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EVIDENCE

Tuesday, January 18, 2011

Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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● (1145)

[*English*]

The Chair (The Honourable Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I will call the meeting to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this committee, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, is going to study violence against aboriginal women. It's a unanimous decision by the committee to do this.

What we are looking at are the root causes of violence against aboriginal women. We're looking at the extent of violence. We're looking at the types of violence. And we're looking at ways in which to resolve that violence, because I think the committee believes that for a very, very long time various levels of government have done all kinds of things in a well-meaning way, but they have not achieved results.

We feel that by talking to aboriginal communities, and not only to leaders but to community groups and NGOs, we might be able to find a resolution that will work this time. When the committee finishes with its study, it will present a report, with recommendations, to the House of Commons, to Parliament itself. The government of the day will have 90 days within which to respond as to what it intends to do with regard to the report and the recommendations.

Now I'll begin. We have two groups today. From the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia, we have Tracy Porteous and Marilyn George, and we have Asia Czapska from Justice for Girls.

What we do normally is give each group ten minutes to present.

Tracy and Marilyn, you can decide if you want to split it five and five, or if one of you alone will present, because you will get an opportunity to answer questions later on.

Asia, of course, you have ten minutes.

Now, you don't have to use the whole ten minutes—I'm just telling you—and I will give you two-minute and one-minute indicators so that you can wrap it up and we can move on to the questions.

Now we'll begin. Who's going to speak for your group, Tracy?

Ms. Tracy Porteous (Executive Director, Ending Violence Association of British Columbia): Marilyn is speaking first. I'm going to follow her.

The Chair: All right.

Marilyn, are you going to do five minutes? Or are you just going to speak and then whatever's left over, Tracy will take...?

A voice: That's correct.

The Chair: Just to be clear, you're not doing a five-five split.

Please begin, Marilyn. Welcome.

Ms. Marilyn George (Representative, Outreach Services Coordinator, Smithers, British Columbia, Ending Violence Association of British Columbia): Thank you.

Good afternoon. My name is Marilyn George. I am the outreach service coordinator in Smithers, B.C., which is almost the midway point on the Highway of Tears between Prince Rupert and Prince George, where, thus far, upwards of 19 women have either been killed or gone missing.

I'm also here today as an aboriginal women's representative to EVA BC, a provincial organization in B.C. that works on behalf of 240 programs located throughout the province that respond to violence against women.

Like the work of my provincial organization, EVA BC, my work is solely related to responding to violence against women, which includes domestic and sexual violence, child sexual abuse, and criminal harassment. I have been doing this kind of work for 14 years.

I am from Sik-e-dakh, or Glen Vowell, B.C., in the Hazelton area. I have travelled here from the north to speak with you about the shocking levels of violence being perpetrated against aboriginal women and girls here in B.C.

I don't think I need to speak about the kinds of violence or the extent of the violence experienced by aboriginal women. By now, through the many hearings you have attended already, you will have heard that over 90% of aboriginal women have either been sexually abused as girls, gang-raped as adolescents, or raped and/or beaten as adults. According to Statistics Canada's 2004 general social survey, rates of physical and sexual assault against aboriginal women are more than three times higher than against non-aboriginal women. Aboriginal women report experiencing more severe and potentially life-threatening forms of physical and sexual violence. Aboriginal women are almost seven times more likely to be murdered than non-aboriginal women. It's like walking around with an X on your back.

In B.C., as you know, our province has more missing and murdered women than anywhere else in Canada—160, according to the Sisters in Spirit report. This is a shocking and shameful reality that must be addressed without delay. I wish to thank you for caring enough to hold these hearings.

I wish to focus my talk with you today on what to do and where we should go from here. I wish first, though, to caution you very strongly against concluding these hearings with recommendations for more reports and more studies. Aboriginal people have been studied perhaps more than almost any other group, and the time for study on the subject has passed. The time for action is now.

Throughout the first decade of 2000, EVA BC, working in partnership with the Pacific Association of First Nations Women and BC Women's Hospital, held a number of meetings, bringing together aboriginal women from across the province to discuss the violence perpetrated against us and what needs to be done. During that time, numerous aboriginal women across B.C. came together for many meetings. We studied the issue very carefully. We looked at all the other studies and wrote two reports ourselves, the second of which I will share with you today. It is entitled “Researched to Death”, and I think the title alone speaks to what many aboriginal women feel today.

The three organizations that were involved concluded that the findings in previous reports were especially alarming given that the violence experienced by aboriginal women is believed to exceed that of any other group of women in Canada. As said by the late Patricia Monture-Angus, “For Aboriginal women, violence frequently begins in childhood and continues throughout adolescence into adulthood.”

That is the same for me and for most other aboriginal women I know. Violence in aboriginal women's lives is pervasive, and is compounded by violence and systemic and institutionalized racism as well as the effects of historical violence, such as residential schools, the Indian Act, and other legacies of colonization. In school, I grew up feeling looked down upon and punished for who I was. I experienced people feeling sorry for me and my sister, and punishing us for being “dirty little Indian girls”.

Violence in many aboriginal women's lives is a daily occurrence, for too many women have died either by murder or by their own hand.

● (1150)

Many governments have been willing to fund studies and reports, but very few have been willing to step up and fund the long-term solutions to the problem of violence against our women and girls. How many more women have to die before any concrete, long-term action is taken?

We need programs designed by us and for us. Anything short of that will not do. We need the kind of big action that will support an ongoing network of anti-violence services run by aboriginal women and for aboriginal women. All across B.C. and, in fact, in every province and territory in Canada, there are networks of services to respond to violence against women. Not all jurisdictions have enough of these services, but they exist, and they have been making a difference.

As I mentioned, I work at one of these services in Smithers and Hazelton. These anti-violence services are mostly what I would call “mainstream” services, that is, services set up by mainstream non-aboriginal social service agencies, women's agencies, and governments.

In looking at these services across the north of B.C., I can say that while many of these programs have aboriginal women on staff and are doing excellent work, and while many reach out to women on reserves, there are many women on reserve who either have no way of getting to town and who are not allowed to engage in these services because of the control their abusive partners have over them, or who don't trust the mainstream services, no matter how good they are.

Without getting into the history of colonialization, which I'm sure you are all familiar with, the issue of violence against aboriginal women on and off reserve is very complex. Many women want the security of confidentiality that comes with going to town for help; therefore, the existing mainstream services must have cross-cultural competencies and training and have aboriginal women on staff. This could be a funding stream you put in place that is for existing anti-violence services. You provide funding for an aboriginal counsellor-advocate position, but in addition, and most importantly, there should be anti-violence services run by aboriginal women and for aboriginal women in communities all across the nation.

I believe that this one-to-one support work, the advocacy, and the community education these programs would also do that will make the difference immediately and in the long term. The solutions that will work will come only from our women, and we need to empower them to act and to help others to speak out.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Tracy.

Ms. Tracy Porteous: Well, we may be out of time.

The Chair: No, no. Go ahead.

Ms. Tracy Porteous: I'm the executive director of the Ending Violence Association of B.C. and I'm here as an ally to Marilyn and other aboriginal women from across the province and the nation.

I just want to share with you a little bit about the second report that Marilyn was speaking about, which is called “Researched To Death”. A number of times over a period of three years, we brought together aboriginal women from across the province, and we consulted quite extensively about what aboriginal women were saying they wanted and needed in order to increase safety in their lives.

Aboriginal women have said to us over and over that one of the overarching issues is the extent to which racism is alive and in action in communities across our nation. I can attest to that, being a front-line worker for many years, and taking to the hospital women who had just been sexually assaulted, or intervening as an advocate in some way. Whenever I had for myself the privilege of working with an aboriginal woman, I can attest that they are treated differently by the system.... I think it is unconscionable that this still exists.

Therefore, we need to take action in addition to what Marilyn has said, in terms of anti-racism and anti-oppression training for police, for crowns, for all the systems in place, because I think in this day and age, in 2011, that isn't at all acceptable. In addition, we believe that training needs to be provided to aboriginal women before they have...let me just back up. Many anti-violence programs are searching for aboriginal women to hire, but all of the anti-violence programs in B.C. provide post-employment training, and there is no pre-employment training in the area of violence against women.

We've had discussions with Northern Lights College in Terrace. They're interested in providing courses on how to become an advocate or counsellor in anti-violence programs for women; it would be similar to the George Brown College program in Ontario. We believe it would really move things forward if we were able to support colleges and universities to provide courses so that aboriginal women are supported and prepared in order to be able to apply for some of these jobs that exist.

● (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Tracy.

I would like to go to Asia. Asia, ten minutes.

Ms. Asia Czapska (Advocacy Director, Justice for Girls): Thank you for taking the time to hear us today.

My name is Asia Czapska. I am the advocacy director at Justice for Girls.

Justice for Girls is a B.C.-based non-profit that promotes social justice, freedom from violence, and equality for teen girls who live in poverty. We advocate for both individual girls and systemically, to challenge laws, policies, and practices that breach the rights of teen girls who are homeless and low-income.

Over the course of 11 years of our work, we have observed that aboriginal girls are disproportionately the victims of violent crimes. They are subjected to extreme sexual and physical violence and constitute a shocking number of murder victims in B.C.

Justice for Girls has monitored many cases of violence against aboriginal teen girls in this province. Actually, realizing that we have ten minutes, I might be able to talk to you about some of the specific cases that we've monitored and some of the criminal justice failures that we have witnessed in our work.

According to the Native Women's Association of Canada's Sisters in Spirit 2010 report, about one-fifth of the cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women across Canada are actually cases of missing and murdered aboriginal girls under the age of 19. Sisters in Spirit points out that a huge number of the women were actually young women. So if you count women under I think the age of 31, then it's a very large proportion of the women who were murdered and went missing. And as I said, a fifth were girls, just from the number that Sisters in Spirit has documented, which, as you know, is a small proportion of the actual number of missing and murdered women and girls.

Historical and current colonization of aboriginal peoples, lands, and families has created a situation in which aboriginal teenaged girls are one of the most oppressed groups in Canadian society. Aboriginal girls face the deepest poverty, extreme male violence in the form of sexual abuse, rape, racialized sexual assault and racism, as well as institutionalization in prisons, mental health institutions, and apprehension into alienating racist and abusive non-aboriginal child welfare placements, and homelessness when they escape or when they attempt to escape these abusive situations when they face more violence on the street.

The impact of these institutional and colonial assaults on indigenous girls is egregious. A disproportionate number of homeless girls, for example, are aboriginal. A recent report in B.C. in which over 400 aboriginal youth in nine communities were interviewed found that about 60% of aboriginal girls had experienced sexual violence.

In the last 30 years, according to police, at least 12 teenaged girls and young women, almost all of them aboriginal, have been murdered or went missing along central-northern B.C.'s Highway of Tears, as Marilyn had spoken about, within the RCMP's jurisdiction. According to community members, many more girls and women have gone missing.

The extreme violence that aboriginal girls face is one of the ways in which colonization continues to ravage the lives of indigenous girls in modern-day Canadian society. In every court case Justice for Girls has monitored over many years where multiple girls were being exploited by men, either most or all of the girls targeted were aboriginal. It has been our observation in the cases we have monitored that racism and sexism have motivated crimes against aboriginal girls. Aboriginal girls are targeted by violent non-aboriginal men partly because of the vulnerability created by the non-response of the police and the courts to violence against them.

Justice for Girls has become steadily more frustrated and enraged with utter failures of the criminal justice system to respond to violence against aboriginal teen girls in this province. In the last five years we have met with various provincial politicians, including the Attorney General, and, along with other groups, have called for a broad inquiry into the criminal justice system's failure to respond to violence against aboriginal women and girls in B.C. We continue to demand an inquiry into the criminal justice system's deeply inadequate response to violence against aboriginal girls and women.

More broadly, the Canadian government must specifically uphold the inherent rights of aboriginal girls and women and make every effort to remedy the consequences of colonization. In so doing, the Canadian government must follow and respect the leadership of the Native Women's Association of Canada and provincial or territorial indigenous and grassroots women's groups, such as, for example, in British Columbia, the Aboriginal Women's Action Network.

Given that I think I have a moment, I can talk to you about some of the cases we have been involved with monitoring.

● (1200)

As some of you probably know, in 2004 Prince George ex-judge David Ramsay pleaded guilty to sexual assault causing bodily harm, breach of trust, and three counts of purchasing sex, sexual exploitation of persons under the age of 18. All of Ramsay's victims were under 16, aboriginal, and girls. As you may know, he had presided over their cases in court. Some of them had child welfare cases before him, where he was the presiding judge telling them whether or not they could keep their children.

The RCMP began their investigation into Judge Ramsay's assaults in 1999. He was not removed from his judicial duties for three years. The crimes committed by Ramsay continued, according to the media, until 2001, so for two to three years after the investigation began. His judgments in cases of sexual abuse have never been reviewed, so decisions he made on cases of sexual violence before his court in communities in central-northern B.C. were never reviewed.

We asked the previous Attorney General, Wally Oppal, to review those cases. We asked and nothing was ever done about that. Anyway, that's just one of the cases we brought to his attention.

In the course of the investigation into Ramsay's crimes, it was revealed that Prince George police officers and a youth criminal defence lawyer had also been accused of abusing girls in that community. Despite many groups' calls for action, there has never been an independent investigation of the alleged police abuse of girls in Prince George. I think one of the reasons that young aboriginal women don't trust the police is because the police perpetrate some of the violence against them. That's important to point out.

In 2003, coming back to the lower mainland area, we monitored the case of sexual offender Martin Tremblay, who pleaded guilty to five counts of sexual assault against five aboriginal teen girls. He admitted to videotaping and assaulting the girls while they were unconscious in his home. He was never given a no-contact-with-children condition on his probation. Justice for Girls called for the crown to ask for no contact with children. This did not happen, and upon his release he impregnated a 14-year-old aboriginal girl. Since his release from prison, girls have reported that he has given them drugs, alcohol, and a place to party, and girls have reported waking up after lengthy durations of unconsciousness in states of undress and abandoned in various public locations.

In 2010 two teen girls, Martha Jackson Hernandez and her friend Kayla LaLonde, died on the same night from a lethal combination of drugs and alcohol. Martha's body was found in Tremblay's home, and there have never been charges against Tremblay.

Those are just some of the cases we've monitored. I guess I'll just leave it to you for questions.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you.

You had one minute left, but that's good. Thank you, Asia.

Now we're going to another part of the hearings. It's the question and answer part. This will be a seven-minute round. As you know, the members of this committee are from all parties, and they'll have seven minutes to ask and have the answer, so you have to be tight if you want to get as many questions as you want.

I will begin with Ms. Anita Neville, who is a Liberal.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): First of all, let me thank the three of you for being here. I very much appreciate your presence.

You all touched on something that we've heard. Actually you've probably more than touched on something we've been skirting around and have been hearing about, both through the committee and I've travelled fairly extensively in western Canada on the issue of the missing and murdered aboriginal women. We're trying to gather information on systemic racism with systemic injustice, the lack of response by social welfare agencies, the lack of response or the inappropriate responses of the justice system, the court system, the police system.

In one community—not with the committee, but another community I was in—the women who had gathered there said to me that the women in that community do not feel they have protection, do not feel supported.

I'm raising this because, as you can hear by my colleague's response, we're horrified. Some of what you raised, Asia, I've heard before, most notably the circumstances of the judge's situation.

I guess my question to you is what is your best advice to us on the recommendations, recognizing that we are federal members of Parliament and there are jurisdictional issues? We can speak loudly, and I hope that the report we bring in will be a powerful report and a strong report. But what actions should be taken by the government when this report is put before Parliament? And what should they be doing right now? I'm horrified at the situation you've described. Perhaps the people from B.C. are familiar with it. I'm from Manitoba. Give us your best advice on how we should put forward our recommendations.

I open this to all three of you.

The Chair: Who wants to start?

Tracy.

Ms. Tracy Porteous: I think it's a really important question. I think there are some really concrete things you can do from a federal jurisdiction.

One of the ways systemic racism and sexism is manifesting itself that we're seeing across B.C. is in a really high number of women who have experienced abuse over a number of years being arrested themselves. We've been talking with the RCMP about this for about the last five years, asking them to take some action and to train their officers not to arrest women who are themselves victims. Obviously it can be difficult for police officers to arrive on a scene and there's a lot of emotion and stuff going on, but what we're seeing in the results is a lot of women being arrested and a lot of aboriginal women being arrested.

So we've asked the RCMP if we can look at the training that happens to new recruits in Regina, and that hasn't been made available to us.

Hon. Anita Neville: Can I interrupt you for a moment?

Ms. Tracy Porteous: Please.

Hon. Anita Neville: I asked a question this morning at the site visit we were at. I'm concerned about the number of women in jail. The number of aboriginal women who are in jail, as you are undoubtedly aware, are disproportionate to the population numbers. The question I asked this morning, and I don't know whether you can answer it, is do you have any numbers or figures on numbers of women who are in jail because they responded to violence—personal, systemic, however you want to describe it?

I don't want to divert you from the other answers either.

● (1210)

Ms. Tracy Porteous: If I may say one more thing in terms of what you can do, concrete recommendations from the perspective of justice and federal jurisdiction, restorative justice is a modality that a lot of justice system people are using to try to resolve crime and bring it back to the community's hands. We don't believe that it's a safe resolution for women who experience violence.

Hon. Anita Neville: You do not believe?

Ms. Tracy Porteous: We do not believe.

There are potential uses for restorative justice if it's done correctly, but there are federal programs that are supported by the Department of the Solicitor General federally that.... I think that action needs to be taken immediately to look at whether there are standards and screening guidelines and other protections in place to ensure that women who have been victims of violence aren't revictimized in the process.

We could probably spend a lot more time talking about restorative justice. I won't say more about that today, but if you want to follow up with me at any point....

Hon. Anita Neville: I may well.

Asia, can you respond a little?

Ms. Asia Czapska: Thank you.

On the numbers, as far as women who are in jail for responding to violence against them, I think the Elizabeth Fry Society nationally used to have those numbers. I don't know how updated they are now, but they used to have those, for sure.

