill sets that are marketable, because many of them want that economic independence.

Ms. Gabriel, you talked about the need for economic independence. They are able to parlay the marketable job skills they are acquiring there into real jobs that are making them real incomes, which make them financially independent. She was talking about some of the women who have taken courses through a number of the community colleges. We are quite proud of the fact that some of the women have come back now to work in the shelter and be mentors for other women who are now the clients of the shelter.

I am wondering if that same thing is happening here and how successful it has been, if it is.

Ms. Nakuset: The thing is that when women come to the shelter they are usually coming in crisis, so they're not really looking for skills. They are looking for a debriefing and a way to heal from that particular crisis. Because the woman can stay in the shelter for as little as one night to maybe two months, it's not really the proper place for them to learn skills, because they're just breathing.

But we have an outreach program, and it follows the women once they have left the shelter. This is where we are able to find them the resources to go back to school, to get an education. We have different programming throughout the year to help them, and we have our success stories too of women who went to the outreach program, who got their degrees, and who now work at the shelter. We do find that, but it is through the outreach program, not at the shelter. The shelter is really just for crisis.

Ms. Lois Brown: Yours is just crisis management.

Ms. Nakuset: Yes, it's going from A to B, and having a career of your choice is maybe Z. Maybe it is X, but it is way down the line.

I strongly believe in the outreach. It's the support services after they've dealt with the crisis.

Ms. Lois Brown: How do we make that bridge? I would suggest that in Ontario what we see from the crisis management situation is that this is when the Ontario government kicks in, and there are subsidized housing units or assisted living situations. In Aurora, in my community, there is an apartment dwelling that has been funded in combination with the community, the Province of Ontario, and York Region, so that there is a place.... It's like transitional housing. When the women are in essentially sheltered housing, there is opportunity then for them to receive funding from Community and Social Services, which is the branch of Ontario government that then gives assisted living. But they can get into courses, into educational programming.

Is that part, Ms. Gabriel, of what you're saying needs to happen when multi-levels of government become part of this solution?

● (1245)

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: That's provided there are no jurisdictional arguments. Quebec Native Women is not a service provider; however, we do have an AHRDA program through the Native Women's Association of Canada through which we provide opportunities for women, say, who have just become hairdressers. We provide the employer to give them hairdressing experience. AHRDA also provides opportunities for women to finish their secondary education, but these are dollars specifically targeted for urban aboriginal women. I couldn't access it if I were in a crisis situation because I was on a reserve. There are gaps.

Education is very much needed. We have a project through the AHRDA or the agency—the ACCESS project—that helps the single-parent aboriginal women to learn how to write a résumé and get some job experience. This is one of the skills we are talking about that is lacking. This is for single mothers who are victims of violence.

The Chair: Sorry, Ms. Brown. We have 10 minutes left in this whole session, so I'm going to intervene.

We have heard nothing from Ms. Shauk.

I would like to give you an opportunity to say something, to make a statement, to tell us what you would like to leave us with.

Ms. Pamela Shauk: I'm going to try my best.

The women here have pretty much said most of the things that I would have said. I've been working at the Native Friendship Centre for the past 22 years. There have been too many cutbacks at the friendship centre. We lack staff and we don't have enough money to hire people.

It's nice for you guys to invite me. I'm kind of shy and I don't really know—

The Chair: We just want to hear in a few words how this works. It's important to us.

You talked about cutbacks and you talked about therefore having to lay off staff. What are the other things you feel...? How do you feel your friendship centres are working? Are there many youth coming there?

Ms. Pamela Shauk: Yes, we have a youth centre. They're open from Monday to Friday, I think, from one to nine. Sometimes they do activities on the weekend, such as going out there with the youth and helping them to get off the streets. We also help them to go back to school.

We are helping women to go back to school. As Ellen Gabriel mentioned, we have native women who are single, who have kids, and we're trying to help them out, to get back to school.

They are not the only ones who are starting one. We also have the Kativik Board, which is an Inuit organization. I think the one they have is pretty much mixed, with Inuit and aboriginal.

I'd like to see more people work at the friendship centre with us. We need more social workers, as I mentioned. We need psychologists. We need lots of help there. We need more workers to come and work with us.

I really enjoy working with people. I'm a people person. I work with people, and I like working with people.

● (1250)

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

We have eight minutes left. There were a couple of things I wanted to ask. The chair rarely gets that pleasure.

We've heard so much information today that I think it's really important for the committee to understand the difference between the needs of women on reserve and the needs of women off reserve, the urban women coming from Vancouver, which is where I am.

Aboriginal women seem to be no one's child. Nobody wants to accept responsibility for them. The federal government says they're off reserve, don't look at us. The provincial government says it's a federal jurisdiction for all aboriginal people. Generally speaking, the municipalities are the ones who have to deal with the reality of their lives. As Stella well knows, from having gone to Vancouver, a lot of these women end up on the streets. They end up being sex trade workers because they have no choice. They become addicted. They're exploited enormously. When all of these women were killed, as we saw in the Pickton incident, these were women who did go into the shadows, into the dark places, so that they could get a $5 trick to buy their next fix because they had nothing, or to get $5 so that they could feed their kids. This is the plight of women who are off reserve and in the cities. The solution I've heard you saying—you sort of hinted at it—has to be very different than for the women on reserve.

I'd like to hear just a quick synopsis about what you think one should do to deal with the fact that no one wants to take responsibility for aboriginal women off reserve.

On reserve, when we went to Nunavut and other places—and I find this distressing because you mentioned it, Ms. Gabriel—we heard that aboriginal women seem to think that violence is just their lot, that this is what their lives are going to be like. There is the sense of absolute hopelessness because of the intergenerational residential school thing. They grew up not seeing parenting, but knowing that they were bad, to speak their language was awful, their culture was terrible, they were little savages, and they had to change, and to be who they were.... Many of them were treated with sexual, psychological, emotional, and sometimes physical violence. For them, violence is something that has been handed down intergenerationally. Women don't want to leave the reserve; they don't want to leave home. Many of them believe that their husbands or their partners are not necessarily finding ways to deal with that same problem that all aboriginal people have.

On the concept of a shelter, a crisis centre, I'd like to hear.... If you had a crisis centre, how would that work if the women did not want to leave home? We also heard that when the police came in, the police wanted to lay a criminal charge and the women didn't want them to lay a criminal charge. So they didn't report it because they didn't want their husband or their partner to be taken away from the family, and they were disrupting the whole reserve by this. So they shut up and waited until it got so very bad.

If you had crisis centres there on reserve and they needed to move from a crisis centre to a shelter, to a transitional house, and then to second-stage housing, which are three different entities, how would you see that working? Would they have to leave the reserve? How would they move from the family? There's a conundrum there. How do we resolve that conundrum?

If you could answer those two questions, one about the plight of the urban aboriginal woman and the other one.... Everywhere we've gone we've heard about the need for a national, comprehensive, integrated, interjurisdictional, long-term strategy working with communities to ensure that they can do that, and that's the only thing that will work. You just repeated everything we're hearing everywhere we go.

Can I have an answer to those quickly? And then I want to thank you for having come.

Ms. Gabriel, I'm looking at you.

Ms. Ellen Gabriel: On reserve, you have this nature of everyone knowing everybody. Even police are hesitant to charge. They'll say, "Let him sleep it off and he'll be okay." So we have this issue.

You know, when growing up I thought violence was just normal as well, and it takes a while for you to realize that it's not. So I think it's very important in a crisis centre that you're dealing with the family, not just dealing with the woman but dealing with the family and dealing with police officers who are sensitized to the nature of violence, whether it's sexual violence, conjugal violence, or even any kind of violence. We know that two-thirds of people in a community also experience violence and can run into crisis situations.

I think what is needed is to have those healthy elders who worked through whatever trauma they have had in residential schools, or those who didn't go to residential schools, to be able to counsel couples, as we had in our traditional ways of doing things. That we include the best of both cultures, which is psychologists, social workers, with elders, to be able to have access, and to allow them the freedom to choose if they don't want to have one or the other. We have to look at some of the root problems, and we've discussed those things.

We need to be able to allow them to have the time to heal. When you go through something traumatic and then the next day you're supposed to go to work, you can't function in your work, so you may lose your job. I think there needs to be some compassion given to families who are in crisis, to say, if they're working for the band or if they're working for someone else—and that's where the multi-jurisdictions come in—"This woman has been beaten, her children are suffering. Give her at least two weeks to be able to catch her breath, to be able to know where she wants to go." She will not leave her husband, as Béatrice has said, because she doesn't want to leave the home. Her husband may be the breadwinner.

We need to look at it from a compassionate point of view, but integrating both traditional and western forms of healing and well-being.

I guess I'll end it there.

● (1255)

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anyone who wants to say something on off-reserve...? Obviously, Nakuset or Ms. Martin, you are the two people who work with women who are off reserve, women who are urban aboriginal women in the cities. We've heard from Stella on this issue.