If we're talking federally, then we're missing bodies of accountability. We are missing any kind of accountability in a lot of ways for the RCMP, for example. We need independent police oversight. That's one of the basic things. We need a body that is not police that will investigate violence by police, or misconduct or mishandling of cases, of investigations.

We also need an independent body that enforces the UN recommendations to Canada. We know that the CEDAW committee at the UN has made all kinds of recommendations for the status of aboriginal girls and women in Canada, the violence against aboriginal girls and women, and there is no federal body that is responsible for making those recommendations real.

There needs to be some kind of enforcement, basically, at different levels for the recommendations that, as Marilyn and Tracy have said, have already been made for so many years. There needs to be some kind of body that enforces those recommendations. For sure, there needs to be a department or a section of a department that enforces UN recommendations.

As we have said before, the federal government needs to listen to the Native Women's Association of Canada. And more than listening, they need to take direction from the Native Women's Association of Canada at this point. Also, I know it's provincial, but they need to go to the provincial and territorial aboriginal women's groups.

As far as criminalization, the same is true for aboriginal girls. Aboriginal girls are 40% to 50% of the girls in the prisons in B.C. When we used to do visits to girls in the prison in Burnaby, there would be times when every girl in the room was aboriginal when we were doing outreach. The way we view it, obviously we'd like girls not to be criminalized at all. A lot of the times young women are in jail to protect them from violence. If they're going to the downtown east side, for example, they'll have a condition: “Do not go into the downtown east side, because that's where they use drugs.” The police and the social workers think they're protecting them, but instead they're jailing those girls for their own protection, really, supposedly.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We've finished that round.

Now I will go to Madame Demers, from the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

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

Good afternoon.

Like my colleague Anita, I am horrified. Why is it that we don't hear about these horror stories down east? Why do we speak out against the situation of women in Afghanistan and Iran and demand that their rights be respected, but we pipe down when it comes to the situation of first nations women? Our voices should be even louder.

What can we do? Why is it that cases like that involving Judge Ramsay are not making headlines? Could you explain to me what needs to be done so that these cases get the appropriate attention in the media? I would like these stories to be on page one. I want to talk about theses stories, I want to shout them out. I want women everywhere to deplore this situation out loud.

It is disgraceful to leave things as they are. The fact that the police and the judicial system have not gotten involved is scandalous. How did we get to this? Could you explain that to me? Is it because of ignorance or simply because we do not care, since we don't think that aboriginal women deserve better? Is that the reality we must face? If it is, what is going to happen? We are touring the provinces, and people are sharing things with us. Afterwards, we will return to Ottawa to tell a nice little story and put it on a shelf. But out here, the same things will keep happening to you.

Marilyn, you said that the time for talking has passed and that now is the time for action. I agree with you. As I have been saying from the beginning, the objective of this tour is not to make decisions and establish positions for you once we are back in Ottawa. We would like you to give us the tools we need to enable you to establish your own position. Currently, we are trying very hard to do things properly. Please, help us.

As a woman, I am angry and hurt.

Could one of you three answer?

● (1215)

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn George: Forgive me, but it's a very emotional topic.

I don't have an answer as to why this hasn't been heard. But now is the time, which is why I sit here as a first nation woman, to be a voice for all of my sisters that the violence has to stop.

I have heard that this exists back east too. I've read reports. It's always done in secret. It's kind of like, "We can't put this on record. We can't speak about this. It's for your eyes only to see." This was just over a couple of years ago that I read this, and I asked myself, "Why? Why can't it be voiced out there?"

So I sit here in hope that our voice will be heard loud and clear as first nation women. I speak for my daughter, my cousins. I speak for those I've lost in my past due to suicide because of domestic violence and other assaults that have happened to many of our women in our communities.

There are no easy answers right now, but I know that this action has to be taken now. Change has to happen. This stuff should not be happening in our communities in this day and age. Making those connections outside of first nations communities, making those connections with the RCMP detachment to make better relationships—that also has to be done with women. We need women speaking to women. We need aboriginal women speaking to each other. We need education for our women on what domestic violence is, and sexual assault—everything. I grew up with violence around me, thinking that it was just a normal thing. But when I became a woman myself, I realized that it was not normal.

So I want this to stop.

Thank you.

● (1220)

The Chair: We have about a minute left. Does anyone want to add something to that?

Asia.

Ms. Asia Czapska: Maybe this is more of a question or a thought for women in Parliament, but what do you need to be able to act? It feels like there are so many recommendations, but I would ask you, what will make government act? What are the barriers that are in your way or in the way of taking on some of these things?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I think that we need to break the silence. We need to put an end to it. You must give us all the information you have gathered, so that it can be published. Social networks that exist today can help disseminate that information. People need to know the identity of the men involved and what they are doing to young women and girls. Canadians have the right to know these things.

What do you think, Tracy?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, we're out of time.

Now we have Ms. Nina Grewal for the Conservatives. Nina, you have seven minutes, as does everyone else.

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for appearing today in front of our committee and for sharing their insights. My heart goes out to you. These are very heart-rending stories.

Currently we're looking into violence against aboriginal women, and it does seem we also could be looking at violence against immigrant communities. Unfortunately, these are very complicated problems that we are facing these days.

I understand that part of the problem we have in dealing with this is a lack of national data. Do you agree with that in terms of violence against women? Is there any way we could be helping law enforcement agencies with the data or something like that? Do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms. Tracy Porteous: We actually are experiencing a problem with data collection here in B.C. I don't know if that's an issue across the rest of the country.

We have been told that B.C. police have only about a 30% compliance rate in providing statistics to Statistics Canada in terms of crimes committed...in cases as they proceed through the system. B.C. is a little bit different, because the police investigate and the crown lays the charge. Police don't have control over the crown laying the charge, so there's some kind of complication that happens here.

Also, the police have just switched over to a new investigative system that also collects data. It's called PRIME. As far as we can tell, it's very difficult to pull numbers from that, and it should be easy. The Vancouver police have found a way of changing some of the technical foundations of PRIME to allow them to use it for statistical gathering purposes so they can submit that. I mean, we can't really develop proper social policy unless we know if the things we put in place are working or not.

When we have gone forward and asked for information from crowns, from police, and from police services here in the province, we have been told that the information is not available. It's mind-boggling to us that we can have our criminal justice branch say they're sorry, but they can't tell us the difference between how cases of violence against women proceed through the courts now as compared to before they changed their policy, because the data from before they changed their policy is all gone.

Now, I appreciate that it's a provincial issue, but on the federal perspective, I think a lot of oversight and accountability can be brought to the RCMP by asking them to account to a committee or an office. We don't have a national office responsible for violence against women overall or violence against aboriginal women. I agree with what's been said about the need to support the Native Women's Association of Canada and the work they're doing, but I think a lot can be done immediately by asking for accountability from the RCMP.

For example, just recently I asked them for numbers of women being arrested here in the province of B.C., just for the first six months of 2010. I was staggered by the numbers. It would be interesting to ask for those numbers across the country, because I think this is one big difference that can be made. If you arrest a woman who has been a victim of violence for the last 15 years, she'll never call the police again. She'll never reach out, so as she goes forward, her life and her children's lives are at much greater risk if the police make a mistake the first time she reaches out or somebody calls the police. So a huge difference you could make immediately is looking to the RCMP to be more accountable.

● (1225)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Do you have any thoughts on what the main root cause is of all of this, of what's happening? These are really heart-wrenching stories. Do you have any thoughts on what the main root cause is of all of this?

Ms. Tracy Porteous: It's a good question.

Ms. Asia Czapska: Something we've all talked about is probably the immense impact of colonial repression. I think if you look at the situation of indigenous girls and women in Australia, you'll see very similar situations. You'll see the over-criminalization. You'll see a majority of women and girls in prisons being indigenous. You'll see a staggering amount of violence. You'll see police failure. I think some of the things we've spoken about....

But on your first question, I know that the Native Women's Association of Canada will speak to you about data and data collection, if they haven't already, and what's happening with Sisters in Spirit. Obviously, they need to be supported to continue to collect data on missing and murdered women and girls.

More specifically, as far as statistics go in the RCMP, let's say, it's very hard to get numbers. For example, people think that there are laws against sexual exploitation in Canada and that those laws are enforced, and that's just not true. When it comes to men buying girls and boys for sexual exploitation, those men are not prosecuted very often, and they're not even charged very often.

It's very hard for us to get those numbers on how many men are charged because, for example, sexual exploitation is not separated specifically. That section of the Criminal Code, subsection 212(4), is not separately segregated by the police. It's just put by the police into “sexual assault—other” or “sexual offences—other”, so we actually can't even tell you how many men are charged with sexually exploiting children and youth in Canada right now. That number would be very useful for us, to be able to say, well, you know, it's ten men per province, and one or two are found guilty every year....

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Madam Chair, do I have some more time left?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Nina, we just ran out.

Now it's Ms. Davies for the NDP.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you.

First of all, thank you very much for coming today. I know it's hard to have a discussion and answer these huge questions when you have seven minutes or ten minutes, but hopefully we can have some discussion.

Based on what you've said, I wanted to get at the idea that the lack of information is an issue. I know that when Hedy and I were on another committee looking at the issue of the sex trade as it pertained to adults and not children, it was very difficult for us to even get information about what was going on in terms of the sex trade, who was being arrested for what, what violence there was, and how that was being reported. So I do think that's an issue, and I do agree that better information-gathering systems are really important.

I think what's underlying this—and Madam Demers asked this big question—is that we're in this culture of denial. When I think about a culture of denial, it is not so much from a community point of view, because I do think there is a lot of information out there. The cases you've spoken about were very explosive cases that hit the media for days if not weeks, but then they disappeared. So the culture of denial is more among police or different ministries or governments themselves.

I know back in 1999 when I first started raising the missing women issue in Ottawa, I met with the Minister of Justice, who is a very decent guy, and he actually didn't know about the missing women, the biggest case in Canada. So that's in response to your question about why it didn't hit back east or somewhere.

I do think this issue of denial is a huge part of what we're dealing with here. I just wonder, to throw that out there, how we deal with that. How do we get past these individual situations, whether we're talking about the Pickton trial...and then everything just goes back to what it was? To me it's very much about this being a systemic issue and trying to focus attention on that.

I just want to give you some opportunity to respond to the idea of how we draw attention to these systemic issues so we can get out of this culture of denial.

● (1230)

Ms. Tracy Porteous: I very much appreciate the question, and I think we also need to proceed with great caution. What I've heard from my friend Marilyn and other aboriginal women is that you can't just go into a community and start talking about violence and then leave. Expecting women to speak up and disclose what's happened to them can actually create a dangerous situation for them. My friend Marilyn recommended to you that one thing she thought was important would be services run for aboriginal women by aboriginal women in every aboriginal community in the province—or, from your perspective, in the country.

I think we need to think very carefully about putting some of those supports in place before we expect women to talk, because there needs to be some level of safety and some oversight in a community, some safe place, some initiative where there's support and building and communities. One of the federal initiatives that's going on right now, which I very much support, is the building of community safety plans in aboriginal communities. In addition, it's not just about building a plan or a protocol. There has to be some support in an ongoing way. There has to be some advocacy.

I just want to echo what Marilyn has suggested to you, because more than anything else, if you could embed advocates for women by women in communities, I think that would go a huge long way to helping women find their voice.

I think in the mainstream non-aboriginal communities that's probably how non-aboriginal women found their voice: through the proliferation of anti-violence services, of feminist voices in communities throughout the province. Now, obviously that hasn't ended violence, and every community isn't the same in terms of having these services, but one of the things we've been saying to the Province of B.C., because they fund these provincial services, is that they need to fund services in aboriginal communities for aboriginal women. They have funded a few, but not nearly enough. We believe very strongly in the recommendation by Marilyn that doing that would make a huge difference in terms of opening up the denial but at the same time doing so in a way that's safe for women.

● (1235)

Ms. Asia Czapska: If I can take a moment, I'll say that I'm completely and strongly in agreement with that, and ditto—the same—for girls and for aboriginal girls: there need to be specific advocates for young women, for aboriginal young women.

As far as denial goes, I think one thing would help. Sometimes we write reports to the United Nations about this situation of homeless girls in Canada—about how there is homelessness of girls in Canada—and one of the things that happens is that when Canada goes before the UN, it prepares reports, as you know, for different covenant committees, and I think there's a lot of denial in those reports. One of the first things would be....

Some countries, when they're preparing reports to the United Nations, approach preparing those reports by saying, “These are our challenges, this is where we have problems, and we have not done this and this”. They say, “Women and girls are not succeeding in these areas and this is what we're going to do about it”. When Canada goes to those UN committees and reports, I think it hides as much as it can and denies as much as it can about what is happening. Those reports are not very useful.

I think one of the things would be that those departments that prepare those reports need to start being honest about what's going on in Canada. They need to start looking at those UN consultations or presentations before different committees as moments to actually work on recommendations, rather than just to defend how amazingly forward Canada is on human rights. I think they need to actually say, “Okay, we have problems, and this is where we need to work on those things”.

And once again, a body of accountability would be useful.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's it.

I want to thank the committee. We don't have time for a second round. We have had to have very short panels because we've had so many people who want to present that we've had to cut our panels to size. Therefore, we have one round at this panel.

I want to thank Tracy, Marilyn, and Asia for coming.

I know that it has taken a lot of time, Marilyn.

Thank you for being brave enough to share with us your pain.

I think we will suspend now until we get to the next round and the next panel. We'll suspend for two minutes.

● _____ (Pause) _____ ●

● (1240)

The Chair: I'd like to call this session to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on the Status of Women is studying violence against aboriginal women, and we are travelling across Canada to do so.

There was a motion that was adopted unanimously by the committee to study this issue and to travel across the country and meet with aboriginal communities and other groups that are involved in the issue so that they could tell us about the extent of violence against aboriginal women, the types of violence, the root causes of that violence, and of course the solutions to what is an ongoing problem. Obviously, despite their best efforts, governments in the past, it seems, have not been able to deal with the situation. So we need to be able to get from you a lot of information and concrete solutions so that when we write our report we will be able to at least, as some people have told us, stop studying the issue to death and get on with finding solutions.

Normally, as you know, these are public meetings, so they are being taped. There can be media here. Media are allowed to come in. I just want to point out that representatives of the consulate general of the United States are here as observers. They're very interested in the issue, and they're in the audience today listening. I also want to welcome them here to listen to the issue.

Today we have representatives of Battered Women's Support Services, Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter, Women Against Violence Against Women, and the YWCA of Vancouver.

Normally we give you five minutes each to present. I'll give you two-minute and one-minute indicators so that you know you'll have to start wrapping it up. You don't have to say everything in your presentation, because there will be, hopefully, a couple of rounds of questions in which you'll be able to flesh out some of the other things you want to say and actually be specific about them.

I'm going to begin with Battered Women's Support Services, from which we have Lisa Yellow-Quill, co-manager of the aboriginal women's program.

Lisa, you have five minutes.

● (1245)

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill (Co-manager, Aboriginal Women's Program, Battered Women's Support Services): I timed this, and it's actually six minutes. Is that okay?

The Chair: We'll try to get you six minutes. We can play with that. We're not rigid, but we don't want to go to seven or eight or nine.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: Hello. They call me Blue Thunderbird Woman, Strong Medicine Woman Standing. *Nekaway*, with Cree, Dakota, and Anishinabe blood—

The Chair: Excuse me, Lisa. Can you just make sure that you have the microphone positioned so that we can hear you?

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: Is that good? Everybody can hear me?

As I was saying, my name's Blue Thunderbird Woman, Strong Medicine Woman Standing, from Long Plains, Manitoba, *Pizhew Dodem*. My colonial name is Lisa Yellow-Quill, and I'm the aboriginal women's program co-manager for Battered Women's Support Services.

Battered Women's Support Services is a feminist non-profit organization that employs women from around the world, reflecting our values of balance, inclusivity, and wholeness. We have been in existence for 32 years providing education, advocacy, and support services, including system advocacy and law reform to women experiencing violence. Our priority is to end violence against women.

I'll be speaking to the root causes of violence against women, which have resulted in more than 500 murdered and missing aboriginal women across Turtle Island, together with the need for social and political accountability for the healing of women, their families, and their communities. This oration is a concerted position Battered Women's Support Services has taken to stand with our sisters who speak today and who have spoken before us across the provinces. Our position is strict. We believe inaction maintains the status quo of violence against women, so we want action.

I'm sorry, I'm a little dry now.

The Chair: Relax, Lisa, that's okay. You don't have to rush.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: I asked Creator and the grandmothers to come to speak through me so that these words I speak would be felt to the core of your being and reverberate to the cores of those once in authority to take seriously the issue of violence against aboriginal women.

We at Battered Women's Support Services acknowledge that we are on unceded territory, Coast Salish territory, and we ask the grandmothers to bless the work we're doing today with the courage, the clarity, and the words that will lead to actions to end violence against aboriginal women.

We know that continued state research on aboriginal women without action is further causing violence in our lives. We further acknowledge that by participating in this research initiative delivered by Status of Women Canada, we could possibly be implicated as co-conspirators or perpetrators in the ongoing objectification and co-optation of aboriginal women and their experiences for financial gain and political masturbation if this research results in mere band-aid solutions.

We know that continued research initiatives without action are also false promises. There is a wealth of research material from government and academia to grassroots front-line workers that has provided documentation naming the root causes and various forms of violence against aboriginal women. There are imperialism, patriarchy, colonization, and now globalization.

In Vancouver, women demonstrate the enormity of this issue by raising consciousness via the Battered Women's Support Services' initiative, “The Violence Stops Here” campaign, which is training developed to invite men's accountability in ending violence against women, the Walk4Justice, the downtown east side smudge ceremony, and the February 14 Women's Memorial March, which promote individual and community healing, to name a few.

At a national level, in 1996 there was the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which gave a whole account in volumes of root causes resulting in violence against aboriginal women. The report by Amnesty International called “Stolen Sisters:...Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada” is another. In *Black Eyes All of the Time* Anne McGillivray and Brenda Comaskey address root causes and provide recommendations in a clear and concise way on issues of intimate violence, aboriginal women, and the justice system.

As a result, we know the Canadian state is familiar with the issues relating to violence against aboriginal women and, as it is, the patriarchal state that initiates, maintains, and perpetuates....

I need a glass of water. I can't even drink my water.

● (1250)

The Chair: Relax, Lisa. You're among friends. Nobody's judging you.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: Yes, but we don't usually get to talk.

The Chair: Well, then, take your time.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: I can't even drink my water.

The Chair: Would you like some coffee?

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: No.

The Chair: Would you like us to come back to you?

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: No. I want to finish.

The Chair: Okay. That's good. All right?

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: Resultantly, we know the Canadian state is familiar with the issues relating to violence against aboriginal women, as it is the patriarchal state that initiates, maintains, and perpetuates the objectification, stratification, normalization, racialization, invisibilization, sexualization, marginalization, criminalization, institutionalization, hospitalization, and colonization that in the end may result in the cremation of our women in this country because they are so badly beaten by society.

To us, it is overtly exemplified in the Eurocentric feeling of land entitlement as demonstrated by the public and private spheres of economic and political entities. I am speaking to the rape of our Mother Earth.

Our main concerns at this point are the issues of paternalistic racism inherent in the socio-political institutions and legislation, the lack of education and resources for urban and rural aboriginal women, and gaps in the justice system, together with jurisdictional barriers.

So for our action items, we want action because women make up 50% of the Canadian population. We want the "Ministry of Women and Equality" reinstated in British Columbia and in place in all provinces across Canada. For the record, there is no longer any ministry that has "women" in its name.

We want action. We want women named on every agenda and their voices included in all the planning and decision-making processes of Canada and its provinces.

We want action. We are asking for socio-political attitudinal change.

We want action. We want the focus of women's experience of violence placed on the perpetrator, not the women. Too often women are blamed and pathologized for the violence they experience.

We want action. We want structural change in governments, law enforcement, and other institutions that maintain the status quo of gender inequality.

We want action. Battered Women's Support Services calls for anti-violence services rooted in historical understandings of colonial violence and informed by aboriginal women.

We want action. We support the Native Women's Association of Canada's call for a reduction of violence; a reduction of poverty; a reduction of homelessness and access to housing; improved access to justice; the 2006 Highway of Tears Symposium's call for victim prevention; community development and support; emergency planning and response; and victim, family, and counselling support.

I'm almost done.

Status of Women Canada and the House of Commons have been relatively silent, notwithstanding this meeting. Violence against women has to be a national priority in ending violence on every level of society, with all institutions mobilizing efforts that are on the ground right now. We have been doing this support without support.

Finally, I will repeat the words of Chief Robert Pasco from Merritt, British Columbia. He says, "Whatever the words of your final report and recommendations may be, they will mean little if they are not met with the political will, the knowledge and the ability to achieve their intent".

Furthermore, in the section on "How to Begin", in the highlights taken from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, it is said: Change of this magnitude cannot be achieved by piecemeal reform of existing programs and services—however helpful any one of these reforms might be. It will take an act of national intention—a major, symbolic statement of intent, accompanied by the laws necessary to turn intention into action.

● (1255)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Lisa.

Now I'll go to the Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter.

Hilla, you are speaking?

Ms. Hilla Kerner (Collective Member, Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter): Yes, I am.

The Chair: All right. Good stuff.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: I'm here on behalf of the Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter and on behalf of CASAC, the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres.

I trust that if you don't understand my accent, you will stop me and ask me to repeat.

The Chair: Yes, but I think we understand you, Hilla, very easily.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: I think two months ago I was at a hearing on legal aid, and I was completely misunderstood in the first five minutes.

We appreciate the committee's decision to invite women's groups to speak about violence against aboriginal women and about our struggle to end it and achieve liberty and freedom for all women.

Surely in this room we can agree that although women in Canada formally have equal rights, in reality women in Canada, and aboriginal women in particular, do not have equality in their political, economic, and domestic lives. Aboriginal women do not have representational power in the living political institutions in the democracy of Canada: the federal Parliament, the government, and the Supreme Court. Therefore, independent aboriginal women's groups have a crucial role to play in bringing the voice, the experience, and the wisdom of aboriginal women to the political decision-making arena.

We are calling on the Government of Canada to provide appropriate funding—with no strings attached, with no demands, with no conditions—to the only national aboriginal women's group in Canada, NWAC, the Native Women's Association of Canada; and to consult with NWAC regarding any issue that can affect aboriginal women in Canada.

My second point is about policing male violence against women. We know from 35—

The Chair: Hilla, could you please lean into the microphone? It's because the people in the room may not be able to hear you as well as we can.

Great stuff.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: We know from 35 years of front-line work that men attack women in their own race and down in the racist hierarchy, and that aboriginal women are vulnerable to violence both of aboriginal men in their homes and communities and of all men everywhere they go. The criminal justice system that is consistently failing to protect all women is especially indifferent to male violence against aboriginal women.

Not only that, but cases of criminalizing aboriginal women for acting in self-defence against the attacking men are extremely high.... I want to encourage the members of the committee to find out how many cases of violence are reported to the police by women and compare them to the conviction rates. I assure you that you will be shocked to find out how small is the number of cases that are taken seriously by the police, that are fully investigated, and that are being brought before the courts in Canada.

My third point is about the poverty of women and aboriginal women. It is a well-known fact that aboriginal women are the poorest women in Canada. In the hearing about trafficking and sexual exploitation in front of this committee in 2006, many witnesses pointed out that aboriginal people are disproportionately affected by poverty in Canada. The committee heard that 40% of aboriginal women in Canada live in poverty.

Poverty of women and violence against women are two powerful oppressive forces that feed each other. The Department of Justice Canada recognized poverty as a factor in increasing vulnerability to violence against women. The Public Health Agency of Canada states, “Poverty limits choices and access to the means to protect and free oneself from violence”.

Canada has been criticized by the United Nations for its shameful income assistance rates. Women return to or cannot leave abusive relationships because they are unable to adequately provide for themselves and their children on welfare. A crucial measure to prevent the vulnerability of women to men's violence is in providing economic security to aboriginal women and all women. Our ongoing vision is a guaranteed livable income, but definitely a mid-term measurement is to just raise the welfare rates. They're completely unlivable.

My next point is about aboriginal women and prostitution. One extreme expression of violence against women is prostitution. Later today, we'll hear from the Aboriginal Women's Action Network on their opposition to prostitution and the legalization of prostitution.

We are calling on this committee to adopt the recommendation of the report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women from 2007: “Turning Outrage Into Action”. The report's recommendations are calling on the federal government to target the poverty of women, and the poverty of aboriginal women in particular, and to decriminalize the victims, the women, who are prostituted—they should not be criminalized for being victims of inequality and violence—but to criminalize the consumers, the men exploiting the women's vulnerability, the consumers of prostitution and the pimps.

My last point is about aboriginal children in care. It's so short that I'm doing it an injustice, and I encourage the committee to invest the appropriate time to have hearings about this issue. Less than 5% of the B.C. population is aboriginal, yet more than half of the children in care are aboriginal. According to the MCFD, in the last year there were 4,666 aboriginal children in care. The state uproots aboriginal children from their mothers, paying a fortune for foster care instead of investing this money in the mothers and offering them the economic security that enables them to get housing, food, and child care, which in turn enables them to take care of their children.

So basically my points are these: consult and fund NWAC; end poverty of aboriginal women and poverty of all women, because that's what makes them and us so vulnerable to violent men; end prostitution by targeting poverty on the one hand and criminalizing the buyer on the other hand; and force the police to follow the responsibility of the state to protect women by thorough investigation, by pursuing appropriate charges, and by bringing men to court to hold them accountable for violence against women.

● (1300)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: That is it.

The Chair: All right.

Now we'll go to Women Against Violence Against Women. Darla Laughlin.

Ms. Darla Laughlin (Aboriginal Outreach Coordinator and Youth Counsellor, Women Against Violence Against Women): Good afternoon. Thank you to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women and to the House of Commons for the invitation and request for Women Against Violence Against Women to take part in this important work.

My traditional name is Singing Thunderbird Child, Twice Standing Woman. I am a Cree Ojibway woman from Peepeekisis First Nation in Saskatchewan. My colonial name is Darla Laughlin. I am currently the aboriginal outreach coordinator and counsellor at the Women Against Violence Against Women rape crisis centre here in Vancouver.

I am here, upon your request, to shed some light on the surmountable forms of violence that are perpetrated against aboriginal women and that we at WAVAW have witnessed. Of course, working in the environment we do, we could speak about the horrific acts of physical, emotional, and mental abuse; about women who have been raped, sexually assaulted, and exploited. This would speak to the various types of violence we see working as front-line workers.

As far as the extent goes, I think the papers speak for themselves. Aboriginal women are murdered, and very recently it seemed that no one noticed. So the “extent”, I would have to say, is death.

I think the important question to be asked is how did we get to a place in society where aboriginal women are so undervalued? What can we do to make change, and where do we go from here?

Let me say that the most significant forms of violence witnessed thus far have, shamefully, come from the government itself in the form of patriarchy, racism, and sexism. The systemic oppression that aboriginals face is by far the greatest threat to their well-being. It has long been the norm for the Canadian government to impose institutionalized systems of oppression, colonialism, and political repression on aboriginal people, particularly our women.

It is our view that unfortunately little has changed. Currently you are all here to further study the violence that is perpetrated on aboriginal women. I would say that it is known what types of oppression and violence aboriginal women face. We have statistics. We now have government saying that aboriginal women have fallen through the cracks.

My question is why do we need to study what we already know? We know that aboriginal women face marginalization, discrimination, racism, and sexism. We know that women are suffering from the effects of residential school and its legacy. Why, then, are women's organizations not being supported to help these women? We have no money for training. We have no money for core funding. Cuts to women's programs continue to rise.

I would like to say that the work completed recently to look into these systems of oppression did not go unnoticed. However, we have not seen any increase in funding for counselling or programming for aboriginal women who face violence. And yet here we are again, studying the issues of violence against aboriginal women.

It is time for government to understand that without readily available long-term resources for women, the picture is not going to get any better. Women must have the option for counselling, safe and affordable housing, and child care in order to truly heal from the effects of violence. Harm reduction is clearly not enough to assist women forward. It is time for real decolonization practices to be put into place for women to have the tools necessary to be successful in overcoming the effects of violence.

Another key factor in the healing of aboriginal women is to recognize the need for true traditional ways of being. Government has a responsibility to recognize traditional healing in the work they do with women to help disintegrate the barriers of mistrust. Women have an inherent right to seek traditional healers to assist in their process, and we, as change-makers, have the responsibility to assist women to be able to find these ways of healing or to bring these traditional values to our places of work. This is not sufficiently being supported by the government at present.

We also bear witness to the dangers women face who are involved in or trying to exit the so-called sex trade. These women are given minimum support, while johns are supported with programming such as john schools. Women deserve to have available more than harm reduction tools, such as condoms and safe injection sites, to provide help.

● (1305)

Laws must be changed and perpetrators should be held accountable and charged to the fullest extent of the law. Canada needs to understand that this is a despicable action that allows women who are the most vulnerable to be bought and sold while living in fear and under threat of death.

Long-term and sustainable life-skills-building programming and counselling are needed to address the issues of women who are sexually exploited. Government needs to understand that sexual exploitation of aboriginal women is not a trade.

Finally, I would like to say that the Ministry of Children and Family Development has scooped and continues to scoop aboriginal children from their families. This is a direct result of the lack of sustainable support from the ministries for housing and social development. Marginalized women—aboriginal women—are expected to pay rent and bills and feed families on moneys that do not meet expectations and are lower than the poverty line.

These two ministries continue to work separately and continue to support the breakdown of aboriginal women and their children. This directly forces women into places of despair, homelessness, and, sadly, the sex trade. What can be more violent or oppressive?

Currently we know that the world view of Canada is rapidly changing in regard to the way Canada portrays its values and the truth behind the non-support of aboriginal women. It is time for the government to step up and make real change for the safety of and quality of life for aboriginal women.

The following statistics are taken from the 2005 report “Researched to Death: B.C. Aboriginal Women and Violence”, by the B.C. government and the B.C. Women's Hospital and Health Centre. Aboriginal women are 3.5 times more likely than non-aboriginal women to be victims of violence. Approximately 75% of survivors of sexual assault in aboriginal communities are young women under 18 years of age. Approximately 50% of these girls are under the age of 14, and approximately 25% are under the age of 7. Canadian aboriginal women between the ages of 25 and 44 are five times more likely than other Canadian women in the same age group to die as a result of violence.

This study was conducted in 2005. Since 2006, the Harper government has cancelled funding for universal day care programs and has cut funding for women's groups and organizations' front-line work and violence work for women's and aboriginal women's issues. With these statistics alone, it is clear: funding is needed for programs and programming for aboriginal women who face violence.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our knowledge. We appreciate your time.

● (1310)

The Chair: Thank you, Darla.

Now we have the YWCA of Vancouver. Nancy Cameron.

Ms. Nancy Cameron (Program Manager, Crabtree Corner Community Program, YWCA of Vancouver): Thank you.

I want to thank the women who have spoken. I don't want to repeat a lot of what they've said.

I just want to say that I have worked in the field of women and violence for almost my entire career, which has been about 30 years, if not longer. I've come to other committees such as this to speak around issues of women and violence. Unfortunately, over the years not much has changed. If anything, it's probably gotten worse.

I think the longstanding facts, statistics, and information that have been spoken about already, and that most of us know at this table still exist...and now in particular the issues of aboriginal women and violence are more of a concern.

I work for the YWCA Crabtree Corner, which is a women and family program located in the downtown east side of Vancouver. Abuse is interwoven into about 99% of the women who come to Crabtree, and of our clients at Crabtree, I'd say about 70% are aboriginal women.

I want to speak particularly about what we see. I think the other women who have spoken have covered very well the issues of why abuse is so prevalent within the aboriginal women's community. I mean, it's prevalent anyway, and what we see at Crabtree are the things that have been spoken about here—issues of oppression. Poverty seems to drive almost all of it. It's very difficult for a woman to leave an abusive relationship when there are issues of housing, when she's living on social assistance—which has been mentioned, that it's not enough money to support someone, let alone children—when there's a lack of resources; I think there's only one treatment facility in the lower mainland where a woman can go with her child to deal with issues of addiction. So there are many reasons why women will remain silent.

It was also addressed that when the police come to a woman's home when there's been a call around violence, an alarming thing is happening. When the police are called around issues of domestic violence, the ministry comes and children are taken. That almost makes the woman victimized again. She's told that if she wants to keep her children, she has to get this man out of the house. We know statistically, and research shows, that that just isn't going to happen, that it takes a woman several times to leave an abusive relationship, and certainly not on the spot. So we have been working with an increased number of aboriginal families headed by women where the children are being removed because there are issues of violence in the home. Of course, this silences the woman; this creates an enormous barrier for her to be reporting abuse, and she's just not likely to do that. It also increases an already existing distrust of the police and the legal system.

I mentioned, and other women have mentioned, the issue of poverty, the stereotyping of aboriginal women that is very prevalent. I see that in my work, in the people who come to do research in the building, and in the community where I work, this sense that aboriginal women, and the judgments that are placed on them... approaching them as almost invisible people within our society. I see that exemplified over and over and over again, and, as has been mentioned here, within the sex trade, within the judicial system, and within the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

I also see the toll it takes on front-line workers. As I said, I've been doing this for 30 years, and I see how difficult this work gets to be and how hard it is for front-line workers to be doing this work when they're up against a lack of funds.

● (1315)

At Crabtree we've only had our violence prevention worker's position for one year, and it took a long time to get the funding for that, and that came from a private donor. So it's very difficult, even in this day and age, to convince those in positions of authority to be funding this kind of work.

The other thing is the lack of resources. When a woman does come and she is in a situation where there is abuse, the lack of resources, of places to refer her or her children or ways to keep the family together.... I think the inconsistencies between the judicial system and the government about just what constitutes abuse, how to work with abuse, sometimes make our work quite difficult as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Nancy.

Now we're going to go to the question and answer part. This will allow you to expand on some of the things you have said. Each question and answer is seven minutes apiece, so if you want to get as many questions and answers, you're going to have to be as succinct as you possibly can. And I'm saying that not just to the witnesses, but to—

Hon. Anita Neville: Me.

The Chair: No, to the members. Now, Anita.

We're going to begin with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you to the four of you for coming here today.

I have three particular questions that I want to ask you, and you can decide how you want to answer them.

You are all service providers. My first question relates to funding, what advice you would have specifically for the federal government, your own funding challenges, because they're significant, and we've heard about it. We've heard increasingly—and I don't know whether you were in here for the previous panel—about the challenges that aboriginal women have in working with government agencies, with the police, with the justice system. I'd like to know what roles your organizations take on in working with women as they work through some of their challenges with institutions, however you want to describe them.

I think one of you, maybe two, mentioned Sisters in Spirit. You're all undoubtedly aware that Sisters in Spirit have not had their dollars renewed for the larger study into the missing and murdered aboriginal women. I'd like to know your views on the role of Sisters in Spirit. I know my own thoughts, but I'd like to know what you think, in terms of the importance—or not—of Sisters in Spirit being able to continue the work they're doing.

So there are three questions, and I don't know whether they're succinct, but if someone wants to have a go....

● (1320)

Ms. Hilla Kerner: I'll start with the funding challenge. There are two rape crisis centres in Vancouver, WAVAW and Vancouver Rape Relief, and Battered Women's Support Services offer, in spirit, similar services. None of us receive core funding at all for the rape crisis centres. WAVAW and BWSS receive some money for individual workers, but definitely not to the overall operation of women's services, and Rape Relief receives nothing.

So the political leadership of British Columbia does not think that rape crisis centres are worth existing for women victims of male violence and aboriginal victims of male violence. The only funding —and it's a political decision—comes for individual victims service workers, which completely dismantles the understanding of violence against women in relation to equality and the importance of women's services in changing the world and making it a better place for women.

Thank you.

The Chair: Darla.

Ms. Darla Laughlin: I have to agree that the core funding issue is probably the most important. I know that WAVAW has applied eight years consecutively to the Status of Women for funding and have been denied eight years consecutively.

Literally, we're doing work off the side of our desks. The amount of need surpasses what we're able to offer. We need more workers. Hilla is absolutely right, the funding that we do have is not core funding. Our positions are funded individually through various funders. We don't have the sustainability, I guess you could say. We have to apply every single year for our funding, and we don't know whether or not that funding is going to be there year to year.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: Ironically, Status of Women—

The Chair: Hilla, excuse me.