What is the solution for them? Sending them back to the reserve may not be the answer. What do you do when no one wants to fund programs, no one wants to take responsibility for programs that will assist women who are victims of systemic as well as domestic and other violence in the cities, where the violence is even greater from a systemic point of view?

Ms. Carrie Martin: Right now in the outreach program that we have going, there's only one worker and I think there are 176 registered clients. I think other organizations that are non-aboriginal need to get on board and start coming together and working with the aboriginal community. We have a lack of aboriginal-specific services, but there are so many services that exist right now. They just need to start incorporating a little bit of the traditional healing.

As Ellen was saying, combine western healing with traditional healing and make sure that the existing services can be adapted to the needs of aboriginal people. There needs to be sensitivity training for different workers in the community. There needs to be some kind of cultural sensitivity training for what already exists in the community so that these women will feel at ease to access the services, they won't feel discriminated, and they won't feel that they don't belong there because it's not an aboriginal-specific resource.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm sorry, Ms. Laliberté.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Émilie-Cloé Laliberté: That's very important; I'm talking about direct line services. Before being a general coordinator, I did direct interventions in the street for five years. You have to be able to respond to immediate needs, which are extremely urgent. I believe a drunk tank in Montreal would be very important. Apparently, there may be a single drunk tank in downtown.

A drunk tank is a shelter where people can go when they are drunk or intoxicated. I think it's to our benefit to have a drunk tank for aboriginal women as well, where they could have a group kitchen, for example, in order to develop skills.

It would really be a centre for drying out. However, if people want to stay longer, they could get support. Elders could offer long-term counselling. This would have to be funded on a sustainable basis. These are essential aspects.

● (1300)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

It appears to me that if you had a national strategy—not a federal strategy, but a national strategy—it might actually be able to catch within it the women off reserve. They are really the lost people, in that no one wants to help them.

Thank you very much for coming. I appreciate the time you took. You were very comprehensive in what you had to say. I like to think that you were as frank with us as some of us were with you.

I want to thank you again so much for coming. We really appreciate it.

Since it is a quasi-formal session, we'll move to suspend.

● _____ (Pause) _____ ●

● (1400)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming today.

We're looking at the issue of violence against aboriginal women from many perspectives. We're looking at the root causes of violence. We're looking at the scope, the extent of violence. We're looking at the types of violence—emotional, physical, etc. We're also looking at it on reserve and off reserve, the differences or different forms of violence and how to deal with it in both of those settings. We're also looking at solutions. So hopefully you'll be able to touch on much of that in your presentations.

As there are only two of you here...I just want to tell the committee that the Women's Centre of Montreal just called and cancelled. Also, the Kahnawake Peacekeepers called and said something had come up and they just couldn't make it. They were going to represent the law enforcement component of it.

So we have two witnesses. Normally, what we do when we start is we give you a bit of time to present. This morning, because there were many people, we did a round table discussion. But given that there are only two of you, I would like you to just make a presentation, and then we're going to ask the committee to introduce themselves and the supporting officers, and then we're just going to go into an open discussion back and forth.

How would you like to begin, Madame Bousquet?

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Pierre Bousquet (Associate Professor, Faculty of Anthropology, University of Montreal, As an Individual): I would prefer it that my colleague starts because we tried to prepare complementary presentations in order to be as efficient as possible.

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud (Full Professor, School of Criminology, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): First of all, I would like to thank you for this invitation. I'm going to start with a brief presentation and tell you about my expertise, in particular.

I've been interested in aboriginal issues and criminal justice since 1985. I am a full professor at the School of Criminology of the University of Montreal. I've explored a number of aspects of aboriginal issues, in particular through work that I've been able to do on the marginalization of aboriginal women in urban areas, more particularly in Montreal. Through a life history, I've traced marginalization pathways.

I've done some work on aboriginal police. I've looked into aboriginal perspectives on social regulation and criminal justice. I have been interested and still am very interested today in potential approaches other than traditional justice. I've done some work on healing circles and sentencing circles. Restorative justice is one of my fields of expertise. I've also started work on the incarceration of aboriginal women. I recently completed a recent project on the experience of aboriginal women who are victims of violence in relation to the resources they have been able to use. Lastly, I am currently a member of a research team, with my colleague Marie-Pierre Bousquet, on the experience of aboriginal women in relation to violence here in Quebec, specifically for the purpose of determining action that may be taken based on the women's experiences. That, in summary, is my background.

I would like to mention that, although some of the projects I just cited did not focus directly on violence against women, it goes without saying that that issues runs through all the projects I have done to date.

My presentation is based on three issues in particular. I should say “our presentation” since, as my colleague said, we agreed to combine our presentations. The first issue is as follows: what is the situation regarding violence against aboriginal women in Quebec? The second issue is: how should we analyze the situation? Let's put the question another way: why are things not improving? The third question is as follows: what action measures would be promising?

My colleague will mainly focus on the second question. In my remarks, I will try to answer the first question. Then I will encroach on the third question. Marie-Pierre Bousquet will also address the third question.

What is the situation regarding violence against aboriginal women in Quebec? I would say at the outset that there is no statistical or qualitative overall picture of the violence experienced by aboriginal women in Quebec. There are studies, but they are scattered and not very recent. Those few studies suggest that violence is not a recent phenomenon. We mainly began to talk about it in the 1980s. Moreover, it is not because we started talking about it in the 1980s that it wasn't going on before that. It does not appear to be a declining phenomenon, quite on the contrary, it seems to be growing, which is of course very disturbing. It is very widespread in the communities, but also in the urban centres.

I draw your attention to the fact that the major challenge in future will also be to deal with what is going on in urban areas, since there has been a major shifts by aboriginal to urban areas since the 1980s. The violence is serious and comes in many forms, that is to say it is physical, psychological and sexual. It is more widespread, but also more serious than among non-aboriginals. It starts earlier, in childhood. It is expressed over a very long period of life. It usually starts in childhood and continues into adulthood. It is a daily occurrence, trivialized and part of a family relationship dynamic, and thus arises between spouses, and it is transgenerational. There are other things to say about it, but let's say that's a summary.

● (1410)

As I mentioned, I conducted a study on the experience of aboriginal women who are victims of violence. We surveyed a number of accounts of experiences of 36 women from various nations in Quebec. Based on that research into the experience of those women and into the various resources that we could use, I was able to make other findings. I'll mention them briefly. I'll obviously have the opportunity to answer your questions more specifically, particularly on the strategies implemented by the women who are confronted with a dynamic of violence, and also on the impact of the resources used.

This is a qualitative study. It revealed, among other things, that one of the problems is that, from the initial outbreaks of violence, aboriginal women tend to adapt to the situation and to really do nothing. That's often an initial reaction, and it's an attitude that is a factor in maintaining the cycle of violence. We also found that all women in our sample used a considerable number of formal and informal resources, some 15 on average, in their life path, during their experience. The average age of our sample of women was 44 years. The main results of these studies who that an aboriginal woman's ability to break out of the cycle of violence, or to remain in it, is related to three interrelated aspects. Those aspects are as follows: socio-demographic profile, victimization profile and use of resources in the event of violence. So these are the types of resources and the chronology of the use of those resources.

Let's briefly mention some other elements of the socio-demographic profile. I would perhaps simply like to mention that the research, based on those 36 paths, enabled us to determine two groups: one group that is doing relatively well, which has managed to break out of this cycle of violence, and the second group, at the time of the interviews, that has remained prisoners of that violence. So our research attempted to understand what differentiated those two groups.

The socio-demographic profile is precisely what differentiates them. Educated women, women who are in the work force do much better. Aboriginal women seem much more resilient than Inuit women. The emotional isolation of women is very important, as we'll see, in taking action, the destructuring of the family cell, and in particular, the loss of parental custody, which may or may not result in the violence experienced, contribute to a context which is not particularly conducive to a break with the dynamics of violence.

As regards the victimization profile, we finally realized that it was less the objective seriousness of the violence than the duration and type of violence that differentiated the women who did better from those who remained within the dynamic of violence.

It emerges that sexual violence and violence that occurs early in childhood are two factors of persistence in the violent situation. What is more, I would say that those two situations, sexual violence and early violence, tend to favour the adoption of violent behaviours in women victims as well. This enables me to mention that violence must absolutely be analyzed in the context of a dynamic. I'm going to place considerable emphasis on the idea that this issue must really be integrated into the dynamic. In addition, we must break the polarized analysis, the classic analysis when it comes to violence against women of the executioner and victim type. Furthermore, the studies very clearly show that men who are violent were also victims of violence during their childhoods.

With regard to the third aspect, the resources used, we realized that the resilient group and the group that persists in violence do not differ greatly with respect to the type of resources used.

● (1415)

All the women in our sample made use of the family, the police, treatment centres, traditional practices, safe houses, and so on. I obviously have more things to say; we'll see based on your questions.

We realized that the most important thing is not so much the type of resource that is used as the manner in which that resource is used. More particularly, one has to look at what goals the women pursue when they use a specialized resource providing help this regard to violence. For example, aboriginal women who use resources for respite or protection are usually the ones who remain in that dynamic of violence because they use it somewhat provisionally, as respite, whereas women who use the same resources with a view to personally taking or taking back control of their lives are the ones who do much better.

I have a lot of things to say, but I'll close with the promising action measures. I'll offer them all together. For me, it's very important that the action measures be implemented on a number of fronts at the same time. I think it's extremely important not to target just one measure, but to consider a whole range of them.

First I would say that we must change our way of understanding the phenomenon of violence against women. I'll give you some details if you have any questions on that. We also must not duplicate non-aboriginal actions and programs in an aboriginal setting; we must not cut and paste. Initiatives that come from aboriginals themselves must be reinforced. It must be understood, and I really emphasize this, that repressive approaches are not constructive. A distinction has to be drawn; we must not confuse safety or exclusion, for example of the aggressor with repression.

The purposes of the justice system must be transformed by innovating through the adoption of various responses. I'm thinking of the courts specialized in domestic violence, for example. We must develop interventions that are inclusive, that is to say that include all the protagonists: spouse, family and community, in particular, through cultural practices. I'm thinking of what I know a little better, the healing circles, restorative justice and justice committees.

I think we also have to act upstream from the problem, not just on the problem, by, for example, supporting and reinforcing the leadership of aboriginal women in the communities, supporting access to key positions, to local authorities such as the mayor's office, etc. We have to fight poverty, develop a harm reduction approach to drugs and alcohol. We have to support aboriginal women's associations, and so on.

I think training should be given on violence to all psychosocial stakeholders who intervene in the community, which includes health staff, police officers, socio-judicial staff, but also teaching staff, for example. Similar training has to be planned in urban areas as well.

In my opinion, we must not standardize the programs and actions that might be adopted; we have to be aware of the specific nature of the communities in order to support those actions. I think we should develop policies in urban areas to combat discrimination, stereotypes, to reinforce the deployment of a support network for aboriginal women in urban areas; that's the great challenge for the future.

I would close by mentioning one very important element. At the political level, we must start soon to eliminate all the discriminatory sections in the Indian Act.

Thank you.

● (1420)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Bousquet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Pierre Bousquet: Thank you very much.

I'd also like to start by thanking you for inviting me to come and testify here. I'll introduce myself as well.

I am Marie-Pierre Bousquet. I am Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology of the University of Montreal. I've been working on aboriginal issues since the mid-1990s, and I am more particularly interested in Amerindian societies, and thus a little less in Inuit societies.

I lived in an Anishnabe community in Quebec for a year in 1996. I have continued making frequent stays there since then for my research and other reasons. Since my research discipline, my work is mainly focused on field research, and that's extremely important for me.

I have examined various issues throughout my years in research, but I have focused particularly on intergenerational relations, relations with the land, on the landscape of religious beliefs, on disintoxication, on the passage into adulthood, and I'm also taking part in a research project on the experience of aboriginal women with violence, in a research group to which Mylène Jaccoud belongs.

I have cited all these research themes. They don't necessarily seem related to violence to you. In fact, they are. If I just take the example of relations with the land, the fact, for example, of sometimes staying on the land or getting closer to the land may be a way for women to become more aware of the violence they experience, of finding a certain peace and making decisions. That's just to give you an idea. All the themes I've addressed here are related to social problems. So I'm going to elaborate in particular on the second point stated by Ms. Jaccoud, that is why violence is perpetuated in aboriginal environments.

As you no doubt know, aboriginal women have the sad record of being the most vulnerable population in all of Canada. On a daily basis, they are the women who are most often victims of family violence and spousal abuse by their spouses who, I recall, can be either aboriginal or alloriginal. It's not necessarily a question of the spouse's origin.

There is every reason to believe that violence has always existed, in all societies, but that it is only increasing among aboriginal peoples. This growth is related to a number of factors: the stress of colonization, the pressure of acculturation and the imposition of Canadian ways of doing things. It has also only increased with the collapse of the traditional economy of the aboriginal peoples and with the unemployment related to that collapse, with the shifts to a sedentary lifestyle, with the increased guardianship of subsequent government authorities and with the social responses such as alcohol abuse and drug abuse, which existed before the switch to sedentary lifestyles but which have undergone phenomenal development since that shift.

We can therefore say that the accumulated injuries have created a vicious circle of violence, which partly explains this perpetuation of violence. We can distinguish two general ways of managing violence in the aboriginal communities. The first are the traditional methods of conflict management. The second is resorting to institutions that were originally imposed by the colonial regime, that is to say the police and the law courts.

I have done a lot of work on the issue of traditional methods of conflict management. Those traditional methods have been quite undermined by the intervention, indeed interventionism, of the Canadian government and its law enforcement representatives. By interventionism, I mean here the interference in the affairs of aboriginal peoples with the use, in particular, of a legal system that absolutely did not appeal to the aboriginal peoples and that was not based on their ways of viewing the offence and other aspects.

There nevertheless are still aboriginal ways to assist women suffering from violence, ways that I would call informal resources. One of the most important informal resources, in the research I have conducted for aboriginal women and Amerindian women in particular is the family network. By that I mean the network of over-kinship, that is to say both kinship and affinity. This is a mutual assistance network consisting of people who general kindred relationships, but who are not necessarily very close relations.

● (1425)

Aboriginal women who are victims of violence can also turn to formal resources such as social services programs and safe houses. However, they don't necessarily always know those resources. And they don't necessarily feel very comfortable there either. Why doesn't this situation improve? There are many reasons. My colleague has already mentioned a few. I'm not going to try to classify them, but I think the most important is without a doubt the general apathy toward this problem.

The fate of aboriginal women seems to be—I'm going to say it in English with a very bad accent and I apologize to the anglophones—the dirty little secret of Canada. Tens of Amerindian, Inuit and Metis women disappear and are assassinated without that mobilizing the media or the authorities. So there should obviously be—that's no doubt why you are here—a federal political will, a provincial and local will to change things.

The preferred models that we tend to think of are the police, the law courts and the other agents in charge of maintaining the regulations of society. Those models, preferred by those whom I call “the agents of social regulation” are repression, on the one hand, and treatment or prevention on the other.

As my colleague said, we clearly realized, based on all the research we did, that repression doesn't work at all. Moreover, the programs are very scattered, which makes them highly unproductive and they are also poorly matched with the informal resources that are not really taken into account, which considerably undermines their effectiveness.

In addition, aboriginals still have very little control over the implementation of programs. The communities are not independent with regard to development, and their general state of economic and administrative dependence contributes largely to the problem. The housing and job shortages and low education levels are part of the equation of reproduction and violence. Moreover, as my colleague emphasized, the more a woman has access to a good education and is integrated into the work force, the more chances she will have of breaking out of the circle of violence.

With regard to education, we cannot forget a fact that contributes to the lack of governance, that aboriginals lack training to apply treatment and prevention programs. Furthermore, if they wish to build programs that are more consistent with their way of doing things, they must at times seek private funding and do not always know where to get it.

Even though women are increasingly accessing positions as chiefs and spokespersons for their nations, the fact nevertheless remains that power remains largely in the hands of men, whether it be at the head of band councils or at the head of Quebec municipalities where aboriginals live. The political discrimination of women for Quebec societies was introduced through relations with Euro-Canadians and amplified through the legal violence?? suffered by Amerindian women since the 19th century. I won't go into the history of the Indian Act, which you must surely know, or the debates to which that act still give rise, but I would like to emphasize that the maintenance of legal discrimination against women, which violates their rights and freedom to identify themselves and their descendants as Amerindians, is part of that violence and at times helps give people living in the communities arguments for excluding women and maintaining violence against them.

That also contributes to a segregation of their problems, as a result of which aboriginal women clearly understood, when they decided to create their associations in the early 1970s, that they had to attack on their own, without separating the two subjects, both the injustices of the Indian Act and the problems of violence. I'm thinking of the aboriginal woman from Quebec, for example, who belongs to the Quebec Native Women's Association. From the time the Association was established, the two themes have always been completely linked. Moreover, it is time that everyone share their awareness of that fact.

Although the aboriginal women's associations have made it possible to achieve progress in taking the abuses this population suffers into account, the community levers are still inadequate.

● (1430)

A good example is the promotion of models of conduct in which the leadership of women is not rightly valued. In the aboriginal communities, women are generally viewed in a paradoxical manner as keepers of the culture and as being responsible for transmitting that culture. So one could say at the outset that this is a highly valued hot, very prestigious role, but at the same time it's difficult for them to enter important positions and to make their voices heard. So they also work very hard to show that being a woman and aboriginal can be associated with pursing an education, getting involved politically and socially and the embodiment of values such as sobriety, care for others and so on. So it would undoubtedly be necessary to encourage and develop these models of conduct and access for women to leadership.