Did either of the other two persons want to respond?

Ms. Nancy Cameron: I'd like to respond.

As I said, we have one position at Crabtree, and it took a long time to get the funding for that, even though all the staff are working on this issue. They may be funded to do something else—maybe work on FASD or something—but because this is so prevalent in the lives of our clients, they're all doing it.

It's not only the moneys for the position; it's also that the staff themselves need support. So it's money to provide that so they can keep doing this work, because they're at real risk of compassion fatigue—if they haven't already experienced it. I think we're losing key people in this field, key women in this field, because of that.

I also think they need to keep it in order to continually be trained. Even to come to an event like this takes us away from our work and from a large number of clients we're not able to provide services for at this particular time. So definitely funding is an issue.

As I said, I've been working with funders for a very long time, talking about women and violence every which way there is to talk about it. I don't know what it takes to convince those who will fund us that we need the funding. I think it's been said every which way it can possibly be said.

The Chair: Lisa.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: What I know and understand about the funding for the organizations I work for is that we rely mostly on donations, on private funders. We all have to scramble for the funding out there that is available for aboriginal programming around preventing violence, and that creates division in our system.

That's what I'd say about that.

● (1325)

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds. Is there any one of you who would like to speak to the question on Sisters in Spirit that Ms. Neville asked?

Ms. Hilla Kerner: I think there is consensus among women's groups all over Canada about the importance of the project. There was a breach of trust when the Minister for Status of Women allocated the money to the RCMP instead of giving it to NWAC. There is consensus all over the country among feminists and women's groups.

The Chair: Darla, did you want to say something about that?

Ms. Darla Laughlin: I think there was a question put out there on how we can better assist women to approach institutions. I think one of the key responsibilities being missed here is that we need to understand that there isn't a very good track record, first of all. There needs to be some type of liaison work that is absolutely and completely clear about what the role of those institutions is when they see aboriginal women.

We have young aboriginal women who are single parents, who are really unable to speak to their social workers because they fear the worst, especially our teen moms who are constantly being diagnosed—misdiagnosed, I might add—with FAS and ADD and various mental illnesses. They might be suffering from the effects of the legacy of residential schools, and they are misdiagnosed as having mental illness and their children are removed. So I think having some sort of liaison in a traditional aboriginal values-based—

The Chair: So you're suggesting liaison workers of some kind?

Thank you.

Now we go to Madam Demers from the Bloc Québécois.

Merci. Welcome.

Nicole, begin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ladies, thank you for joining us this afternoon.

First, I would like to tell you that your document was very powerful, Lisa. At times, while you were reading it, I felt embarrassed. At other times, I felt very concerned, as, for instance, when you said that we talk a lot, but we do little. That's true. You are completely right. Darla, you said the same thing, and it's the truth.

Why are we touring the country again? Why are we asking questions about the living situation of aboriginal women when we are very familiar with it already? We know what kind of violence is committed against women. We wanted to go on this Canada-wide tour because we did not want only two or three groups to come to Ottawa to talk to us about the situation, and then to be told that those two or three important groups spoke on behalf of many aboriginal women, but did not represent all of them. We wanted to go on site, so that people like you, who represent smaller groups, could talk to us about the situation. Having done this, we will be able to return to Ottawa and show that all these women testified and said that this is indeed the situation Canadian aboriginal women find themselves in.

We wanted to make sure that it was not only the Native Women's Association of Canada, Femmes Autochtones du Québec and aboriginal leaders that described the situation to us. All aboriginal women have spoken to us about this situation and asked us to do something about it. Your voice is the most important one because it is the voice of all aboriginal women. That is why we are here today.

Ms. Cameron, you say that there have been no changes in the last 30 years. Why do you think that is?

I also wanted to ask you whether you think that Canada's signing of the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and officially asking forgiveness for the events surrounding the Indian residential schools will change anything. We have not seen any changes over the last two years, and I am wondering why.

● (1330)

[*English*]

The Chair: Nancy.

Ms. Nancy Cameron: I think there are many reasons why things have.... I wouldn't say entirely that they have not changed, but they have changed very little. I still see an existing attitude towards women that has not changed, an attitude towards aboriginal women that has not changed, systemic beliefs about how to treat women that have not changed, and policies and practices that have not changed. There are many things. What I see is that there have been attempts to make those changes, and then other things happen that pull us back.

Because the numbers of women who are being abused are still enormous and unacceptable, because women continue to live in poverty—if not more poverty and more extensive poverty—because there are still difficulties in the justice system, and because there still are children being removed just because of systemic beliefs or oppression of women as I see.... I mean, some things have improved, yes. Back when I started doing this work 30 years ago, there were different views on child care, and there weren't as many transition houses. We have more shelters now. Maybe we have more treatment centres. Maybe it's more common to have more women who have post-secondary education. Some of those things, though, still exist, and they exist in large numbers within the aboriginal community, and I think that absolutely has to improve, as the women have spoken to here.

Even though those things are improving, there is still abuse of women. There still is.

Ms. Darla Laughlin: I'd just like to speak to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. One of the important things that's going to have to happen in order for that declaration to do aboriginal women any justice and to be helpful is that committees such as yours have to refer to it when you're speaking on our behalf, and you have to use that document. Although it's not a legal document, it should be.

As an aboriginal woman, I think about the so-called apology we received. Yes, we received an apology that many horrific things happened through the colonization process and the residential schools, but the reasons why were negated. No one said in that apology, “We did this because we wanted to steal your land.” That was negated. Those are the things that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is going to bring forward. And until Canada airs its dirty laundry about what's really happening in this country, it's going to be very difficult. We're here to fight that fight and we're not going to go away. We have young people who are coming right behind us who are going to continue this work.

So I implore you to use that document for our women in a good way.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Darla.

We have 30 seconds, if someone wants to make a quick....

Hilla.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: Yes, I want to say that I don't have much hope. I'm joining Darla's call, because the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in November 2008, in an unprecedented step, called on Canada, within a year, to conduct a national public inquiry about the missing and murdered aboriginal women, and to raise the welfare rate. Nothing has happened. It's been almost two and a half years since then.

Unless there is strong pressure from Parliament and members of the public, those UN convention calls are useless.

● (1335)

The Chair: Thank you, Hilla.

That's it.

Now we move on to Ms. Grewal for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The funding issue came up, so I would just like to let you know that since 2007, through Status of Women Canada, the government has funded about 150 projects, totalling almost $28.7 million, for work to eliminate violence against women. We are also supporting prevention, providing shelters on reserves, and funding victim services.

We want to ensure that the justice system meets the needs of aboriginal women and their families. Are there any legal reforms, legislative changes, that you can recommend to this committee?

Ms. Hilla Kerner: I'm sorry, I want to correct you. It's true that all the services—

The Chair: Hilla, I'm sorry.

Have you finished with your question, Madam Grewal?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I have finished with my question.

The Chair: All right. Just put your hand up if you want to speak, because I should really keep things flowing nicely so that one person doesn't answer all the questions.

Hilla, go ahead.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: I'm sorry. I come from a culture where you just speak.

It's true that all these services have been funded by Status of Women Canada, but in the last year Status of Women Canada refused and rejected all applications from women's groups and women's services who are for advocacy. It means there is no federal government funding for women's groups that want to advance the status of women or to advance women victims of male violence. Those services that have been implemented and funded cannot replace the work of women's groups seeking advocacy and equality.

Ms. Nancy Cameron: I'd just like to add that $28.7 million—if you look at the cost of running our programs—is a very small amount of money to be adequately supporting the staff in doing these programs. With that amount of money, it typically means that the woman herself is not going to be making a very high wage, and there wouldn't be many additional dollars for training or for resources that would go along with that kind of money. So even though it sounds like a large amount of money, when it's divided up, it isn't much money for the various programs.

The Chair: Thank you, Nancy.

Darla.

Ms. Darla Laughlin: I'd just like to say that I'm happy to hear that there is money coming forward for aboriginal women's programming. But I'd also like to add that both Vancouver Rape Relief and WAVAW, the only rape crisis centres in Vancouver, serving a very large population, have not received any funding. This is one of the major cities in Canada, so that speaks for itself, I think.

The Chair: Thank you, Darla.

Lisa.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: About those moneys, did you say they were for on-reserve or off-reserve groups?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: On-reserve.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: So on-reserve; okay. There are many.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I have one more question. We have been hearing about violence against aboriginal women for only a few years now. Previously the problem seemed to exist only in the background.

Why is this the case? Why have we been hearing about this and talking about violence against aboriginal women for only almost half a dozen years now?

The Chair: Lisa, and then Darla.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: In terms of the $28 million or so that's been divvied up between over 500 bands across the nation, what I want to say is that those are the band-aid solutions that we don't want, right? We're looking for structural change, attitudinal change, socio-political change. That's what we're hoping the moneys would be invested into, as well as the shelters on reserve and off reserve.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: No, what I mean is that this problem has existed there for quite a long time. Why have we heard about this problem only for the past half a dozen years? This has been there for a long time.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: What problem?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: The problem of violence against aboriginal women.

● (1340)

The Chair: Go ahead, Darla.

Ms. Darla Laughlin: Well, there's been violence against aboriginal women in this country for 500 years. The reason behind why we are, I guess, only hearing about it....

I've heard about it my whole entire life, being an aboriginal woman, and my ancestors before me heard about it. I think there's been a huge blanket lifted off the eyes of some of our Canadian people. I think what needs to happen is that there needs to be mainstream education and curriculum in the high school education system that portrays a real portrait of colonization, the residential school and its legacy. This legacy is going to go on. People are going to suffer from the legacy of the residential school for a very long time.

Aboriginal women have been victims of violence for decades. This is not a new subject. Unfortunately, the media do not portray what's happening in our country. Most aboriginal issues are swept under the carpet. Most people don't hear about them. It's no secret that women were murdered and went missing in Vancouver, in this city where we sit right now, for decades. The police knew about it. People knew about it. Politicians knew about it. But it wasn't until a non-aboriginal woman went missing that something was done about it.

So once again, the responsibility rests within our government to take action and to let the citizens of this country know what's going on in this country with aboriginal people.

The Chair: Thank you, Darla.

We have 30 seconds left. I'll go to Hilla, and then I'll go back to Lisa.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: I've been here five years. I cannot speak to why it was not an issue on the government agenda before that. It's just ongoing colonizing and indifference towards aboriginal women. It's just a symptom.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: You know, as far back as I remember.... I think I was born when Helen Betty Osborne went missing—the violence against an aboriginal woman in northern Manitoba. Then of course there was an inquiry as a result of it.

So violence against aboriginal women isn't new. It's always been on the agenda. I think it's gotten louder as a result of aboriginals standing up.

Prior to that, in terms of media attention and so forth, aboriginal peoples weren't getting that very much—unless you wanted to prove a stereotype—i.e., "Look how sick these people are. You think you've got it bad? Check out this." There were those kinds of things and attitudes, right?

I just think that maybe the Conservative government is just now open to hearing about it, because violence against aboriginal women has always been on the agenda. It has always been very, very present. This is how—this is *how*—Canada was built. You had to oppress us. You had to kill us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we will move on to Ms. Davies for the NDP.

Ms. Libby Davies: Thank you very much.

First of all, to all of you, thank you for coming today. You're major organizations in our city, so the work you do is really important.

I'm very tempted to continue the discussion on the funding side because I think we could spend hours on that, on the lack of advocacy funding and the lack of core support, but I also want to switch gears just so we get as many sorts of responses and issues into the record as possible.

But I did want to say that I really hear the sort of level of cynicism that there is, right? You know: another committee, another parliamentary hearing, and another report.... This goes on and on. I think that's partly our challenge. How do we deal with that? I mean, we're all people who want to see change, and yet we're dealing with this culture of denial. We're dealing with these huge systemic issues that just go on, and it's about how you tackle that. I just wanted to put that out there.

The question I have—because a number of you raised it—is about the relationship with law enforcement, because that is so important. It's not the only thing, but in every single group that I've ever talked with about violence against women, particularly aboriginal women, the police come up: how they respond, how they don't respond.... For sure, there are good individual officers out there. We've met them. There are individual people within those systems who are doing their very best. But there is a bigger issue about law enforcement, and we do have a couple of fairly senior RCMP officers speaking later, so we will have an opportunity to actually question them.

There's a question I have for you, though. You guys are very active in Vancouver. What kind of official relationship do you have with the police? Is there any sort of ongoing process whereby you can actually bring forward issues of an overall nature about how law enforcement is done to deal with this whole issue of women who are already victims being re-victimized, in effect, or being charged with whatever because they're poor, because they're sex workers, or whatever their situation?

Is there any relationship you have? Now, you're all in Vancouver, so I presume that mostly it would be with the Vancouver Police Department, and of course outside Vancouver it would be the RCMP, but it's just such an important element in what we're talking about, the relationship with law enforcement overall. I just wonder if (a) you have any experience, and (b) if you have any suggestions about what you want to see changed that we can focus on, pick up, put in the report, and make sure we follow up on.

● (1345)

The Chair: Lisa.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: I wonder what the implications are of answering that question.

Ms. Libby Davies: None, I hope.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: Well, I don't know...I'm just a bit of a conspiracy theorist.

Ms. Libby Davies: Say what you feel comfortable saying. I just want to give you an opportunity to say what you think needs to be done.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: Battered Women's Support Services is a member of the Valentine's memorial march committee. Members of the committee, other community members, and organizations have meetings with the VPD around those issues, questioning their structure, the police structure, the jurisdictional issues, and the continued and ongoing violence against women in the downtown east side and existing Vancouver areas. It's a slow process and it's new. They're trying to build trust with us, and I don't know... accountability.

The Chair: Lisa, can you keep speaking into the microphone? When you turn aside, we don't hear you at all.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: Okay.

Do you have anything to say...?

The Chair: Hilla?

Ms. Hilla Kerner: Libby, I want to encourage you to ask those officers who will be coming today, because on Friday the VPD had a big community meeting, and they tried to brag that only in the downtown east side there were 666 reported cases, and they showed what happens before they get before the courts. I believe only 50 cases were actually brought before a judge. So I don't know how they think it's going to be a positive spin on their work.

The rate of dropout, before those complaints go before judges, is enormous. First and foremost, how many women are complaining, and how many actually get justice in the criminal justice system?

The second point is there is no civilian oversight of police, and it's crucial in a democracy. It's crucial for civilians to have an ability to oversee police work. The two police complaints commissioners have nothing in their reports about violence against women, although we know that women's groups and victims of male violence, including the Battered Women's Support Services and Rape Relief, are constantly filing complaints. They have no echo in the police complaints commissions.

We have great expectations from the Oppal commission. We're hoping it will bring many women's groups standing. I think the decision will be made next month. You have the framework agreement on women's equality, male violence against women, and state responsibilities, through the police, to protect women.

● (1350)

Ms. Libby Davies: Do any of your organizations have—

The Chair: I think Darla wanted to say something.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: We don't have a formal relationship. We're not interested in that.

Ms. Darla Laughlin: I'd just like to add that I think it really comes down to the responsibility of the policing forces to find out exactly what it is we do and how we do it. I think there needs to be more than just sensitivity training on a cultural value. There are some real losses in understanding throughout the judicial system as well, which are totally and completely cultural.

We have traditional youth who are bearing their banners and wearing their headbands in society, in Vancouver, who are being harassed as gang members. These are kids who were born into ceremony, who are using their headbands for ceremonial purposes. So the police are not even aware of those types of understandings, that knowledge. It's really important that there be a critical understanding of aboriginal people as distinct.

I'm Cree and Ojibway, and I have no idea about the ways of Coast Salish people, as far as my own inherent rights go. So understanding that every aboriginal women who is in the downtown east side, or anywhere in Canada, for that matter, is not going to have the same belief systems, or understandings, or ways of being is crucial.

This is unceded aboriginal territory. The people who belong here have a right to be understood. That's not happening, and it is creating further violence.

We have many instances. I run two youth groups, and out of those youth groups, 90% of our aboriginal youth females have been dog-bitten, by dogs from the RCMP and from the VPD. I think there needs to be much more work done than just sensitivity training. I think it's the responsibility of the RCMP and the VPD to look for that training.

The Chair: Thank you. That's the end of that round.

We're going into a second round, and it's going to be a five-minute round. I would like to ask everyone to please work within the time. We've gone a minute over time on every one. The point is that we have other people waiting to come in to other panels. As we bump the panels later and later, it's not fair to the people who have been waiting. So can I ask you, please—and I know the sensitivity of the issue, and I'm fully aware and understand the emotions behind it—to try to be as concise as you possibly can with your questions and answers. Thank you.

Now we'll go to the second round. The second round is a five-minute round, as opposed to the last one, which was a seven-minute round. I will begin with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: I just quickly want to ask something.

Darla, you made a comment at the end that 90% have been dog-bitten. What does that mean?

Ms. Darla Laughlin: I mean by police dogs.

Hon. Anita Neville: Oh, okay. Thank you.

I have a comment and then a question.

My colleague across the way asked why we haven't heard a lot about it. I would beg to differ. I think the issue has been very much on the table for a long period of time, and I would say that it's amazing that this is getting as much play at the moment, given the lack of funding for advocacy groups right now, and the fear, on the part of many organizations who are funded by the federal government, to speak out for fear of further retribution. So I thank those of you who are here for being here, and I think this issue has been there at various levels for a long period of time.

I want to ask you something that we haven't quite addressed here. In the late nineties there was an inquiry done by the Minister of Justice at the time. People were involved and met with aboriginal women and dealt with the issue of violence against aboriginal women. I was told by one wise woman who was very intimately involved in these discussions that the reality for many aboriginal women is that incest and violence in their homes is viewed as a norm of life. You may choose to differ with that.

My question to you is this. Is that still the experience that you have—or perhaps not at all—that aboriginal women have come, over the years, to accept violence and incest as how a family operates? If so, what do we do? And if not, good.

● (1355)

The Chair: Darla.

Ms. Darla Laughlin: First of all, I'd like to just state that I don't think that incest and childhood sexual abuse is normal in any family, aboriginal or otherwise.