Lastly, it should be borne in mind, even though it's obvious, that aboriginal cultures must be taken into account. The perpetuation of violence also depends on factors that are observed in aboriginal environments, such as the rule of silence, which is a big problem—if only in detecting violence before confronting it—fear of informing and the fact that people can find violence and acceptable. I lived in an Anishinabe community for a year, and I can tell you that, by the end of one year, I wound up finding violence normal—in talking like that when people tell each other village gossip—and that scared me. So this is part of that environment.

Aboriginal women generally live in a close relationship with those who make them suffer, and they are often afraid that, if they speak out, they will break up their social environment and the support they have. These factors, which maintain a status quo, must be considered in environments that very much operate in isolation. Together with that is the fact that the current response to violence against aboriginal women are inappropriate and inadequate.

It also should not be forgotten that the history of relations between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or the police in the aboriginal communities is a charged history that is past on in aboriginal circles, of particularly harsh action taken against aboriginal people, interventions that were considered unjustified, imprisonment for minor offences, and the removal of children from their parents. Moreover, the history of relations with the law courts isn't any better. That history weighs on the quality and effectiveness of services provided by police and the justice system in aboriginal communities. In addition to that is the fact that many services won't be adapted to aboriginal cultures, quite simply as a result of a total and absolute lack of knowledge of aboriginal cultures—that strikes me every time.

There are of course aboriginal police officers, aboriginal social workers, substance abuse and crime caseworkers who are aboriginal, and other qualified staff. Their advantages that they know the actual situation on the ground, but there aren't always enough of them, far from it. In addition, they very often have close ties with the assailants or their victims and are not always well trained, particularly in detecting violence that isn't necessarily physically predictable. So they often tend to apply the term violence to what corresponds to very visible marks of blows—we've seen that in particular in the research we're conducting right now. However, the violence isn't limited strictly to that form; it can be non-verbal but can be verbal as well. We also noted that, for non-physical violence in particular, non-aboriginal staff are not necessarily better trained than aboriginal staff.

My colleague has already noted some courses of action, and I'm going to focus particularly on two of them. It's important to start by emphasizing that it is hard to talk about women without talking about men. First, that doesn't reflect the views of women or what they want in the matter, and if women are also suffering from violence, is because the men are suffering too. The spouses, family members and children are all part of this circle of violence. They are all affected by the resulting trauma, either because they are responsible for it, because they are its targets or simply because they have experience and reproduce it. Everyone needs support, and the care and attention in the social environment must be comprehensive.

The development of traditional approaches should also be encouraged. By traditional approaches, I also mean simply aboriginal approaches, that is to say innovative models, that the aboriginals would like to experiment with if they consider them more appropriate to their way of being.

● (1435)

Allow me to finish by emphasizing one fact. As a result of my specialization, I am particularly interested in culture, but the cultural difference of aboriginal women must absolutely be taken into account in helping the manage these problems.

That cultural difference exists and is lasting. It is there despite 500 years of living together. We must, in particular, involve and sensitize not only aboriginals, but also Allochtones in this matter, to help address and destroy prejudices that have lasted as a result of ignorance and that perpetuate the systemic violence against aboriginals.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup.*

We'll begin with some questions. We're not going to stick to seven minutes, etc.

Lois's hand is up, and then we have Michelle, and we have Luc, Nicole, and Irene. I just want to get them in order, that's all.

All right, start, Lois.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you, ladies, for being here today.

The Chair: And introduce yourselves so everyone knows who you are.

Ms. Lois Brown: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Lois Brown, member of Parliament for Newmarket—Aurora, which is a riding about 30 kilometres north of Toronto. I'm a first-time MP and a member of the Conservative Party.

We've heard some very interesting discussions today. One of the things we heard this morning was the issue of education. Madame Bousquet, you've spoken about that as well. You talked about aboriginal staff and non-aboriginal staff and there not being enough of the aboriginal staff to be culturally sensitive to the issues being faced.

My question this morning to one of our witnesses was, how do we encourage young people to stay in school to get the education they need to become the qualified staff that is required? One of the things they said this morning was that sometimes aboriginal people are given certificates they can use on reserve, but they're not qualified off reserve. I wonder if you could comment about that level of education. Are we helping the situation by creating this other level, or do we need to encourage young people to stay in school so the qualifications they're getting are ones they can use in both places, and they're recognized as being qualified in all areas? Do you have any comments on that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Pierre Bousquet: I think young people who choose this kind of occupation should have the same certificates as others, if only because growing numbers of aboriginal people are entering urban areas in Quebec. They have to be able to speak with other caseworkers. They're already attending meetings, seminars and conferences.

I also think that non-aboriginals should also have minimum training on work in aboriginal environments. That's being done in a lot of provinces, but very little in Quebec. It's possible to earn diplomas in social work and in other fields without ever taking a course on aboriginal people. That's particularly surprising because there are aboriginals everywhere in Quebec. I think it would be desirable for everyone to receive training on that subject.

We have to find a way for aboriginal people to stay at school. Personally, if I knew of one, I would try to apply it right away. I don't know one. School is definitely a very charged issue. Young people don't necessarily want to stay there because they don't necessarily feel very comfortable there. School is not a very appropriate place for taking in aboriginal students. In addition, the aboriginal schools have to teach the provincial curriculum. That curriculum is at times very difficult to implement. Since the schools are very isolated, they have to adjust to the fact that the students live in a violent environment at home. When they come to school, they aren't necessarily focused or able to follow well.

It must nevertheless be understood that most of the aboriginal peoples in Quebec became sedentary starting in the 1950s. The history of relations with schools is necessarily very negative; I'm thinking in particular of the Indian residential schools. That had a very impact on an entire generation of people here in Quebec. As a result, schools is still perceived as a place that's part of the colonial machinery. Even though immense effort have been made by people who want to develop education and aboriginals who want to develop education, you don't change that image in a few years. It takes time and information. We have to dress wounds and address trauma that have been transmitted by that history of Indian residential schools.

I don't know whether that completely answers your question. My colleague may have something to add. There is a tendency to want to tell aboriginal young people what they have to do in life. Personally, I've had the great luck in my life of doing what I wanted. No one told me that I had to become an anthropologist. My parents didn't even know what that occupation was. I told them that I wanted to become an anthropologist. I was enormously lucky to be able to decide completely on my own what I wanted to do.

My wish is for aboriginal young people to have as much good fortune as I did and for them to be able to choose, for them to be able to have access to a large bank of occupations and for them to know more about what they are capable of doing. I've often heard young people tell me that they aren't sure they are capable because they're aboriginal. I'm enraged by that. I've been working with them for years and they're as capable as anyone else. This is part of those accumulated injuries. I would like them to choose to do what they want.

● (1440)

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown: I have a very good friend who spent some time teaching in northern Manitoba on a reserve, and I know she was not prepared, when she arrived, for first of all the poverty she encountered.... There were a number of social situations for which her training had not prepared her.

My question would be, do we see young people who are receiving training going back and teaching on the reserves? Are we beginning to see that migration of a generation that is prepared to go back and assist? An aboriginal teacher would have some ideas, some knowledge, of culturally sensitive issues that could be addressed. Is that a way of helping our aboriginal children to stay in school?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Pierre Bousquet: That might be one way. However, I've been working in communities for a long time, and I would say that, in any case, fundamentally, of all the young people and less young people I've known—the young people I knew long ago are no longer young today—there isn't one who didn't tell me they wanted to return to his community one day. They all wanted to return to their community. They all felt a duty and responsibility to their community.

When they go get a diploma, they go back and put it in the service of their community. This is a minority for the moment, but we are very gradually seeing the graduation rate improve and the number of school dropout declining going forward—although it's quite a slow movement. All of those who earn diplomas return, at one point, to their community.

These are small communities. Here too, I would say that this isn't necessarily easy to live with because, when they go to do their studies, they leave with the idea that they are going to be models. That's a heavy burden. That's part of a weight they have to bear that many others don't. In any case, I didn't have that weight. They are aware of it and that makes it possible to have model individuals who will show that they are aboriginal and that they are capable.

After all, one of the presidents of the Quebec Medical Association —I was president in the early 2000s—Stanley Vollant, is an Innu. He has done a great deal to make it possible for people to think that it's not because you're Innu and your first language is Innu that you can't become a doctor. Yes, he is one. He even holds an extremely high-profile position. That's extremely positive.

● (1445)

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Brown: Madam Chair, do I have one more moment?

The Chair: No, I think we're going to move on. We'll try to give everyone at least one round.

Ms. Simson is next.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's been fascinating hearing from people who have done some research into it. Primarily our witnesses have been from groups and organizations that are providing assistance to women who find themselves in situations like this, and I believe it's probably the first time....

My sense, through all the hearings we've had, is that we're somehow spinning our wheels. It was saddening to hear that that really isn't the case, that violence against aboriginal women is in fact on the rise.