Hon. Anita Neville: If I can interrupt you, Darla, it's not that I'm saying it's normal, but it is viewed by many to be the norm in their....

Ms. Darla Laughlin: Does this happen? Absolutely, it happens, and we know this is one of the prevalent pieces that was handed down to the aboriginal people of this country through the legacy of residential schools. I think those are the things in that legacy that need to be addressed.

Is there sexual assault that happens within aboriginal families? Absolutely, there is. Is it the norm? I don't know the stats for that, and I don't know how we would even begin to collect stats for that, with it being such a sensitive subject. However, I think these are the issues.

As far as counselling, I can say that 95% of my clients have suffered from childhood sexual abuse due to the legacy of residential schools, and this is why we're here asking for assistance. This legacy is so detrimental to an entire nation of people that I can't even describe how I feel about the need.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Lisa.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: In response to the normalization of sexual abuse and other forms of violence that happen in our intimate family homes, I don't think it's.... Of course, that extends into our community and so forth. I think the problem is that we talk around it being a normalization, but I think the mechanisms of denial within society, within that abusive relationship, within the families and so on—the denial and the oppression of the issue of that sexualized violence and sexual abuse—are the normalization. I don't think we walk around thinking it's normal. I think how we deny it becomes normal and how we talk about it becomes normal. When we talk about it being a normalized state, then it becomes normal, but it's not.

The Chair: Thank you, Lisa. We are now past five minutes, so I'm going to go to Ms. Cadman.

Ms. Cadman for the Conservatives.

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Thank you very much.

I would like to know who is the main abuser of aboriginal women. Is it aboriginal men? Is it white men? Is it aboriginal women? Who?

The Chair: Dona, have you finished?

Ms. Dona Cadman: I think you also have to get over it a bit, in a way. Yes, you were wronged, very wronged. People have apologized. What more do you want?

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: A change in legislation, justice—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Lisa. I'll come to you in a minute. We have to let Dona finish.

Ms. Dona Cadman: That's fine. Go ahead.

● (1400)

The Chair: Please put up your hand, because the person with the fastest voice gets in and we have to try to let everyone have an answer. I know we haven't heard from Leslie and Nancy for a long time.

Lisa, go ahead, and then Darla.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: I apologize for my fast voice.

We're not victims. We just know the truth. These systems are still in place. Canada still has legislation from way back still in place. We still live under the Indian Act, which dictates a lot of our lives. It dictates who is going to dictate in future generations.

We live and function within those parameters. We're not victims. We're not victims of it. We exist, and we exist and we live within it. We live in poverty. We live in marginalization. We live to be able to sit here and talk about the issue. The issue is that Canada marginalizes aboriginal women. Colonization is violence upon our mother, the earth, violence on all our nations, and violence on us.

As I just said a little while ago, we had to.... The settlers at that time had to remove us from our positions in our communities in order for them to be able to step in. It was done in many ways.

We're not victims. I just want you to know that when we talk about the Canadian government being the main perpetrator, it's not that we are standing here talking like we can't get over it.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Okay, yes, but every time a government changes, it's that government's fault; it's the next government's fault. So where are you starting from? Are you starting from the beginning, or are you blaming us now?

The Chair: Darla.

Ms. Darla Laughlin: First of all, what I'd like to say is that I haven't gotten over it yet because it's continuing on from government to government. What I'd like to see is some attitudinal change from people who tell me to just get over it. It's not over. There has not been change. People are not getting what they need in order to heal, and that's why we're here today. We're here to talk about what it is that we as aboriginal women need.

We need a government.... There have been many governments before you and before your government. We need a government that is willing to stand up and say enough is enough. We need a government to stand up and say it's not all right to sell aboriginal women and to see them missing and murdered. It's not all right for us to take their children away from them. It's not all right for us to continue running our government on the backs of their resources and not help. This is what we're here to do today.

We're not saying that we're blaming your government. We are blaming the governments in general of this country for not standing up before 2011 to take notice of a 500-year-old problem, for women who have been murdered and missing for over two decades, for families who are in the middle of a breakdown, for ministries who do not support women to live in a position where they're not forced into poverty, for the children of these women in rural communities. We have reserves in this country that don't have schools for children, that don't have clean drinking water for their children to drink, for nursing mothers to drink.

These are the issues we're talking about. This is what's important for this committee to understand. It is not okay to say get over it, because we're not over it.

The Chair: Hilla.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: Yes, I think men are committing violence against women. White men, men from all kinds of races, aboriginal men—they are killing, raping, and beating aboriginal women. But the government is colluding. As long as the government is providing women with impoverishing welfare rates, it's handing women on a platter to abusive men. As long as the government is not demanding from the criminal justice system that it hold men accountable, that it stop the violence through thorough investigations and through convictions, it's colluding in male violence against women.

We cannot remove the responsibility from each individual man who commits violence, or from the community for tolerating it, but the government plays a huge role by enabling it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I will go to Madame Demers.

Nicole.

● (1405)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I was wondering about something. Out of all the countries in the world where members of first nations live, is there one where they have succeeded in living together in harmony, in recognizing first nations and in granting them the status they deserve?

Have your brothers and sisters in the United States succeeded in having their rights recognized? If so, how did they achieve that? Could we find inspiration in what has been done by other peoples, other nations, and do the same?

Do you have an answer to this question?

[*English*]

The Chair: Lisa.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: No, I don't have an example. But we can be the first.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: *Oui.*

[*English*]

The Chair: Did anyone else want to tackle that?

Hilla.

Ms. Hilla Kerner: Of course, my country, Israel, is doing the same, through its occupation, to the Palestinian people. The problem is that the colonialist force still has the power, and there is no international accountability, because of the alliances between the strong, powerful countries, to stop it.

So it will only come from the people, from the elected people in a democracy, to force their nation to stop having their alliances—between Canada and Israel, between Canada and the United States—and to stop all forms of occupation and colonialism.

The Chair: Darla.

Ms. Darla Laughlin: I think we're in a place in the world right now where we're coming out of a place of oppression and colonization throughout the world.

Although I think Lisa's absolutely right—Canada being first would really be something—I think we're a long way away from being in a nation that is healed from years of oppression. But I think there is a really good opportunity at present for that work to really have a great start and a solid foundation as long as the people are listened to.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: In Canada, women account for 52% of the population. Could we begin by convincing them that all women must stand together? Could we begin to build bridges?

What do you think about this, Lisa?

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Nancy.

Ms. Nancy Cameron: I think we have been doing that. We have been doing that. My grandmother did that. My grandmother was a close friend of Nellie McClung's. I think we've been doing that for centuries, getting women to come together and build those bridges. We're still dealing with the issue of women and violence, or women and abuse.

Again, I go back to the historical.... Your question earlier was about why that's still happening. And it still is. For me, anyway, it's not just....

Yes, women have been coming together. Grassroots organizations have been doing the work. Women around the world have been doing it. But there has to be work done at other levels, at the government level, with education, with advocacy, with changes in policies—on all levels, from the ground up.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: You would like there to be more women in positions of power, right?

[*English*]

Ms. Nancy Cameron: Yes, absolutely: more women in positions of power, more women who have more of a women's voice, and, for those women who are sitting in those positions, that the solidarity is there as well in terms of how they're viewing the issue and how they're looking systemically at how these issues came about.

The Chair: Leslie.

● (1410)

Ms. Leslie Wilkin (Violence Prevention Worker, Crabtree Corner Community Program, YWCA of Vancouver): This is the first time I'm speaking. I apologize for coming in late.

In terms of women joining in solidarity to end violence, I was just going to add that when we talk about the issue of violence against aboriginal women, the leadership has to come from aboriginal women themselves. White women can join as allies and support that, but they cannot take over the movement and cannot take over the activism, because historically that has happened as well.

Diluting the aboriginal perspective and the needs that aboriginal women are putting forward is not productive to the goal of ending oppression and racism, so non-aboriginal women would stand in that solidarity but would not be the leaders of that advocacy. It's about sitting on panels like this and really deferring that expertise to the aboriginal women themselves and to what they would like to see happen.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now have to move on to Ms. Davies for the NDP.

Ms. Libby Davies: Thank you.

Just briefly coming back to the question about an apology and what that means, I do think that probably we have an understanding about the systemic nature of violence. There are individual acts of violence, but I think we understand that it comes from a systemic base, so maybe we need to view an apology in that way as well.

To verbalize an apology and to have a formal thing is very important, but it has to be ongoing. I think that's what you're saying to us today: that an apology has to be acted out in terms of the programs, the resources, the laws, the ways things are...to deal with the inequalities, right? So it's also systemic.

Really, the question I have, because we're coming to the end of this session, is this: how do you feel about the future? Are you at a point where you feel that although things are pretty bad, there is a greater awareness, and therefore you feel optimistic about what might happen, say, within the next decade, whatever governments we're dealing with, whether they're civic, provincial or federal? Or are you actually feeling that it's going to get worse? I'm just very curious to know what your own sense is.

We're here and now; we understand the reality of what here and now is. But how do you yourselves see what the future might be in terms of how it's tough but it's going to get better because there is greater awareness? Or is it that we're going to sink down still more and things are going to get worse before they get better?

The Chair: Thank you.

Darla.

Ms. Darla Laughlin: Personally, I feel unsure about the future. Right now, with the apology...and I say that term loosely because to me an apology speaks to what happened and why, and no one told us why they did this. It wasn't spoken for, so I have a hard time with the apology, as do many aboriginal people I know.

However, with that apology comes reclamation, I guess you could say; there's supposed to be some kind of reconciliation happening. I wonder what that reconciliation is going to take; it took hundreds of years to get to the apology. So for me and in aboriginal circles everywhere I go, I think the question is, okay, we said we're sorry, here's 50 bucks, shut up now.... That's really the question. Is there going to be real sustainable programming that is going to heal the next seven generations of people who are coming...?

As we've spoken about, the abuses that are entrenched now in aboriginal families and that were placed there strategically are well ingrained. It's going to take a lot to undo...to decolonize the aboriginal people of this country. Decolonizing is a huge piece of work and we don't have nearly enough workers. We don't have enough funding. What we're dealing with now isn't even a drop in the bucket compared to what we're going to need to heal the young people and their families, to create healthy relationships, and young people who are fighting systemic violence that has been passed down generation after generation.... It's a huge piece of work.

So what do I see in the future? I guess that all depends on what all of you have to give and offer to the aboriginal people of this country and whether or not that commitment is true, is steadfast, and goes on for the long haul.

● (1415)

The Chair: Thank you.

Lisa.

Ms. Lisa Yellow-Quill: I have hope. I really believe in our people, aboriginal people, and I see them moving forward. I don't see us and don't want us to be these people living within programs, and program to program, sitting here at the table and asking for money all the time. That's not who we are. That shouldn't be. We weren't put here by the one who gives life to be asking for money from somebody else.

We have hope. I see, with a lot of the work we've done at the grassroots level, at different levels, that there's some movement, but the issues, of course, are always there. I always try to remember that the stronger we get the stronger the opposition gets too.

So I keep that in mind, but I'm really hopeful, because I know that I'm going strong in this, in my indigeneity, in my feminist indigeneity, in this movement, and that's still alive. So, yes, I have hope. I'm very hopeful.

The Chair: Thank you, Lisa.

Now we have finished this round. I'm sorry, but that went to six minutes. We're doing five minutes, guys. I'm really trying to give leeway here, but I can't keep adding minutes all the time. I can see my next panel sitting out there, ready to come on.

Before we move to see if we can do a third round, which I doubt very much we can do.... I sometimes don't ask questions, because if I think the answers are being given, I don't necessarily intervene, but there was a lot said at this panel that I want to reflect on, and maybe more so than by asking a question.

We've been across this country. If we've heard one thing over and over, we've heard that the root causes of violence stem originally from colonization. I heard Nicole asking if you can tell us of any country that's better. Well, in 1997 when Canada—and I was the minister in charge at the time—took to the Santiago conference the issue of aboriginal people and their rights as peoples, not population demographics, there was a lot of pushback from Latin American countries that also are “new world countries” and therefore have been colonizing their people.

We've seen Australia. We've visited. We've heard from New Zealand and from the Sami, etc. While I think there is a sense...and I believe you have spoken very movingly about the continuing systemic discrimination. It is systemic, and therefore, apologies are fine and wonderful, I think, but if you don't have the system changing...and the institutions of the system have to change. I have heard very moving testimony across this country that those systems have not changed, that the nice words aren't followed by respect, by empowerment, and by allowing us to move away from the sense that aboriginal people are some second class of people, some savage groups who are no longer capable of living with us and who are stereotyped as being all of the things you hear people stereotyping aboriginal people as—and who were here over 40,000 years before the colonials came.

So you are absolutely right, and I want you to know that this committee has heard from all over this country the testimony that you do not want to be patronized anymore; that you don't want people to study the issue anymore; that you don't want people to say okay, thank you, and then pat you on the head and move on; that it's going to take generations for the intergenerational harm to heal; and that healing does not occur right away. I have heard all of that, and I just want you to know that it has been extremely moving for many of us who have been here and for all of us who have heard it.

If the political will around this table will have effect, I can tell you that for the members—whether they are people who have been on the committee for a long time or people who have moved into the committee to participate just temporarily—that message in many instances has been given. But you are absolutely right: political will is what is necessary to change things. That is something this committee has always been very clear on in regard to what we want to say, but political will is what it's about at the end of the day. So for your issue of hope, I think the hope will have to be within the strength of our report and the political will to ensure the report is listened to.

I want to thank you very much for coming.

Lisa, you reminded me at the very beginning—you didn't actually say it to me, but you reminded me—that we want to thank the Coast Salish people for allowing us to meet here today on their territory.

Thank you very much to those of you who have come here today and for your very frank discussion.

Before you leave, we could do one more three-minute round if you want to say anything, but it means that I'm going to be brutal about the three minutes. All right?

Okay, I'm hearing....

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: If we do that, though, we don't have a lot of time, so why don't we suspend? For two minutes?

● (1420)

Thank you.

● (Pause)

● (1450)

The Chair: Order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this committee, the status of women committee, is studying violence against aboriginal women. In this study we have a parliamentary committee that is made up of members of all political parties. There are four political parties here. We are non-partisan in many ways, in which we really try to come together and as Parliament resolve some of the issues that we believe need to be resolved.

What we're looking at is the fact that violence against aboriginal women has been going on now for a long time, and that to be kind, with the best intentions of everyone....

Everyone has put various efforts into this—governments, institutions, and community groups. We haven't really been able to make a difference, and it continues, so we want you to talk to us a little bit about the root causes, about the extent and the nature of the different types of violence against aboriginal peoples.

We have been going into reserves. We've been going into isolated areas. We've also been going into cities. We know that the forms of violence against aboriginal women in isolated areas, on reserve, and in the cities have actually different elements to them and may require very different solutions. So we're also asking you for solutions. We hope you know that you can speak freely and that we will listen. We want you to be as frank as you possibly can.

We will begin with a presentation of five minutes from each person. I will give you a two-minute signal and then a one-minute signal so that you can wrap up. I know you might think that in five minutes you won't have time to say all your things, but that can be fleshed out within the question and answer period. You will get an opportunity, as we do in question period in the House, not to answer the question but to make sure you get your point in. You can at least make up for the time if you don't get any of the statements you need to make.

We do not yet have anyone from the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs. They were supposed to be here today. If they come late, we will welcome them and have them make their statement to us.

I just wanted to recognize in the audience Mabel Todd. Mabel is 76, and she was part of the Walk4Justice. She walked across Canada.

Mabel, would you stand up and let us all honour you?

[*Applause*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for gracing us with your presence today. We're honoured to have you here.

We also want to thank the Coast Salish peoples for allowing us to be able to have this meeting on their territory.

I'll begin with Russell Wallace, Warriors Against Violence Society.

I want to thank you, Mr. Wallace, because we don't often see a lot of men coming to speak at these issues. I know that men care, but it would sometimes be really nice to make sure that they want to stand up and be counted. So thank you for coming.

You have five minutes, so please begin. I'll give you a signal at two minutes and then at one.

Mr. Russell Wallace (Vice-President, Board of Directors, Warriors Against Violence Society): All right. Thank you for having me.

Huy chexw a, ha7lh kwakwayel. Welcome.

I sit on the board of directors for Warriors Against Violence. Actually, I got wrangled into this at the last minute, so please bear with me: I might not have all the facts on hand.

Warriors Against Violence started out in the late 1990s with Daniel Parker and Joseph Fossella. It grew out of a need in the community for men to gather together and talk about the violence that they were perpetuating themselves.

Both Daniel and Joe were abusive in their relationships before, and they came to a point where they realized they couldn't continue on, and their wives wouldn't let them, so they came together. They went through programs like Change of Seasons. In that, there was cultural sensitivity to finding ways of ending the violence. So after all these other programs finished, they formed Warriors and decided they had to keep programs going on for men.

Warriors Against Violence gathers together. One of the things they do is improve awareness through education, health promotion, and training. They also have the ability to provide counselling and support as needed. They train participants to be facilitators themselves, because since we are based in Vancouver, out of the Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, a lot of times facilitators are asked to go to different communities, a lot of remote communities. They found that the need to train facilitators was there, so they had programs through the Native Education College and also programs within Warriors.

Warriors encourages participants to respect traditional perspectives. The men gather together at a sweat lodge or they gather together to sing. These are ways to find, in some ways, a spiritual connection, but also a bonding together of men that you don't find in the city.

Warriors also believes in confronting violence through culture. That is like finding traditional responsibilities of men in the community and realizing that violence isn't one of the responsibilities we have, so we should end that.

We also believe that first nations women and children are basically held hostage by the current values and beliefs of the dominant society. That basically means there are different types of violence against women, and one of them is social, economic, and systemic violence. A lot of the women who come to the program talk about how social workers have threatened them that under certain circumstances their kids are going to be taken away. We encourage the women to document anything of that nature, and we provide support when needed.

We also want to address all the issues that affect and damage first nations families and communities, whether alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse...a lot of the social problems that have happened. There are also the effects of residential schools on generations afterward.

We meet together. It started out as a men's program, but we've expanded to include women, and now we have a youth program. The youth program is also getting younger and younger, so we're providing cultural events for the youth. Last weekend, for example, the youth went out and watched some eagles. A lot of youth in the city have no access to go to the land, so this is one way for them to see eagles in their natural environment.

We have also started specifically a women only program. So we provide the family program, the women's program, and the youth program, and we meet three times a week.

● (1455)

I believe that's all I have to say.

Thank you for your time.

Kukwstum'ckacw.

The Chair: Now I would like to ask Jane Miller-Ashton from Kwantlen Polytechnic University to speak.

Jane, welcome. You have five minutes.

Prof. Jane Miller-Ashton (Professor, Criminology Department, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, As an Individual): Thank you.

I want to correct this right away, because someone thinks a criminologist has arrived; it's my second career. I don't think I'm here in my criminology capacity, although I am teaching in areas related to the subject matter we're talking about today.

I think it's my experience...33 years with the criminal justice system, and my volunteer work now, both with the residential schools dispute resolution process and as a member of the Keepers of the Vision for the healing lodge for Corrections Canada and Okimaw Ohci in southwest Saskatchewan. The main files I looked after with CSC were related to aboriginal women, women in the corrections system, victims, and restorative justice.

That's just by way of background so that she doesn't hit me with the criminologist questions. I'm not self-identifying as an academic. I try to bring to my students the real-life experiences I've had in 33 years in this type of work, just to balance some of the academic. Of course the academic is important, but it's probably not my strength area.

Unexpectedly last year on January 3, my 60th birthday, an aboriginal woman who I knew in prison and had reconnected with in the community showed up on my doorstep with her young baby. She asked if my husband and I would take her young child while she sought in-patient treatment.

I have to start there, because my year has been about on-the-ground experiencing what I felt I knew, and did know, in many ways, through the work I've done over the years as a volunteer and as a paid employee of the government. But the last year has just affirmed for me the state that we are in, the brokenness of our system.

I don't want to imply that there are not good people working in the system. I was one of those people who tried hard, who tried my best, when I was in federal government. And I've seen over the last year.... We're now on our fourth worker. She's as lovely as the other three, and trying her best, but there are many, many struggles.

We did take this young child in so that this mom could try to rebuild from an addiction problem. Her history, if I were to describe it, would be familiar to you, probably, from what you've been hearing as you've travelled the country. My fellow witnesses today would probably say that her story sounds much like the stories that we know are tied up with the complex situation of violence against aboriginal women. Her background was violent as a child. She then inflicted violence on others, and she hurt herself as well. She spent most of her life in provincial, juvenile, and federal facilities. She's been crime-free since she got out a few years ago, but has struggled with the challenges of re-entry.

That's why I've decided to focus just a few recommendations around re-entry, because it's such a big topic that you're tackling, and I know that we're one of your last stops. You've heard it. You've heard from experts that have far more experience and expertise than I, so I just wanted to focus a little bit out of that lived experience this year and also my experience at the back end of the criminal justice system.

Recently I came across an aboriginal model called Circle of Courage, whose principles on native American child development became the basis for a book called *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future*, written by a native American called Martin Brokenleg and others. It began a movement that's showing success in working with young aboriginal youth at risk. I'd like to use its principles to frame a few recommendations that I'm just going to make about the back end of the system and aboriginal women coming out of the prison system.

The four principles are belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Belonging is the organizing principle in partnership cultures such as first nations. Mr. Brokenleg says that in an aboriginal culture, one feels significant by belonging, whereas in dominating cultures, one often gains significance by standing out from others, often seen as the hyper-individualism of our western society.

That makes me think of how when aboriginal women are returning to the community, they need the chance to create a sense of belonging to their culture and to the larger society that, through long incarceration, has become unfamiliar and unfriendly to them. They can't create places of belonging unless the larger society is welcoming. This means to me that a public that understands that a system of graduated release from prison is a key component of successful re-entry is important, as is a public that can shed its fear and its us/them mentality.

Collectively as citizens we need to have the courage to be more hospitable. As we do that, we will strengthen our bonds of community and our confidence to prevent crime in the first place.

Education programs are essential to this end. The media should be a major target of such campaigns so that they can educate others.

● (1500)

I can remember being on the planning committee for a conference called “Prison, Parole and the Media”. One of the aboriginal women prisoners we invited to be part of the planning committee said to one of the journalists, also a planning committee member, “I'm getting out on parole in a few weeks. Can you tell me if it's really as bad out there as your headlines suggest?”

One of the key ideas of the task force on federally sentenced women was that every woman should have a community support worker from the beginning of her sentence to the end of her sentence.

● (1505)

The Chair: Jane, I'm going to have to ask you to wrap up. You're now at six minutes.

Prof. Jane Miller-Ashton: I'll stop right there.

The Chair: We can flesh out the other parts—the mastery, and independence, etc.—in our questions.

Prof. Jane Miller-Ashton: Excellent. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'm going to go to Beverley Jacobs, former president of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

We're honoured, Bev, that you're here, and we welcome you.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs (Former President of the Native Women's Association of Canada, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

[*Witness speaks in Mohawk*]

I'm speaking to you in my language, Mohawk, from the Six Nations of the Grand River territory, and I told you my real name, which is Gowehgyuseh, which means “she's visiting”.

This presentation is actually dedicated to my cousin Tashina, who was missing and was found murdered in my own community. Her body was found in a shallow grave in my own community of Six Nations. She was also pregnant, and this is dedicated to her unborn child, to him as well. She had already called him Tucker.

Also, this presentation is dedicated to all of the missing and murdered aboriginal women in this country, their unborn children, their children, and their mothers, fathers, and their families. I have come to know many of these families across Canada. I still have very close relationships with them. I pray continually for justice for those who are still waiting for their loved ones to come home, or those families like ours who had to bury loved ones as a result of horrific murder and horrific violence.

I also am well aware of violence. I'm a survivor of violence as a child, as a young girl, and as a young woman. But I'm a survivor of violence, and I devote the rest of my life to ending violence in all forms.

I wanted to come here because the families I have been communicating with and still advocate for have concerns about this committee. It's about the mandate and the fact that there have been so many studies. The royal commission, inquiries, reports, Aboriginal Healing Foundation reports, women's organizations, aboriginal women's organizations, aboriginal organizations, inquiry reports, research reports, the Stolen Sisters report, the Sisters in Spirit report—all of them talk about root causes. All of them talk about the nature and the extent of the violence that's occurring on reserve and off reserve, in cities and towns and rural communities.

So we know there have already been millions of dollars poured into these research studies and thousands of recommendations that need to be implemented. How much did it cost for this committee to do this study? We don't need another study. We need action.

I believe that the House of Commons study and its process are creating more silence for aboriginal women, and this silence is violent.

Let me explain. The families of the missing and murdered were and are unaware of this process. When they did find out, they were unaware of the process to actually present. When they did attend some of your sessions already, they were unable to present because they didn't know the process. So they continue to be frustrated, not only about the continued injustices they face. They are frustrated and angry that a study is being done without their input, input that is well needed since they have direct experience to present to this committee. So I would respectfully request that this committee meet specifically with families of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

In my speech in response to the government's residential school apology, I said that respect is needed for aboriginal women, that action by government is needed. It's action that's needed. As I said, there are so many of those recommendations. It's about implementing those recommendations.

The impacts of residential schools are a root cause. They are a root cause of the cycle of violence that continues to this day. There are all types of violence—physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, sexual, racialized and sexualized—of which aboriginal women are direct targets, as were Helen Betty Osborne and Pamela George.

All of these issues of violence have been studied, and there have been tons of recommendations, as I said, so we need to look at the resources that are needed, or the resources that are actually being put into communities right now. What is working? What is not working? What is the type of study that has to be done in order to address it? What is really working?

● (1510)

If there are resources being put towards violence against women, why is there still a continuance of violence? Why are there still so many women going missing? Why are there so many women being found murdered? Where are the prevention services? Where are the educational resources?

Although I have total respect for this study that's being done and for hearing from the people who are coming here, what I do find is that there's no political will to put the resources where they are needed to actually end violence against aboriginal women. The resources are needed to revitalize traditional teachings about respect for women as life-givers, to revitalize the language where those teachings originate from, and to provide needed counselling and healing services both for men and for women to heal from violence.

We are dealing with violence internally from our communities, from our own men who are doing the violating. We are dealing with violence externally from white men and the impacts of racism and sexism—those women like Helen Betty Osborne and Pamela George. But today there is a momentum growing in grassroots communities, without government resources. We see Walk4Justice and these women who are here today representing Walk4Justice, Grandma Mabel being one of those, women who took on and have the strength to be able to do that grassroots work that needs to be done.

The families of the missing and murdered, as well as individuals, are healing and leading the charge to end this violence. But in order for there to be redress and reconciliation, with government actually taking some responsibility for the root cause of violence, which is residential schools—and which they have accepted that they have done to our people in this country—government must provide those resources.

There are specific needs. There are different needs for families of the missing and families of the murdered. Resources for the families of the missing are resources for searches, rewards, travel when families receive tips, publicity, healing services, loss and grieving counselling, and family gatherings. Needs for resources for families of the murdered are for assistance in court, knowledge of the process, victim services with training on cultural knowledge about what is needed for families, healing services resources, and family gatherings.

I'm going to end there, but the one final recommendation I have is that if this government really wants to make a change to end violence against women, what it can really do is actually enact legislation, as they did in the United States, to end violence against women. I'm going to end there.

I really want to make sure as well...there is also a direct relationship in violence against women and violence that's occurring to our mother, the earth. Until we as human beings recognize that there is a direct relationship, we will continue down this road, to the destruction of all life. I know that I have made the commitment to end this violence for my future generations. Are we all thinking seven generations ahead?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Bev.

We'll hear from Janine Benedet, as an individual.

Prof. Janine Benedet (As an Individual): Hi. My name is Janine Benedet. I am a law professor with the faculty of law at the University of British Columbia, where I teach, among other things, criminal law and the law of sexual assault.

I've been researching the legal treatment of different forms of male violence against women for about 15 years. My current research focuses in particular on sexual violence, including prostitution. I use my research and the public platform that my position gives me, in alliance with a number of women's equality-seeking and anti-violence organizations, both locally and nationally. So I am very pleased to take part in these hearings on the very important issue of violence against aboriginal women and girls.

I'm sure you have many experts appearing before the committee who are speaking to the scope of the problem, to its enormous cost for aboriginal women and their communities, and to some of the root causes of male violence against women. So while the brief remarks I have necessarily touch on some of those things, I want to confine my remarks to the committee in the main to the legal aspects, which is where my own expertise lies, both the law on the books and its application in the criminal justice system.

The first question that I think is worth addressing is whether we need new laws or tougher penalties. I heard with interest Bev Jacobs' suggestion about a violence against women act, in the sense that the statute exists in the United States.

In terms of the criminal law, it is always tempting, when faced with a crisis, to think that more severe criminal laws or criminal penalties are the answer. In fact, we have a fairly comprehensive set of assault and sexual assault laws on the books. The potential penalties for those offences are quite severe. Obviously the primary concern in this area is violence prevention, and we know that the criminal law is not a particularly efficient or effective means of preventing violence.

The reality is that the vast majority of acts of both physical violence and certainly sexual violence are never reported to any authority and never enter the criminal justice system.

The other preliminary point I want to emphasize is that I think the government, and the federal government in particular, has a real role to play in this area. That role goes well beyond the idea that more punitive measures are necessary to address this problem to being one of ensuring that women are able to realize their very fundamental rights to security of the person and to sex equality. And that's not done simply through the criminal law and through punishment of offenders.

I'd like to talk for a moment specifically about how sexual violence against aboriginal women is treated by the criminal justice system and where it seems to me that in the application of the laws there are some real causes for concern. The most important of those, I would say, is that we continue to see aboriginal women as offenders rather than as survivors or victims. We continue to see, in many jurisdictions, double charging in domestic violence cases, where the woman is charged along with the man who is assaulting her, or we see women who are charged for fighting back against men who have done them violence, including women in prostitution who are charged for assaults against johns and pimps.

We continue to see women routinely pleading out to lesser offences, offences they may not be guilty of at all, simply to avoid the threat of federal sentences or life sentences, depending on the offence with which they are charged. That, to me, is an area that deserves some urgent attention.

I am also concerned that the very important attention that we are now paying towards stranger violence, when we look at the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women, may result in a neglect of the issue of violence within aboriginal communities and its roots in a long history of regrettable government policies.

To return just briefly to the issue of sexual violence, we also continue to see a number of what I think are really disappointing trends in the way these cases are prosecuted when they get to court, if they ever do get there. We continue to see many cases in which aboriginal women are treated as consenting even when they are highly intoxicated or nearly unconscious. And we see a stubborn reluctance on the part of judges to invoke the bias sentencing provisions of the Criminal Code, so subparagraph 718.2(a)(i), which indicates that where the offence is motivated by factors including sex and race the penalty can be enhanced if those are aggravating factors—it is really difficult, if not impossible, to find any cases in which violence or sexual violence against aboriginal women and girls is treated as a crime of hate or bias. But that's exactly what it is.

● (1515)

The final point I would make is in relation to the question of prostitution as it relates to the issue of violence against aboriginal women. I think we continue to see, both in the media and, regrettably, in some public facets and government facets, violence against aboriginal women being dismissed as being about women's high-risk lifestyles: prostitution, hitchhiking, drug use, running away.

That really replicates a pattern that we've seen in the criminal justice system historically of blaming women for their own victimization, or at least locating the source of the violence in her rather than in the men who are inflicting it, and in the greater societal system of sex inequality. I think that's also something that is important and needs to be considered, as is the current trend to encourage the legalization of men's prostitution of women as a solution to aboriginal women's poverty and violence.

I'll end there and just say that I hope the focus of this committee, given that it's the status of women committee, stays on sex equality.

Thanks.

● (1520)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to go to the question and answer section. This is a seven-minute segment, and that includes the question and the answer.

Again, I'll just warn everyone that we have to stick to the time. We have another panel after this, and we don't want to eat into their time. I'm just going to ask you to be concise and address the issue.

We will begin with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

So many questions....

First of all, let me ask you, Janine, have you done writing on what you've told us here today so that we can further read your arguments? Perhaps you wouldn't mind letting the clerk know what those are so that we can access them.

Prof. Janine Benedet: Sure, yes.

Hon. Anita Neville: That would be great. Thank you.

I'm going to ask you the question that Jane thought I was going to ask her. I asked it this morning, and I don't know whether you can help me or not. The government has implemented a number of crime bills, most of which have mandatory sentencing. I've asked for a gender-based analysis on those bills and the impact on them, but we know that a disproportionate number of women who are incarcerated are in fact aboriginal women.

Do you have any knowledge of whether those women—and I think you referenced this—have been responding to the violence against them when they then have been perpetrators of violence, and then have been apprehended and incarcerated? Have you done any work on that?

Prof. Janine Benedet: I'm not a criminologist, so I have to rely on the work of others in that regard. There's certainly lots of research, and Bev has mentioned some of the studies, to indicate that women who are serving federal sentences for crimes of violence almost exclusively, almost 100%, have themselves been victims of violence in the past. There's also some writing on the relationship between the sentencing of women and their violent history.

I mean, to connect that to the mandatory minimum sentence and the gender-based aspect of that.... The real concern with mandatory minimum sentences is that of course the only way to get out from under them, at least in jurisdictions where they're used a lot, is to finger somebody else, right? So eventually people go down the chain, trading off information about something else, and it's the people at the bottom who have no one else left to finger.

I can say with some confidence that aboriginal women are less likely to be at the top of that chain than they are to be at the bottom.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Wallace has to leave within...another 10 minutes?

Mr. Russell Wallace: Yes.

The Chair: So if you have any questions to address to him, please, can you just...finger him?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you. I'll come back in a minute.

Ms. Jacobs, prior to your arriving today there was some conversation about Sisters in Spirit, which I know you were instrumental in making happen. Can you comment, or are you willing to comment, on the impact of the government reluctance to fund the continuing work of Sisters in Spirit in terms of the research capacity and the ongoing work it's been doing, and the impact that will have on communities and women?

● (1525)

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Actually, I haven't been involved with NWAC since I left in September of 2009, but I do know that the intent of Sisters in Spirit was to have the families as the leaders, as the ones who were guiding the process. So we had family gatherings, but with the resources we had, we couldn't collect and be inclusive of families. Part of that process in gathering families, because it was such a network for them to be able to gather and talk about issues that were affecting them and their healing...it was such a good process for them to be able go through.

I'm going to talk about myself as a family member, as someone who was part of Sisters in Spirit, in the sense that this is going to continue whether that stops or not—families on the ground are going to continue their work. They've told me that they're going to do it anyway, so it's a matter of time and resources and what can be done for them. My recommendation in leaving a political organization is that it's not a political issue in the sense that political organizations can't fight for jurisdiction of the issue; it's a grassroots movement that's occurring. That's what I'm saying: it's going to happen anyway. But when it comes to the research and the policy development, that needs to continue. It needs to continue, and whether it's the families that do it themselves is the question.

The purpose of this study and being able to determine what the root cause is was the whole intent of Sisters in Spirit as well, and I think part of the study and part of the report identified that. It's difficult when I'm talking to families as a fellow family member about the need, because that's what it is; it's about the need in order for them to heal through what has happened to them and to us.

Having that experience of meeting with families now for...it is almost 10 years now since I started with Amnesty. Part of this whole issue is an acknowledgement that this cycle of violence that's occurring started from somewhere. It started from what I would say is contact, because of the disrespect to indigenous women in this country and because of the policies, the genocidal policies, of the Canadian government to totally eradicate.... How do you eradicate a population? You get rid of the women.

In order to deal with that, the healing is occurring in our communities. The resources are needed. I don't know what else to say.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will move on to Madame Demers.

Nicole, begin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Wallace, I would really like to know what the success rate of the program you talked about is and whether the program could be set up elsewhere.

● (1530)

[*English*]

Mr. Russell Wallace: I don't have all the figures available, but we do have a lot of men coming to the program who stay on for a number of years, even though they feel they've stopped the violence, but they want to help younger people. So to say that the success rate is at a certain level, we'd have to determine what that success is.