I'll come to my question. It was touched upon that we can't use the cookie cutter approach and we can't necessarily take non-aboriginal solutions and transplant them into aboriginal situations. If a lot of these organizations are specialized in dealing with violence against aboriginal women, for instance, and shelters and counselling, where do you see the disconnect?

We're obviously losing ground. I don't necessarily believe that these organizations are trying to take non-aboriginal approaches and use them to solve the situation in the aboriginal community, but somewhere along the line there's a disconnect. Additional funding—just throwing money at this—maybe isn't the answer, because it's patchwork. These organizations aren't in sync. There isn't a national strategy, and they're just stopgap measures.

Can I have your comments on that?

The Chair: Madame Jaccoud.

[*Translation*]

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: Thank you for your very relevant and interesting question.

It's true that this is very complicated. When I emphasize that there is no ideal solution, that's really what I have observed. Let's consider the example of safe houses. I'm not saying that safe houses are useless, but this is a type of measure that doesn't really address the causes of violence. In our research, we've realized that once again it's the woman who bears the burden of having to leave the home. The aggressor often stays in the community. Once again, the burden is on the woman to take action, to leave, and all that. If the safe house is located outside the community, sometimes there's this burden.

However, it's difficult to respond unilaterally. In all my research, I've met women who said that it was important for them to leave; others said they would prefer to stay. Still others said they felt more comfortable on the outside, that a safe house, with non-aboriginals, because their anonymity was good for them, whereas others said they needed cultural proximity to their own people, that they felt better in their communities. That's why I very much emphasize that you have to be creative, but you especially have to be close to the people.

I know that you work in politics. I know you start from above and put in place structures and initiatives at the bottom level. Instead, I think you have to develop inductive approaches and sometimes go from one community to another to get a clear idea of the local realities and to deploy a number of services so as to respond to the diversity of people's needs. If a woman needs to stay in her community, there should be a structure that permits that. If a woman wants to leave her community, there should be a structure that permits that, and not say that we're going to establish safe houses in all communities.

What is more, sometimes there's a problem with the operation of those safe houses, which resemble prisons. It's incredible that an aboriginal woman who is a victim of violence... I won't name the place because there would be no point. It's nevertheless incredible to see aboriginal women feeling doubly victimized because they have schedules they have to follow: they can't leave when they want to. In a way they feel shut in. That's absolutely unacceptable.

The major difficulty, in my view, is understanding that, as a result of the proximity and cultural differences Marie-Pierre referred to, we have to innovate and find completely different things. That requires a lot of creativity in the communities. I find there's often a lack of imagination.

I don't know whether I'm doing a good job of answering your question. I don't think we need to focus our efforts solely on the idea of safe houses. The safe house is one solution, but it's very temporary.

I don't know whether I answered your question.

● (1450)

[*English*]

The Chair: Are you happy with that? Shall I move on, then, to Monsieur Desnoyers?

Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As my colleague mentioned, we have experts. Your studies have enabled you to reach important conclusions. Will those studies and recommendations be submitted to the committee?

[*English*]

The Chair: We already have the pieces here, but they're only in French, so we have to translate before we give it to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: So you already have the whole series of recommendations. Excellent.

You talked about causes. We have to go back a long way if we want to solve the problem. It's not by adding touches here and there that we're going to solve the problem.

You also talked about colonization. That fascinates me because I heard about that this morning. I would like you to say more on that subject and what that's ultimately done to the aboriginal community.

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: It will take a long time to describe, but colonization has definitely resulted, among other things, in the placing under trusteeship of societies that were functioning very well and that were creating their own economies, even though they were subsistence economies. There was a social regulation. That doesn't mean, as Marie-Pierre said, that there wasn't any violence or problems. I've studied, in particular, traditional Inuit societies, that had their own social regulation mechanism. Colonization caused extremely rapid changes within those societies. Structures that absolutely did not suit them were imposed, which caused cultural alienation. That very much destabilized family dynamics and the division of responsibilities, which is related to family violence.

One of the hypotheses made by certain specialists is, surprisingly in a way, that women have emerged from this in better condition than men, economically speaking. And when you go into the communities, you see that some Inuit women hold jobs. The loss of their traditional role as providers appears to have greatly affected men, who have found themselves in a situation of isolation, loss of meaning and of a function in their communities. This probably contributes to a much greater understanding of the fact that they want to forget by drinking and using drugs. Alcohol and drugs are definitely an extremely important precipitating factor. My anthropologist colleague would be in a much better position than I to talk about the destructing effects of colonization.

● (1455)

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Ultimately, we've taken away everything that belonged to them. In today's reality, if we established a national plan to begin to remedy the situation, what would be your first two recommendations?

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: I'd like to make what will be a somewhat paradoxical comment. I believe that the weight of colonization absolutely should not be denied. It must not be forgotten. We are all responsible. There's really something that has to be denounced. I think it has to be officially recognized that Canada was a colonial state. It still is. We still have a long way to go.

Here's the paradoxical part of my comment. Every time we establish initiatives and say that colonization is responsible, from a pragmatic point of view, that doesn't produce a lot of courses of action. I think this historical fact has to be acknowledged, but that, once it's said, we have to move on to action. We have to stop making the causes of colonization the driver of action.

As for recommendations, I think we really have to start supporting aboriginal people in order to develop governance. That's a fashionable word, I know, and we don't always like it. I'm going to give you an example. I'm conducting a study on the Inuit community of Kuujjuaq for the Department of Justice. Knowing the problem involved in imposing methods of regulation that absolutely do not suit those communities, I'm still going to place considerable emphasis on the fact that the punitive and repressive approach, which includes the police and justice systems, does not work. On the day we've understood that a social problem cannot be resolved by means of a justice system, we'll have taken a major step. However, we aren't stuck with that. We're still attaching importance, above all, to the fact that this is an offence. When a man beats a woman, its an offence, of course, but the legal answer isn't the right answer. They have the courage to go beyond that and to do something else.

I'm suggesting an approach for the community of Kuujjuaq. In my mind, the central course of action is to rebuild social regulation in the communities. How do we do that? By grouping together all existing resources and supporting all existing forms of regulation; by creating joint action; by having an orchestra conductor who makes the actions consistent and who is like a link in a chain; by no longer excluding people because they have committed an offence; by adopting inclusive approaches; by reinforcing all the initiatives so that people can take charge of their lives. So, yes, that's governance.

We have to rebuild this social regulation. I believe in this. In particular, we can do it through initiatives like circles, committees and local organizations. We have to reinforce leadership, target the few families in which things are going well and which can become very high-profile models. Lastly, it has to be understood that aboriginal people have abilities. It's simply that the aboriginal communities have lost confidence in them. The fact remains that those abilities exist. We have to go and find them.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Nicole.

[*Translation*]

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

I don't know where to begin. I clearly heard what you said, and I believe you're right all down the line. Ultimately, I wonder whether we're not the ones who need cultural education, because I realized that, all too often, the decisions are made for someone's good; they aren't made based on that person's needs. We always believe we know better, can do better, than the people directly involved in the community.

I heard Mr. Desnoyers talking about colonization and I drew the parallel with apartheid in South Africa, a country where there is a lot of violence against women as well, where that has increasingly developed and where women have adjusted to violence. It's true, women adjust to violence, because it's easier to adjust and to continue to suffer it than to do something to counter it.

There's one term that I've always detested, and that's the term “reserve”. I'm tired of hearing that word. Reserves are in Africa for animals, not for human beings. Shouldn't we be teaching young people in our schools, in our entire society so they know about history, so they know with whom they share the land, that that land initially wasn't theirs? Shouldn't we do something to ensure that the real history is known and to re-establish the facts?

For a very long time, I thought we were engaged in charity with aboriginal people, with the First Nations—because that's what we were taught—until I met Ellen Gabriel and she told me the history and I understood that we weren't being charitable with anyone. These are things that we owe them, and we're still not giving them enough again, in return for what we've taken from them.

It very much concerns me to see that there is a very large gap between what we say and what we do. You also mentioned harmony between the various levels of government. Let's simply take the example of the new provincial policy on children. If there are problems, the Youth Court can remove the child from the aboriginal mother, in an aboriginal community and take the child kilometers away from there where she won't have an opportunity to see the child as frequently. These are things that make no sense. We're reproducing the history of the residential schools. I wonder who will establish the link between the various levels of government so this has some kind of consistency.

That may be a complicated thought and question because there are so many ideas in my head.

● (1500)

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: It's not complicated, if I can take the liberty of answering you.

I do a lot of work in the mediation field. I think there are really some bridges that should be built between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people. I'm fascinated by the ignorance of history. The first thought that comes to the mind of some people is that aboriginal people don't pay any taxes, that they're alcoholics, etc. Why don't they pay taxes? Do you know aboriginal history?

I would add a minor clarification: Ms. Bousquet and I are of European origin, which isn't by chance. There is a terrible discomfort among Quebeckers—for example, since that's the province where we are—over the study of this issue. There's really some discomfort, and I believe it's not by chance that we are both European.

You talked about children. This is a typical example of the kind of intervention that is reproduced, because the DPJ operates like that; it's the child's welfare that takes precedence, etc. That's the way things are seen and done. My research on the marginalization of aboriginal women was done through life stories. We asked the women to talk about themselves, from birth until the time of the interview. It was very interesting. We saw rises and falls in terms of integration. We plotted marginalization curves. Do you know what was very interesting? Every fall in the life paths of these women coincided with a moment when their children were taken away from them.

Contrary to what we think, even if the environment wasn't appropriate, it was much better, much more positive for the child to stay with his or her mother, perhaps with protection measures, we agree.

You talked about reserves. I can't help but tell you that the Indian Act inspired the apartheid regime in South Africa, since you mentioned that. That was the source of inspiration for the apartheid regime in South Africa.

● (1505)

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Bousquet, did you want to add something to that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Pierre Bousquet: I'd simply like to add that I entirely agree with my colleague. In response to Mr. Desnoyers, regarding possible solutions—I also agree with Ms. Demers—I would say that there are two important aspects, in my view: education and governance.

The aboriginal communities, whether it be on reserve, in institutions, in villages or in northern and other municipalities, don't have enough governance, that is to say that they have quite little flexibility within the system. They receive programs and budgets that they have to implement, but that leave very little room for initiative. That's obviously very harmful because we can't withdraw everything from someone and hope for that person to remain independent. That makes no sense.

In fact, since I offer two full courses of three hours a week on colonization every semester, I often wonder—and every time, I'm dumb-founded—how much worse it could have been. Aboriginal people are much more resilient than we think. I say to myself that they lost their economy, their social system, we prohibited them their belief system, they were prohibited from even wearing their traditional costumes. They were prohibited a lot of things. Things should be worse, but they managed not to come out of it as badly as that. They have a lot of will. The communities in which I work are extremely dynamic. There are a lot of young people who want to pull through. So they have to be given more governance. It's more than a fashionable word, as my colleague said.

There's also education. I'm a university professor. My students appear before me in the first class, and I ask them what the 11 aboriginal nations of Quebec are. They live in Quebec, and most of them are Quebeckers. They know a few names here and there. They don't know where the communities are. They don't know how many there are. They don't even know that there are 11. They know nothing, and I mean "nothing". They have vaguely heard about those communities. They have images of either fantastic people in harmony with nature or of very violent drunkards. There's nothing between the two.

I've been working with aboriginal people for more than 15 years. If it was that horrible, I would have changed occupations a long time ago. So education is fundamentally important. We often talk about the education of aboriginal people and say they have to be better trained and so on, but young Allochtones also have to be trained so they know a minimum. For example, I do a lot of work in regions. Most of the people don't know that the villages where they live have Indian names. That should be posted at the entrance to the village. We should have access to the toponyms so they are more visible. We live in a province where aboriginal people are quite invisible.

I've been to other provinces. Proportionally, of course, there are more aboriginal people. In Vancouver, for example, there is a certain aboriginal presence, if only in art, which is omnipresent, which is everywhere. In Quebec, where do we see the aboriginal presence? You walk around in Montreal and you could very well not know that the lookout on top of Mount Royal is called "Kondiaronk", after the name of a great Indian chief. Where is that presence? What marks that presence? There's nothing.

So we have to take part in the visibility of aboriginal people, a positive visibility, and show that these are people who are part of society and that there are all kinds of people and occupations among them: workers, secretaries, designers, doctors, lawyers and so on. We have to start by showing that they also live in that society, that they are part of it and that they have a history that's worth the trouble of getting to know, an absolutely marvellous history. I would like that learning to start in primary school in fact. I would be pleased about that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Nicole.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes, Madam Chair, we'll talk later.

[*English*]

The Chair: I don't know that we have a lot later. It's now 3:12 p. m. We're due to finish at 4 p.m. When they get a kick at the can, they're getting a fulsome response, and that's good.

Irene.

● (1510)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you to the witnesses for being here. I've appreciated everything you've said.

I want to go back and forth and pick up on some threads. When you said that the political focus should be on getting rid of all the discriminatory sections of the Indian Act, it set me back. While I know that the act has been very harmful, I wonder if you might take us through it in terms of those discriminatory sections and what we have to really focus on if we're going to understand the kinds of changes that we need to make.

[*Translation*]

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: I'm neither a legal expert nor a specialist on the Indian Act, but the rules on descendance and belonging, which are still discriminatory, should definitely be amended as soon as possible. I prefer to let the aboriginal women's associations present their viewpoints to you. However, an effort should definitely be made to clean up the Indian Act. I also believe the clauses on heritage and land possession should also be examined.

In fact, I recommend that a group conduct a thorough examination of the Indian Act and really clean up everything the contravenes the good governance of the communities and their empowerment. I can't answer your question in detail, but it is absolutely relevant. I believe that has to be examined with the aboriginal people. It is indeed quite complicated. There are territorial rules, local powers, band councils. As we know, that's prescribed in the Indian Act. There are a lot of challenges to these forms of power, which should perhaps be rethought. A lot of work has to be done on the Indian Act.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Bousquet: I'd like to add a few comments. This act dates back to 1876 and was originally based on racial criteria. When it was introduced, a man, that man's children and, lastly, that man's lawful wife were Indians. That necessarily marked people because the act is characterized by patriarchal conceptions. In addition, it does not apply to all Indians. It only applies to those who are entered in the federal register, and that register, as its name indicates, is federal, that is to say that it is Ottawa that decides who is Indian and who is not. So that's the first problem. Belonging, recognition as an Indian depends, on a priority basis, on the services that the person receives from the federal government. The act also imposed a political system, the band council system, which was established in order to standardize politics, but also to establish the criteria for defining who would be the government's interlocutors.

Without going too far into the details, I will say that it is very hard to be a band chief. In fact, a band chief is simultaneously a kind of head of state, a negotiator for his nation, a federal programs administrator and a mayor. It's a very complicated task to try to perform these four functions at the same time. One or another should be selected. You can't be both administrator and negotiator, for example, to the same state from which you receive programs. It seems to me that, from a political point of view, something isn't working right. I conducted a number of interviews with chiefs who told me that they were in this system that they had to deal with and found it very hard to develop their own political initiatives because they no longer necessarily knew what their role was, since it didn't coincide with their conception of what a chief should be, based on what had been passed on to them historically.

As for the women, until 1985, as a result of the amendments made to the Indian Act by Bill C-31, an aboriginal woman who had married a non-aboriginal man lost her status. Starting in 1985, they were granted the right to retain their status. However, their children rely on a paragraph concerning an amendment made to the Indian Act under Bill C-31. They are classified as either type 1 or type 2, which I find abominable. I know some women who have told me that they are the daughter of so and so, but that, as they had married a non-aboriginal man, their children would not be aboriginal, whereas if they had married another one, they would be.

In a system of this kind, people define themselves under the act by means of a paragraph, which I find utterly terrible. I also know some aboriginal women who had a first aboriginal spouse with whom they had a child, then a second non-aboriginal spouse with whom they also had a child. As a result of the situation, one of their children would be able to pass on his status and the other not. And yet they have the same mother and were brought up the same way.

This is an aberration. Non-aboriginal women who married aboriginal men before 1985 became Indians under the act. In their case, their children don't depend on either a number or a paragraph in the act and can pass on their status without any problem. That's one of the fundamental discriminations. The amendments made to the Indian Act under Bill C-31 did not correct all the injustices of the act in question. This is only one example among many.

● (1515)

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: It's breathtaking when it's put that way, because we have a sense of self, that if we are part of a community and we belong there, then that community accepts us: we are just members of a community. To have someone from someplace else, out there in the east or somewhere, say “you belong” and “you don't” is bizarre. When it's put in just that way, it underscores how strange the Indian Act is.

This sense of aboriginal women's organizations being able to unravel this Gordian knot Is interesting, too. I've seen a great deal of the work from NWAC. It is incredibly complex, and I know they've truly put their minds to sorting this out and trying to do the overhaul you spoke of. But now they don't have the funding. They're laying off staff. It gets to be a very frustrating kind of situation.

I want to also ask about the impact of all of this on kids and youth. I taught at a high school, and we had aboriginal and non-aboriginal students. The aboriginal students came from outside the city, from a small community. When they arrived, they were doomed to failure, because it wasn't a good cultural fit. When hunting season came along or when community festivals came along, they didn't coincide with what was going on in the school, and so very often these kids were missing class, and no leeway was given for them; they were just marginalized.

I always worried about that, and it fits in with what you were talking about in terms of the justice system. I'm very concerned that the kind of punitive system we have in place is not going to suit the community, or it's not going to benefit these kids. They are being removed from their homes; they're being regarded as little criminals in the making. We're not doing what we need to do in regard to letting there be a system.

This is bizarre, our saying “letting there be a system” that suits this cultural reality for kids. I know that the suicide rate is horrendous, and I know that kids are being taken out of their cultural reality and transferred into care.