But yes, it is an ongoing thing, and men and women do come and go. But I know a lot of them have been there for 10 years, and they feel comforted by the peer counselling and comforted by their friends, and they feel compelled to help other people in that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Could the program be set up elsewhere?

[*English*]

Mr. Russell Wallace: Yes, we actually have a lot of men and women from other cultural groups as well. We also help people who are in same-sex partnerships.

The basis of Warriors is respect, respecting the family, respecting the traditions and beliefs of other people. So we include all of that in that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much.

Ms. Miller-Ashton, you did not have the opportunity to finish talking about the program for youth at risk. Could you tell us more about it?

[*English*]

Prof. Jane Miller-Ashton: *Merci.*

I was using it as a way to talk about concerns about aboriginal women. And I like those concepts of belonging and mastery and independence and generosity as concepts that are key in the aboriginal community. I think for women coming out of prison, which is the area I know best, these are key things we could build recommendations around.

We need to do the community piece better. And I say that not because I am necessarily in support or not in support of prisons but because prisons are a reality of our world. So coming back out is a reality of our world, and we need to do that better. We need to give women not only a chance for belonging, which I spoke to, but a chance for mastery. Mastery is in comparison not with others and standards and inflexible rules, but in comparison with their own past performance, so we have the flexibility to work with women in ways that work for them.

In the case of the woman I've been journeying with for the last year, she may have relapsed, but she is doing better than she was a year ago. So the system has to be able to find ways of acknowledging that, rather than re-victimizing her and putting her back in places where she can't recover and where she is further away from her child, and find ways of working towards acknowledging achievements that have been made, even if they've been small and incremental. That's one.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: So, you think that we would benefit from investing money in rehabilitation programs, rather than from putting more beds in prisons, as we are currently doing.

[*English*]

Prof. Jane Miller-Ashton: We know from the research that community-based programs work better. They do. And it makes sense, when you think about it.

That doesn't mean that I don't think people can learn some things in prisons. In fact, one of the ironic things is that it's in prison that aboriginal women sometimes find out about their culture for the very first time. I have seen some incredible things happen in prison when aboriginal women connect with our culture and elders. It's not the nature of prison that creates that opportunity; it's the spiritual people going in and the opportunity for sisterhood and gathering and belonging that so many of them have not had.

The problem is that when they gain that, and they do that transformation and that hard work on their own and with the support of their spiritual people, then we can't move it out. When they come out, it seems to fall apart.

I had an ironic situation where an elder suggested to me that we gather some of my students with women on parole in the community rather than me going in; usually I go in to the prisons with my students. I said sure, and we gathered at a friendship centre. My students had a wonderful experience, as they usually do. It was transformational for them in their thinking and understanding. But the aboriginal women on parole said, “Why can't we do this?” It was the first time they had gathered.

I'm not saying there are no programs—that would be just wrong, because there are programs—but we need more. The research tells us that if we offer those opportunities in the community, they'll work much better.

We need someone to accompany them. We keep talking about that notion of accompaniment. I read recently that they're suggesting in the health care system that there be somebody who's assigned to you once you're diagnosed with cancer so that you'll have someone who guides you through the system. We need that guide, but we really need to mean it. We've talked about it before, in corrections, but we need to really mean it and assign a guide. I don't think this has to cost a lot of money. It could even be volunteers. You need someone who is your guide, who maybe has been there, so that when you get out you have that guide to help you.

Then we need to create opportunities for the belonging and the mastery and the independence. That means the chance to have power. In aboriginal societies, power doesn't mean power over; it means power to run your own life. We need to create those opportunities.

● (1535)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Our tour will perhaps have some positive results. We have been meeting with groups that do extraordinary work. They work with people whose experiences have marked them and who are now getting better through their work with others. This will perhaps help to pass on the message and the ways of doing things to other regions. Listening to you brings back memories of places we visited, where incredible work is being done.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have to move on now, Nicole.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go to Mrs. Grewal for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really appreciate your concerns and the issues you have raised here today.

As a society, how can we break this cycle of violence to ensure that aboriginal women can live with confidence and dignity? What suggestions can you offer to help our government deal with this violence against women issue so that all of us can do still better?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: There is a lot this government can do. I mentioned a lot of it in my presentation.

One thing is language programs. This Conservative government cut language programs for our communities. Language is the source of our identity. It's the source of our teachings. It's the source of our laws, our traditions, and our culture. When we have language, it strengthens our spirit, which is part of the process of healing. In healing our spirit, the language is a part of that, as I said, and is part of those teachings.

There are very specific teachings in our culture about respectful relationships. I had to relearn those, because my grandmother, who was in residential school, wasn't able to teach me. It is part of the responsibilities of the women to teach our young people and it is part of the responsibilities of the elders in our community to teach us about how we have respectful relationships with each other when we begin a relationship. That cycle of violence will end when we're taught about those respectful relationships and when we're taught about self, about our identity, and where we come from.

As I said in my presentation, resources are needed, very specifically for women and men in our communities, so that's healing services. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was one of those foundations that was able to provide healing services and counselling services. Whether Health Canada can also be involved in being able to have those kinds of services continuously available to aboriginal women and men who are healing from violence....

There are resources needed for families of the missing, as I said, and families of the murdered. There are very specific needs for each of them. When you think about someone in your life who has gone missing, you want them to be home every day. You think about it every day. There's trauma every day. When you're in that traumatized life and trying to come to terms with the fact that someone has gone missing and they're not in your life anymore, you have loss and grief. Then, when they're found murdered, there's a whole process of grieving. Somebody you know is not in this lifetime anymore. But how? They've been murdered.

There's education. There's prevention. There's so much that can be done. We do know that these are occurring in our communities, but there's more that's needed.

I'll stop there.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you.

Russell, did you want to add anything to that?

Mr. Russell Wallace: I guess one of the best ways to end violence is to prevent it in the first place. One of the things within the Warriors is recognizing the patterns that we have in violence, and a lot of times that comes down to an emotional situation. We provide tools to recognize that, to recognize those triggers, like triggers to anger. What triggers anger? It could be something simple like a transit person not letting you on the bus or something. That triggers anger in you. It's about dealing with that anger in a way such that you're not being violent to the transit person or violent to anybody who's around you.

Finding ways through culture is a good way, too, connecting to the culture and knowing those traditions. It's about redefining what a warrior is, because warriors weren't the ones who created war. They're actually defined as people who look after the community and who look after their family and individuals, hence the name “Warriors Against Violence”. We're protecting our families. We're protecting our community in that way.

It also is about finding other tools, like giving yourself a time out when you know you can't handle a situation. You remove yourself from that situation.

There are a lot of other tools available.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Madam Chair, is there more time left?

The Chair: Yes, you have 30 seconds, Nina. You can do what you want to with that.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: That's fine.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Now we have Ms. Davies for the NDP.

I'm sorry—we've just received a message from the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs and—

Ms. Libby Davies: Are they coming?

The Chair: They're coming, but you'll have them on the next panel. We're trying to figure out what to do here, so I'm sorry if I was distracted.

Ms. Libby Davies for the NDP.

Ms. Libby Davies: Thank you very much.

Well, we've been hearing all day some really very incredible testimony and observations. I just wanted to come back to the way Beverley began, because I think everybody's raised it: another committee, another study.

I remember when I first got elected, the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples had just come out, and I started reading it. It was an amazing report, and there were hundreds and hundreds of recommendations. One sticks out in my mind. One of the recommendations was to hire 10,000 aboriginal health care workers. It sticks out in my mind because 10,000 was a nice round figure, and I just remembered it. I'm sure it was never done.

You really raise very huge questions, like here we go again. And we kind of all feel this as well. So it's another time around the table. It's another hotel. It's another hearing, and around we go. I could offer my own observations about why I think it keeps going around and around like that, but I'm interested in what you have to say as well.

One of the things that I wonder about is that when these issues come up, they seem so huge that people don't know where to begin. Even governments somehow don't seem to know where to begin. Money, as it relates to equality or inequality, is a big part of it. But I wonder if we need to shift to a much more local response. You kind of touched on that when you said no matter what we do, the grassroots stuff is going to happen. And that's what I see in Vancouver. The stuff that's coming out locally is the stuff that's really working. Maybe our role federally is to make sure there are adequate benchmarks and standards—and I know we're going to hear about CEDAW later. Maybe what we have to do is turn it back over to people. The more local, the smaller it is, in some ways the more manageable it is for people to take on.

I wonder if any of you could just kind of reflect on that. Maybe that's something we have to think about in our own structural responses so that we don't repeat this same cycle, the same kind of recommendations over and over again, and nothing ever happens. That's one thing.

The second thing is I am interested in the question of the law. We've kind of had two different points of view here. My own feeling would be that generally this simplistic idea that a new law, another law, is going to solve these complex issues is just absolutely not on. It's an illusion.

But, Beverley, you said you felt the U.S.A. enacted specific legislation, and you implied that you thought it was good, and it was working—I don't know—so maybe you could say a little bit more about that. I've always felt that the laws, as they are, are there, but it's what we do with them or how they're enforced or not. But it's also before that. It is the prevention. It is the issue of money and power and where resources go rather than the questions of law.

Anyway, those are just two points I'll put out, if you'd like to respond.

● (1545)

The Chair: Beverley, if you'd like to respond, go ahead.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: With respect to what you're talking about—local resources—right now I'm actually teaching a course at the University of Calgary on self-determination, indigenous governance.

I've always approached it by talking about the self as an individual within a community. That's where the healing begins, with the self and the self-esteem. Everything that needs to be healed with the self has a ripple effect on your family, on your clan, on your nation. So to me it is where the resources are needed. They're needed on that individual basis to deal with the cycle of violence and to end that cycle of violence.

Russell's organization, Warriors Against Violence, is an excellent example of the resources that are needed for the men, because that hasn't been happening either. The women are healing. There are a lot of women who are healing, but we still need our men to heal. We still need our men to understand the role they play as warriors, as protectors, because that's what they were, and that's what they're supposed to be.

So those kinds of resources are needed. We could do a study on the resources that are being provided: where they are going, how they are helping, and whether they are helping.

The reason I suggested this new law or this legislation was so it could be a way to begin those local resources. It could be a way to start the discussion that we continue to have and then finally have something that you could actually see that might make a difference.

I haven't done enough studying about the legislation—because it is new in the United States—as to when it was passed and whether it has made a difference. I don't know if Janine has looked up anything on that, but she could probably answer that. But I do know women in the United States who are dealing with the same issues. I just don't know whether or not they feel that the legislation that was passed has been any help. That would be another good study.

● (1550)

Ms. Libby Davies: Do we have time to hear from Janine?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Libby Davies: What do you know about the law, Janine, that —

Prof. Janine Benedet: One of the things about the Violence Against Women Act federally in the United States is that it names violence against women and gender-based violence as violations of federal civil rights in a system in which criminal law, of course, is state by state, so you don't have a unifying federal force.

I guess what I would say about this idea of local versus national is it may be very true that the actual programs that are happening, the most innovative, are at the local level, but there is no reason that the federal government could not pick five priorities—ending women's poverty, attacking attitudes that encourage male violence against women and the idea that aboriginal women are appropriate recipients of male violence and male sexual violence, promoting education, having some kind of a clearing house for funding, and setting standards and some kind of a program to encourage really good research about which programs are working and which should be expanded to other jurisdictions.

I know it seems like a big and overwhelming problem, but pick five things and do them. When you're finished, pick five more. At least then something would get done. That is what I would say.

The Chair: Thank you, Libby.

Now we're going to go to a five-minute round. That means five minutes for questions and answers. We will begin again with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Well, Janine, you anticipated my question. I was listening to Bev, who I've talked to frequently, and her skepticism about yet another study. But we are here, and we're in the middle of it, and we are a committee reporting to Parliament that the government has to respond to. So we have some...I don't know whether it's "clout", but certainly some standing.

I guess what I would ask each of you....

Let me back up. We were talking the other day about the report that we're going to put out. One of my colleagues from the NDP, Irene Mathyssen, who's not here today, said that it's going to be a very powerful report, we've heard so much. And we have heard so much.

So I would ask each of you to do a little bit of what Janine has said and give us your top three recommendations or top three priorities that we can put in. What would you see as the most important things—one, two, or three—that we can recommend as a committee? Because we will get attention.

If I can back up for a minute, Bev, while the process may be a cynical one, I do believe that the process raises awareness of the issue with legislators, and hopefully it has an impact.

I don't know who wants to go first.

Prof. Jane Miller-Ashton: As a person who is not an aboriginal person, I am interested in some recommendations that would be targeted towards non-aboriginal communities, the larger community, and the "us and them" mentality. I alluded earlier to the inhospitable climate that we have in our country, that starts with.... There are so many us and thems, but one of the us and thems is prisoners and non-prisoners. Very many of our prisoners are aboriginal people, and very many of the ones who....

In answer to your question, in Fraser Valley Institution right now 40% of the women are aboriginal, and 90% of those would have been sexually or physically or emotionally abused; 80% of the non-aboriginal women.

Those are our prisoners. They are feared by our society. They are shunned by our society. They are not welcomed back by our society.

So I would love to see a recommendation from this committee that puts a focus on education and public understanding and breaking down some of those "us-them" walls. If we can do that in a broader way, then we will definitely contribute to the situation of aboriginal women, because they are making up so much of that population.

● (1555)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Bev?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: I don't know what more I can say. I've already talked about my recommendations. The first is language.

Hon. Anita Neville: That's your number one priority.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: That's my number one priority: language.

The second is the healing resources for individual women and families of the missing and murdered.

Number three is resources specifically for families of the missing and murdered, at the grassroots level.

Hon. Anita Neville: Janine?

Prof. Janine Benedet: If I had to pick my top three, I guess, in no particular order, I would say tackle women's poverty, which I think is at the root of much of what is happening here. It's simply unacceptable for aboriginal women and children to be living in poverty in such great numbers in this country.

Number two, I would say focus on the over-incarceration of aboriginal women. It is fine to talk about, and I completely agree that we do talk about, what happens when they're released from prison, but the percentage of our inmate population that is aboriginal women is a scandal. It's completely inappropriate, and it just gets worse and worse and worse.

Number three—this is not an uncontroversial suggestion, but I believe it very strongly—I think Canada ought to adopt a Nordic model in relation to its prostitution law: public education, criminalization of johns and pimps, and extensive public funding for women so that prostitution doesn't become the social safety net for aboriginal women.

Those are my top three.

Mr. Russell Wallace: I would agree with everyone along the line. Probably my top three are all there.

I would reinforce the idea of providing resources for aboriginal men. A lot of them who are in prison have been abusive, and when they get out they're not provided any resources to become healthy again. They just repeat the same cycles over and over. We should provide resources inside the prison but also outside the prison, when they get out.

Ending poverty would be another good one.

Mostly, though, we should be providing resources for men who are abusive, and finding ways to get them out of that cycle.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, all.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you. That was good.

Now we go to Mrs. Cadman for the Conservatives.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Thank you.

You said that the cycle repeats itself. Now, breaking that cycle is going to be very hard. I'm not just saying for aboriginals but for all people: breaking the cycle is very hard.

Would it be wrong to maybe suggest parenting courses or self-esteem courses in high schools? Would this help everyone, or would it hinder?

Mr. Russell Wallace: Speaking as an aboriginal male myself, I didn't go through a lot of the traditional high schools that a lot of other people go through, so a lot of those resources wouldn't have been available to me, I guess, if I were going through high school.

We do find that a lot of the violence is emotional violence, and then the emotional violence becomes physical violence and then economic violence against the women. These are perpetrated by the men. So it's finding a way to actually end each of those kinds of violence against women.

Like I said, there are not a whole lot of resources for men who are incarcerated, so it's finding those that would help them overcome their anger issues. Men do have issues, whether it's residential school residue or it's actual abuse on themselves. There's a whole long list of things that aboriginal men have also suffered, but they take it out on the women or on their children. It's finding ways to end all of that.

It's never too late, because you're able to change yourself.

● (1600)

Ms. Dona Cadman: If they're incarcerated, could we give them—I don't want it to be like a lesson plan—some sort of help for them so they can gain more self-esteem so they could become better people, just for themselves? So much is open to you after that.

Mr. Russell Wallace: That's true, finding your own self-esteem, but also finding it within the community, so reaching out to a community, whether it's a cultural thing.... Like I said, we gather the men together to go to a sweat lodge and there we bond as men, or we sing together as men. We're finding cultural ways that have traditionally been there and that have been erased, basically, by colonialism. So it's trying to reach out to all the men in these ways. A lot of them have never sung a traditional song, or have never been to a sweat, or never experienced anything that was remotely cultural to them. So it's finding things they can go to and feel accepted, but also overcoming a lot of those issues.

There's that issue, but it's also providing them with tools, with counselling and peer support groups. If you get angry, then find a way to do something with that anger, rather than lash out.

The Chair: Does anyone else want to answer the question that Ms. Cadman posed with regard to self-esteem courses?

Yes, Beverley.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: It's more than that. It's more than a course in high school, but that would be a start.... No, it has to start sooner than that.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Well, in grade school? It has to start at home, but—

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Part of the difficulty is that schools themselves are not providing a safe place for a student, in the first place. That's what this is about, providing safety. So if they're not provided a safe place, whether it's in their own community or in the urban centre, having a specific course may be one part of many things that have to happen, because they're also talking about family dynamics. They're talking about a student living with violence.

I'm going to talk about myself. As a child I was violated, and school was a way for me to disappear from my family. It was an escape from what was occurring to me as a child. So school was a safe place for me. But in some places school isn't a safe place. So you can't put resources into a school unless you know that it's a safe place.

Again, if you're talking about self-esteem, you also have to talk about culture. You have to talk about where they come from, about their identity, and part of that—and I'll keep coming back to it—is language. We have an immersion school at home, where I come from, where they're teaching the language, but those who are coming out of some of those schools are still not in healthy relationships. So if they're not taught the teachings from the language about healthy relationships, to me, that is the core. Part of our teaching as we're growing up is that there are certain things that you're to do and certain things you're not to do. Our elders would teach us that responsibility from the time that you're a child and then when you reach your change in life. There are ceremonies for that. That teaches you about self-esteem, those ceremonies that are done during that time. If you're not taught those, you don't know.

So it's bigger than a little course in school.