I wonder whether you could talk a little bit about the justice system, or the lack thereof, and youth criminal justice.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: I'd like to start answering that question by telling an eloquent little story. At one point, I conducted a field study for my doctoral thesis in Puvirnituq, an Inuit community in Hudson Bay. My thesis concerned the administration of criminal justice and included a historical component to understand how the Euro-Canadian justice system had been imposed on the Inuit, in particular. There was also a component concerning the land, in which I asked them for their views on the administration of justice.

I explained my subject by saying that it concerned the criminal justice system. One woman interrupted me by saying the words "criminal justice". She asked me what criminal justice was. I explained to her that it was punitive justice, our penal system. She answered that that was funny because the words "justice" and "punishment" didn't go together. I asked her what she meant by that. She told me that, for them, justice means doing good; punishment means doing bad.

I've always remembered that. As a result of going into criminology, I have developed a critical and suspicious look at our way of doing things, which doesn't work any better in the south or in the non-aboriginal communities. We really have to reinvent our approaches to social problems.

I often say that when a problem event occurs, whether you call it a crime or an assault—regardless of the name given to it—the major problem is that a justice system will always consider it a transgression. There has been a transgression of a code. In fact, before that transgression, there are two things. There's often something that precedes a problem situation that will be characterized as a crime, so problems that precede that transgression. The transgression also creates consequences.

So if you want my opinion, a true justice system should focus upstream from the transgression. In fact, it is important to know why someone hits someone else on the head. We won't focus on the transgression, but rather on why it happened. Can we take action to prevent people from hitting each other and help people avoid doing that? The other thing is that hitting someone creates consequences. Can we address those consequences?

So a real system, whether we call it justice or something else, is a system that takes into account the people in the situation, and the transgression is ultimately secondary. I know it may shock some people to hear me say that, but the further I go into my work, the more I assert, and am very sure, that we have to get away from the idea of a transgression against social standards and deal with the people who are caught in these social problems in order to support them. So we have to develop a network of assistance and support.

Going back to the issue of violence in the aboriginal communities, having met a lot of people who were brought up within these dynamics, I can tell you that men and women need support. There's nothing worse than a justice system that, in any case, operates in a completely different manner. Marie-Pierre can give you a lot of examples, but, in my field, for example, the notion of guilt does not exist in the aboriginal languages. So how do you translate it in court? You ask whether the person did it or not; that's how you translate the notion of guilt.

So we have to completely change our ways of seeing things in order to reinforce the idea of accountability instead. For example, a person admits that he was involved in such and such an incident, that he was responsible for that, he admits it, and so on. People need support. They don't need to be sent to prison.

People obviously have to be protected. The problem is different in an urban environment, but, in the communities, there are in fact natural protection areas that can be used. There are very promising initiatives for taking charge of male assailants who have problems. The male assailants aren't very happy people. However, it takes courage, initiative and creativity, and we have to go off the beaten path.

● (1525)

In the third report I'm preparing, on the community of Kuujjuaq, I came across an idea that I very much like and that I want to share with you. This idea has been used a lot by the people who work in political science. They say the problem with institutional reforms that we try to make is that we suffer from path dependency syndrome. Pardon me, my English is terrible. This path dependency idea is very interesting. It means that, when we're in an institution or an organization—whether it be the justice system, politics or whatever—we are always, like a hamster, stuck on our wheel, and we think of reform not just in terms of the logic of our system, but also in terms of the history and path of our institution.

So we always adopt reforms consistent with that logic and we become dependent on our own organization and the weight of its history. What does that mean? We are all caught up in this path dependency: you, me, Ms. Bouquet and everyone. We're always on a pathway and we always think in terms of that pathway.

I'll give you the example of the research I conducted on Kuujjuaq, where I interviewed a person—

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame, can you wrap up after this example?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Can I just ask to connect that to the violence that aboriginal women experience when they are incarcerated? We've been talking about the punitive nature of incarceration, yet 3% of the population is aboriginal and 25% of the female population in penitentiaries are aboriginal women. How did they get there? What happens to them? What on earth are we doing jailing them, incarcerating them, throwing them away?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just wondered if you could also add that on.

The Chair: It's a form of violence.

[*Translation*]

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: That's somewhat what I was emphasizing earlier.

In a community that experiences this dynamic of violence to a high degree, the categories of executioner and victim completely overlap. These women who find themselves incarcerated are above all victims of all kinds of things, of having experienced forms of institutionalization early in their lives, of having been placed, or being separated from their families and finding themselves in all kinds of situations.

We conducted a study on the paths of women who are incarcerated in order to try to understand their paths. Their path is mainly strewn with injuries. I believe that anyone who finds himself in that situation, your or I, might be capable of committing a violent crime, because that's part of this dynamic. Furthermore, many women wind up incarcerated because they went back to their spouse as well.

So, yes, it's terrible, and incarceration obviously resolves nothing. I think we have to draw on the idea of healing lodges, as is the case in the west. Of course, it's essential to consider that a woman who acts violently may need to be helped more than to be excluded from society. You don't learn to live in society by being excluded from it. That's the classic paradox of prison.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry, did you have something to add?

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Pierre Bousquet: I'd like to emphasize something that has already been said, but that is along the same lines as the question. I want to emphasize the importance of addressing the problems comprehensively. I spent time with social workers in communities who told me they no longer knew where to start, because a “band-aid policy” is often pursued. Little band-aids are put on injuries, but the open wound is ultimately much too big. So the band-aids will never be enough to cover the entire wound. It will still be there.

When we talk about young people who enter this circle of violence—there are drugs and alcohol—it's related to the fact that they themselves have seen and experienced violence. We can't treat that in small stages, or else we waste a lot of energy. I remember doing a project in a community of 350 persons where we simply surveyed a number of health services programs. There were more than 25 programs. There were programs for virtually everything and anything. As a result, since the programs operated separately, a woman might have an appointment on Thursday from 10 to 11 o'clock if she had a child under one year of age, and in the afternoon if she had children from one to three years old. That's ridiculous because, in any case, they are the mothers and have a number of children, so there's no point in separating the groups. This is one example to show you that there should really be a much more comprehensive model.

I also realized, during a quite recent research project that I did on the passage to adulthood among young people, that those youths has assimilated a number of negative ideas about being aboriginal. In particular, they engaged in high-risk behaviour. They might think, for example, that if you're a young aboriginal and haven't had any drinking problems or serious problems, you're not as aboriginal as the others. There's a reproduction of violence as well, because they have assimilated the idea of the model they have known, that of the very tough guy who does stupid things. They often become aware of this around the age of 25 or 30 because they have really engaged in very high-risk behaviour and have nearly died. Sometimes there's an epiphany, but when that epiphany doesn't occur, there are cases that are not always surveyed as suicides, but that are suicides all the same. These young people have really done everything possible to die younger.

The entire problem of embodying negative images about being aboriginal is extremely serious, and I would say that addressing these problems in a comprehensive manner also means making aboriginal people proud of being aboriginal. I've seen young people crying during pow-wows, for example, because they thought it was beautiful; they were proud. They found it beautiful to see people dancing and taking charge of their lives. Often being a dancer at a pow-wow means supporting sobriety, healing, and so on. I've seen young people, little tough guys who never show their feelings, dissolve into tears because they were so proud to be aboriginal. That's really striking, when you see this pride in these young people. I remind them that I crossed the Atlantic to come and understand their cultures. Those cultures are worth it, they are interesting, their society is worth it, and they don't always know it. So that's also part of this dynamic and of violence they have known through their lives.

● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Given the time, I'm going to have to move on.

Julie, did you want to ask something?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Julie Cool: I simply wanted to follow up on the subject of the courts specializing in domestic violence. I wonder whether there are any. When we went to Iqaluit, the people told us that the Criminal Code was developed for southern communities and that it applies very poorly to them. We also heard about the RCMP that has to lay charges, and that creates divisions in the communities, especially those where the RCMP is the only police force in place.

Are there any alternatives, and, if so, can you give us any examples?

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: There are some. I believe the west is ahead of here—we're very far behind. What I find particularly interesting in the specialized courts is that they're called the problem-solving courts. That's been developed to a great extent in the United States. They talk about community courts, problem-solving courts, specialized courts; there are a number of names.

The principle is really interesting. These are initiatives in which there is a higher degree of formal intervention than an alternative to prosecution—let's say it that way—but in which the role of the judge is changed so as to take a more balanced look at the social problem than as a transgression or the idea of an offence.

The problem-solving courts operate differently from one region to another. Some are very oriented toward the punitive aspect, whereas others are oriented more toward therapeutic care. The judge changes in a way—as is the case in France—and becomes a sentence executor, where the sentence is in effect suspended. In addition, people dealing with problems are monitored very closely. They regularly go before the judge to testify, for example, about the progress they are making on their detox program.

This is a promising initiative that has not yet been introduced in Quebec. I believe there is some talk of establishing a problem-solving court in Montreal. I think it's a kind of initiative that should be put in place in the aboriginal communities. Of course, an evaluation would have to be... It's true that is causing dissent in the communities. The positions on alternatives aren't the same. In Quebec, for example, there are about 15 justice committees, but not all of them function as well as that. Sometimes they may be a bit too much in the pay of the courts. They act as sentence executors.

I think we have to try to intervene more upstream. There are some promising initiatives, such as the healing circles. The one in Hollow Water, Manitoba, is an example of an initiative where there is a genuine partnership between the community of Hollow Water, the healing circle, the RCMP, the courts and the prosecutors. You have to have the courage to say that you're suspending charges to permit more suitable initiatives. Hollow Water is a good example of a community that has taken charge of itself.

● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair: We have 20 minutes left, and I have a few people. But we're going to have to cut this off, so what I'm going to have to ask is that you please ask very short questions, and if we could, please make very short answers.

Ms. Simson and Ms. Brown are next.

We'll hear Ms. Simson quickly and Ms. Brown.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: I got on the list to ask a question on a totally unrelated topic, but this has got my attention, about the justice system or having courts that you know really will do the job for the aboriginal community.

Were you referring strictly to justice when it's on reserve, or would it include off reserve as well?

[*Translation*]

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: Yes, absolutely. I think that the problem-solving courts—

[*English*]

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Do you mean off reserve too?

[*Translation*]

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: Yes, absolutely.

[*English*]

Mrs. Michelle Simson: I just want to ask a question, and it isn't accusatory.

Canada has been very accommodating in a multicultural fashion. If we were to institute something like this, which by the way I don't disagree with, how do you balance that against communities?

Coming from Ontario, for instance, we put up a fierce battle against instituting sharia law, another justice system for another group, and won. Once you introduce something like that for the aboriginal community.... It's just a question, because I think it's a great idea about the aboriginals, but I guess part of me has this fear that once you open that door, if it wasn't related to the reserve and was available province-wide, then it would reopen this door for sharia law, which a lot of women were fiercely.... It wasn't going to advance the cause, at least in Ontario. We were literally two days away from the attorney general coming in and saying that it was going to happen.

I don't know if you have a comment on that.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Pierre Bousquet: In Canada, aboriginal people were the first inhabitants. I especially don't want to get into victimization, but we have a debt toward the aboriginal people. That's undeniable. Depending how the statistics are prepared, they say that approximately 3% of the Canadian population is aboriginal. Showing a little more humanity toward that modest 3% of the Canadian population is a necessity.

It should not be forgotten that Canada's aboriginal women are the most vulnerable individuals. We therefore have a duty. We aren't creating special cases. We really have a duty of memory. We also have a duty to realize that this is a minor national scandal. In a country as developed as ours, aboriginal people too often live in third-world conditions.

Even if this doesn't necessarily make sense for everyone—in any case, it does for me—I really believe that we must not forget that these were the first peoples of Canada. These women, more than the others, need us. They need justice. They need us to help them get rid of this violence. When I think of them, I also think of their spouses and those in their circle. In my view, this is really a social duty.

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: I'd like to clarify one point. When I refer to problem-solving courts, I'm not talking about aboriginal courts. I'm really talking about an approach that may or may not be applied within the aboriginal communities. It's a completely different approach, one that is focused on conflict resolution, problem-solving. That's what I meant by problem-solving courts.

Incidentally, I'd like to say that, if we wanted to humanize our society, aboriginal cultures would have a lot to teach us from their traditions about solving social problems.

So I don't have a lot of fears about the advent of aboriginal justice systems. I believe they are much more humanistic systems than our own. I really invite you to go and see how justice is administered in the aboriginal communities.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, this is carrying on a bit.

Ms. Brown, and anybody else who wants a quick....

Ms. Lois Brown: I'll keep my question very short.

Madam Jaccoud, you talked earlier, in prevention, about female leadership being important. I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about that. You talked about access to key positions and women's roles in the community. Could you expand on that a little bit?

One other question, just to go along, because I think it fits in very well....

Our government has brought forward legislation to extend status for children when a grandmother has lost her status because of marrying a non-Indian man. We have brought in legislation that is going to extend status to those grandchildren in the same way that a grandfather can extend it if he has married a non-aboriginal woman.

Can you talk about the leadership, and do you see this working well within the community?

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Prof. Mylène Jaccoud: I believe that female leadership must be reinforced in the communities. In some communities, it's going a little better, but much remains to be done with regard to the place of women, whether it be in the composition of municipal councils, the distribution of mayoral offices or key positions in the local public service.

I believe that, when women have more power to change things within the communities and hold key positions, things may happen a little more positively, particularly in the fight against domestic violence. I'll give you an example. Sometimes, rather than act directly to address violence, perhaps it would be preferable to support and train women so that they can proceed with a community organization, manage communities and stabilize them.

Marie-Pierre can perhaps attest to the following. In these communities, these matters are taken care of, but on a very ad hoc basis. Committees are established, but it's hard to stabilize them. We have to support female leadership and know how to stabilize it.

With regard to the bill, I believe it's controversial. I believe Marie-Pierre said so: there really has to be a full and fundamental revision of the Indian Act. Perhaps we can even think that there may one day be an aboriginal constitution that will enable the nations to negotiate. Perhaps even the Indian Act may one day be null and void.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to take us in camera for a moment, so I need to save some time to do that.

I just want to thank the witnesses for being here and for giving us.... Obviously, we were not talking to people who are field workers; we were talking to people who are researching the whole cultural system. I just want to say one thing. Coming from a country that was colonized—many of us who come from the Commonwealth know what it is to be colonized—I understand very much what the aboriginal communities have suffered.

I was talking to a friend the other day and I was discussing the fact that we are hearing about violence and about the issues. This person lives in the downtown east side of Vancouver, and he said to me, “I'm sick and tired of all this whining.” This is what he said to me. He said, “You know what? Some people were stronger and they came and they took their land, so they've just got to live with that.” I listened to this and I thought, wow, where did you come from?

I think the whole concept at that time was that western civilization and Europe and Britain were all the powers of the world and they came and they took over the New World, and of course they knew best. They were the civilization and these people were savages. So they had to show them that their lives were wrong, the way they lived was wrong, and everything they did was wrong, and they had to tell them that they knew how they could live better. That was the essence of what colonialism was about, to come and tell other people that you knew they were just a bunch of savages, and you were civilized and you were going to tell them how they should do things.

The absolute need for “reculturalization” is an important thing. I know you talked about going west and seeing how things are. I know we're trying in small ways. It's absolutely not perfect. But I do know that every time the premier of our province, no matter what his political stripe—and I say “his” because we only have guys who are premiers—stands up, no matter where he is, and before he speaks, he says, “I want to thank the Salish Nation”—or the Musqueam Nation or whoever—“for having us live on their land.” It's a simple statement. I know I do it, and we do it all the time, and Mr. Martin used to do it. It's saying, I know I am here on your land and this is not mine. It reiterates the sense that we are here as people who came later.

A lot of work is being done by UBC on anthropology. They discovered the Hatzic Rock, and they did a dig in that area in Abbotsford, in British Columbia. They found, with carbon dating, that the aboriginal culture existed 40,000 years ago. They went back and found that 20,000 years ago the aboriginal people were trading all the way down the coast of the Americas. They were bringing in minerals and stuff that did not belong in British Columbia, and they found them in these digs.

The aboriginal people had hugely organized governments and huge amounts of trade went on. They were societies that were not perfect. I don't believe any society is perfect. But the point that one would decide that they are useless, and the fact that we have a whole lot of people now who are absolutely living with the idea that they are useless, and savage, and that whatever or whoever they are is absolutely unworthy, is something that it doesn't take five years to fix.

The only way we can start doing it is by actually listening, by learning, and I believe by helping to ensure that we give back that culture the respect it deserves, and say, you've got to have the answers; we can't impose them on you. That, I believe, is what we hopefully will be hearing as we go on. Everything we hear from everyone is usually reiterative of what went on.

But I think you have given us a much better perspective on the long term and the problems that aboriginal people will face. In the west there were many matriarchal societies among aboriginal peoples, and the lineage of the chief was handed down through the women, so this is not necessarily a male-dominated society. We see that things have changed because of the fact that many aboriginal people were taught that patriarchal societies were the ones that would actually always work.

● (1550)

Thank you for coming. I'm really pleased that you came, because looking at this through the anthropological lens and through the historical and cultural lens will hopefully give us a much better understanding of where we need to go as we come up with recommendations and as we write a report, which I hope will be sensitive and not the usual politically correct kind of stuff that quite often parliamentary committees put forward.

I think we have a real opportunity to change things. We have a real opportunity to make a difference to something that's been going on for so long, and I'm hoping this committee will have the courage to do exactly that.

Thank you for coming.

I'd like to suspend and go in camera, please, just for a few minutes.

I would ask those who can't stay to please quickly leave the room.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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