● (1605)

Ms. Dona Cadman: I realize it's bigger than that, but we have to start somewhere. Where do we start?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: But I wouldn't start there.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Do we start at a younger age? Do we—

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: We start with language and we start with teachings.

The Chair: Thank you.

I wish to move on now.

We're going to go to Madame Demers, from the Bloc.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Beverley, I know you're a grandmother, and I know you love your grandchild, the one I know, very much. I know that you talked about the language program that existed before. I know that one of the language programs that existed before in some of the communities was for grandmothers to teach the language to the grandchildren, to the children in the community. I thought this was a great program, because not only does that permit the children to spend time with the grandmothers, but it also allows them to learn their identity through their language.

When you presented, you talked about going seven generations into the future. I think that's one of the most important beliefs of the first nations, thinking seven generations into the future. I think we all ought to do that, think seven generations ahead. Unfortunately, that program was stopped. I don't know why, because this was one of the most important programs.

What Mrs. Cadman was talking about I think is one of the most important things. If you want to instill self-esteem into a child, that's where it starts, with the knowledge of the child's identity. And that starts with his culture, his language, his traditions, and his values. It starts right there within his community with his parents, with his grandmother, his grandfather. That's where it starts. And if you can't have that, you cannot have self-esteem. So I think that would be the most important program to start again. That language program would be one of the most important ones.

Another one that would be important was a prevention program for the young girls who were getting pregnant and who were having a problem with alcohol, with fetal alcohol syndrome. That's also a program that I'm very sad I saw was cut back, because it's very sad to see young kids being born with that syndrome. It makes for more people in jail. More young people going to jail is also very sad.

So if you want to make recommendations to us, I would suggest you recommend to us to put those programs back.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Yes, maybe I'll recommend that.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Beverley.

The Chair: All right. You have a minute and a half, Nicole.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Do you want to add something to that?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Sure.

I totally agree with you, actually, about the grandmothers program and teachings in schools. If that's something that could be done to teach about self-esteem, then that's exactly what I'm talking about. But it's not coming from the Eurocentric education system; it's coming from our own education system, from our own teachings and our own languages. And whatever sources they can use to be able to revitalize that I think would be really helpful. That's the core of it.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'm going to go to Ms. Davies for the NDP.

Ms. Libby Davies: Thank you.

A lot of the witnesses earlier today, and I'm sure elsewhere across the country, talked about accountability and how important that is. We have the Oppal inquiry that's just beginning here in B.C., the public inquiry, and that's going to be a huge issue around the accountability. It strikes me that the same is true even of what we're doing here on this committee and whatever report that's issued. So I just wonder if you have any suggestions or thoughts about how we write in issues around accountability.

We're talking about cycles of violence. We're talking about systemic issues. We're talking about inequality and the growing gap between wealth and poverty; we're talking about colonization, residential schools—all of these cycles. So how do we begin to build some mechanisms around accountability into whatever reports come out or whatever recommendations there are, so we break that cycle of how these reports come out?

Beverley, what you said is really bothering me, because I think it's so true. So do any of you have thoughts about how we actually factor that into the work of the committee and what is actually produced? I'm sure it will be a fantastic report. I have no doubt of that. How do we ensure accountability, even within that report, about what is followed through? Any ideas you have would be helpful.

Prof. Jane Miller-Ashton: When I was on the task force on federally sentenced women, we had six suicides during the course of the task force. I remember a woman, Sandy Sayer, who ultimately committed suicide. She didn't have any hope for herself. She had hope for our task force, and she wrote a very poignant submission to us. One line in her submission has always stayed with me, and it was "In ten years, when another task force is on the prowl, when they look at what has been accomplished will they feel satisfied?" That has haunted me. She went on to say, "But more importantly, will we feel satisfied?"—we meaning aboriginal women in prison. That has haunted me, because of course I was part of building five new prisons in Canada, and I felt both proud and shamed by that.

So I think for me accountability means remembering what this is all about. This is about aboriginal women and aboriginal people in general, but aboriginal women specifically and their families and their men. So the accountability will be to them, and should be built right into the most disadvantaged—and I would say aboriginal women in prison are among the most disadvantaged.

So what can you build into your report that will speak to ways in which they can be part of that accountability? I know you already have a plan, because I read in some of the material that you are going to be doing this with aboriginal women, so I took that for granted. I'm saying actually build in what Sandy Sayer would have asked for, which is are we going to be satisfied? That would be my recommendation.

The Chair: Any other takers on that question to be asked? Janine, you look as if you....

Prof. Janine Benedet: I agree with that completely. That was exactly what I was thinking: that it's one thing to say we're accountable to the electorate at the ballot box come election day, but it's another thing to be directly accountable to the women who are most directly affected by what it is you're doing. You've heard from many of them, and there are many more who are experts, the front-line organizations who work on behalf of aboriginal women and on behalf of the women's anti-violence movement generally. I think it would be great to see some accountability to them. They have so much expertise and they do so much with so little. I think that would be really important.

Part of it is not just simply recommendations that can be ignored, but an actual requirement to report on what's been done—

Ms. Libby Davies: Like a progress report.

Prof. Janine Benedet: —and what hasn't been done, and why. What is the justification for not moving on a particular issue? Then it's not just silence you're responding to—you know, next year, when we have more money, if we ever get a majority, whatever the explanation is.

● (1615)

The Chair: Yes, Bev.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Just in the sense of your accountability as members of the committee, I agree with my co-presenters. When you're talking about accountability, to me it's action, it's about what is being done. What is actually being done?

Even when we did the national aboriginal women's summit, there were still two reports that were to come, and the next part of that process was to be reporting on what is being done. So I'm not sure exactly what's happening in that process, but to me that still is important to follow up on what is being done. Has there been an implementation report of the royal commission? There have been studies. There have been some meetings, a few. But has it come from government? I don't know if I've ever seen it. I don't think so.

Are there progress reports on other provincial inquiries? I know there has been with the aboriginal justice inquiry of Manitoba, but I don't know about other inquiry reports that have been done, or task forces reporting on what has been done. To me, that's being accountable. When you can actually see something that's making a change, to me that is being accountable. When you know that something that I've said today is going to make a difference and that someone is actually going to do something about it and it is done, then to me that's being accountable and being responsible. That's being responsible by acting on the promises that have been made.

The Chair: Thank you.

You want to say something, Russell?

Mr. Russell Wallace: Yes, a quick one.

The Chair: Okay. We've finished Libby's round, but I'll let you finish. Go ahead.

Mr. Russell Wallace: Thank you.

One of the things is being accountable systemically as well, thinking about Bill C-31 and all these things that define status and define what women are in terms of all those issues that come to mind.

One thing that also comes to mind is that my wife has worked with Health Canada for 17 years in an office full of aboriginal women, but they have never got any further than.... I don't know what the terms are, but they never got into management positions. So looking at all these aboriginal women who might have worked there for 25 years or so but never got beyond a certain point, she called it the buckskin ceiling. Other women have a glass ceiling they can break through, but these women had the buckskin ceiling, where you would hit a certain point and they couldn't break through. So looking at systemic accountability in that way....

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we can go to a third round, but I'm going to be really tough about timing. I've allowed people to sort of free-wheel a bit here, but this is going to be a tough one. It's going to be a three-minute round, so we're going to have four questions with the three-minute round. That's 12 minutes, given that everybody, no matter what I say, is going to go over two minutes on each round anyway. That's going to get us to the time when we're going to end.

We'll begin with Ms. Neville, for the Liberals. And feel free to say "I don't have a question". No, Anita, I'm not meaning it specifically for you.

Hon. Anita Neville: Actually, I'm not sure that I do.

I would like to go back to Janine. I was really interested in your whole approach. I haven't been at all of the committee hearings. I've been at many, but to the best of my knowledge nobody has come forward with quite the same message that you have.

You talked about the biased sentencing of aboriginal women. Could you speak to that a little bit more?

● (1620)

Prof. Janine Benedet: I guess what I mean by that is you see that coming up in a variety of different ways. The point I was making specifically is that we have legislation right now that allows us to name criminal acts against women as crimes that are committed on the basis of race or aboriginal status or on the basis of sex. Yet sexual violence is not understood in that way.

We tend to limit that provision to gay bashing and other kinds of crimes, for which it's entirely appropriate. But I would really like us to see this problem of violence against aboriginal women and sexual violence against aboriginal women as not just a series of independent discrete acts by bad people who need help to not be bad people or bad men any more. That's one way of looking at the problem, but it doesn't get you very far.

It really has to be understood systemically as an act of sex discrimination. That's what it is. That's how sexual assault functions in society, because it takes away opportunities from women. It makes them poor, it makes them afraid, it makes them disabled. The effect of trauma is often disability. I don't think we often recognize that connection, that even though it's a series of acts perpetrated by individuals, it's collectively a practice of sex discrimination that contributes to women's material inequality in society.

Hon. Anita Neville: Would you add the word “racialized” sex discrimination?

Prof. Janine Benedet: Sure. In this context, I think that's right. I know sometimes aboriginal communities don't like being lumped in with sort of racialized minorities, but however you wanted to describe that, sort of colonialized and gendered as well, I think in this context that's right. You see that intersection.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

That's three minutes.

The Chair: Yes, that's very good. You have about 30 seconds left, but that's okay.

Ms. Grewal for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: There is one more question I would like to make clear today. According to Statistics Canada, aboriginal women experience spousal violence at a rate three times higher than non-aboriginal women. A few years ago I think Health Canada suggested that aboriginal women are eight times more likely to suffer abuse than non-aboriginal women. Of course, 87% of women had been physically injured and 57% had been sexually abused.

In your opinion, are these numbers accurate, or have they overplayed or underplayed the magnitude? Could you comment on that?

Prof. Janine Benedet: Yes. I think what we know is that in the area of sexual violence, the statistics that we have are generally accepted to be on the low end. There is a persistent pattern of under-reporting of sexual violence for a variety reasons. So I think we can be quite confident that the numbers we are hearing about sexual violence are not overstated, and I'm fairly confident of the fact that they are understated, and they're already disturbingly high.

In the area of physical violence, you will not see as much of that phenomenon. It's not as pronounced, but it's still also there. There's a considerable amount of violence that is not reported or not even recognized as violence by the victim because the victim is convinced that in some way she deserves it or that it's just the way things go. Again, I think you would have to say that those figures are actually pretty robust, if not underplayed.

I don't know whether others would agree.

The Chair: Are there any other questions, Nina? You have a little bit of time. We have a lot of time left, actually.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: No, I'm fine.

The Chair: Very good.

Then I'd like to go to Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to know why there is more systemic violence committed against women here, on the west coast, than elsewhere. It is very surprising, and we are wondering why it is so. We tend to think that, on the west coast, like in California, people are more relaxed, they eat better, they have healthier lifestyles, they drive cars that emit fewer greenhouse gases.

Why is there more violence here?

● (1625)

[*English*]

Prof. Janine Benedet: I do think it is generally acknowledged that one of the factors of that climate in Vancouver is that you do get a migration of people from all across Canada.

A voice: A lot of people from the east.

Prof. Janine Benedet: Well, certainly many of the factors, the predicting factors...if you have individuals who are living in poverty, who are trying to survive, they often find it easier to do so here. But I can't imagine that that's a major explaining factor.

I don't know if others or if you, Jane, would know what the explanation is for that.

Prof. Jane Miller-Ashton: I was going to say, with respect to aboriginal people, if we accept that the legacy of the residential schools plays a factor, then you have a strong history here, in British Columbia, of a residential school system, and not particularly well-run residential schools in the west. So that might be a contributing factor to the aboriginal situation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes, but many of the aboriginal women who disappeared or were murdered hail from here, the west coast. I assume that they were not killed by aboriginals.

[*English*]

The Chair: Russell, do you have something to add to that?

Mr. Russell Wallace: One of the reasons that comes to mind is class. Vancouver is divided into west and east. On the west side, houses are a lot bigger and a lot more expensive, and on the east side they're smaller and there are working-class families, although it's harder to live in the east end these days too. But I think class is one of the things in there, and class and race kind of go together as well. People who are lower class aren't thought of as highly, I guess, as people from a higher class.

The Chair: We have five seconds. Go ahead, Bev, for five seconds.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Five seconds is not enough, but okay.

I've had this discussion before, because the highlights that came out of the Sisters in Spirit report were the higher numbers in the western provinces.

This is something I've been thinking. Colonization started in the east and then it slowly came across to the west. So the reporting of the numbers of women who have gone missing or have been found murdered is, to me, more prevalent in the west. Whether it's historical or generational...I don't know how to explain it more than that. When you're talking about the east...you have more generations that have been impacted by colonization as you move towards the west.

So if the reporting of women who have gone missing or are murdered...maybe your family has forgotten about it or there was no reporting of it. To me, it was also part of the Indian Act system and the whole membership issue as well, because a lot of women were forced from their communities when they married out. A whole bunch of issues still need to be looked at, because it may be the same; it's just the way it's been reported.

The Chair: Thank you, Bev.

Now we go to Ms. Davies for the NDP.

Ms. Libby Davies: Is that for five minutes?

The Chair: No, it's three, Libby. Nice try.

Ms. Libby Davies: Well, actually, no. I was just going to say that I'm happy to hand over my time to the four panellists, just to make any closing remarks, so they'll each get a minute.

The Chair: No, we have time for that. We have time for closing remarks.

Ms. Libby Davies: That's fine.

The Chair: You don't have any other questions?

Ms. Libby Davies: No.

I'm happy for them to say what they want to say.

The Chair: Okay.

Before we go to closing remarks, because we do have some time for you to each give us about a minute of closing remarks, which is to sort of wrap up in a little capsule the things that you really feel you would like to leave with us that are important, I just wanted to follow up on that question about higher numbers in the west.

As we crossed the country, you saw that in the west there were larger numbers of aboriginal people living in cities. These are the people who were living off reserve. The urban aboriginals seem to be larger in number in the west than they were in other parts of Canada. Now, whether that has to do with treaty, whether that has to do with.... I have no idea. But I have a question I wanted to put forward here, because I've asked it before and I really need to get a handle on it, and that is the difference between what happens to people when they leave the reserve....

I know that on the reserve, if you're dealing with domestic violence on the reserve, you don't have anywhere to go. If you don't have a safe place to go, you can't leave the reserve; it's too far. And lack of services and being within the community, etc., is a difficult one. But when people leave the reserve, and we know that a lot of young women have told us that they run away from the reserve, fleeing what they consider to be familial violence, and they get into the cities, they're literally lost. No one—and this is my question—no one seems to want to take responsibility for urban aboriginal people.

In my book, the federal government has a fiduciary responsibility for all aboriginal people. It doesn't matter where they live. I know we talk about jurisdictions. I know we have heard in many places that in the cities the social services pick up kids. And when women don't have enough money to have a place to rent to keep their kids, they're terrified to report violence or to leave because their kids are going to be taken away from them. So they stay in abusive situations. They're in a catch-22 situation that's really bad.

But I still believe that when we hand off parts of taking care of aboriginal people's needs to different levels of government, when the federal government has the fiduciary responsibility—and I know I have asked for us to get the information on the fact that there was a decision made by the Supreme Court quite a few years ago with regard to the requirement to carry with the person the resources that are passed on for *x* number of people on reserve, if they leave the reserve, should the resources go with them so that they don't have to struggle outside of the reserve trying to find a government to be responsible—that, for me, seems to be a huge cyclical problem that is facing urban aboriginal people: nobody wants to take responsibility for them. I'd like to hear the answer for this from any of you if you'd like to hazard it.

The second thing I wanted to ask is about healing. You know that at one time, when originally if not an apology then a regret was made, there was money put into a fund for aboriginal people to be administered by aboriginal people. It was the Aboriginal Healing Fund. That is now gone and it's gone back into a bureaucracy. And yet we've heard that systemic violence among bureaucracies and institutions is core to the problem with systemic discrimination. So we've put it right back into a bureaucracy when it was shown by INAC that it was working, that it was actually giving that power and that autonomy back to people to deal with their own healing. So I would like to get a comment on the Aboriginal Healing Fund.

And finally, there's the self-esteem issue. We've all come to these meetings, and I have listened to them. When I was a secretary of state at one time, I met with many aboriginal people who didn't speak in public fora but we just talked around in a circle, and I heard a lot of things. And I understand what the colonial system and the residential schools did. I think public awareness is an important thing, and public education. I don't think a lot of people understand what the residential school system was. It was taking your kids away from you by force and then putting them into a place where they had no family, where they were made to feel isolated and dirty and horrible because their language was horrible, their race was horrible, everything about them was horrible. So the shame doesn't get healed with a self-esteem class, because you come out of the classes and you're back into a system where everyone is already judging you because you're Indian.

● (1630)

It's part of that hierarchy. Those kids went back out of residential school and didn't know how to parent. They had no relationship with their parents, so they brought in the only parenting they knew, which was what the schools did, and we have this cyclical sense of a lack of ability to parent, a lack of ability to have a sense of self. As a people you are proud. Identity, language, all those things that make you proud to be who you are were lost and continue to be lost.

I really want to hear somebody talk about this, because I don't think a lot of people know what the residential schools meant. They just think you went to school; it was like a private school, and then you got kicked out, and shouldn't you get better? Isn't it about time you grew out of this?

I don't buy that, because it's a cycle, a complete inability of parents to become parents and grandparents because they didn't know what it was. It was taken away from them. Then there's that shame of being who you are, and every time you walk down the street, no matter how good you feel about yourself as an individual, somebody looks at you and says, “There's an Indian.”

How do you ever walk away from that systemic sense of violence when people judge you the minute they look at you because you look like an Indian and because you are an Indian? What is it that we can do? I want to hear this.

● (1635)

Prof. Jane Miller-Ashton: It's interesting that you would bring up the residential schools, because in my class today we were talking about the residential schools. These are second-year criminology students. I asked how many in the class had heard of residential schools, and virtually everybody had. Then I asked what was their notion, one thing they thought they knew for sure about residential schools, and just in polling that one group who are studying criminology, the amount of inaccuracy and error was high, and there was even some denial that things had really happened. It was good that there was a climate where that could be said out loud, so we could talk about it and deal with it.

I was sharing with them that after six years now of being involved in the alternative hearing process, and hearing mainly elderly people, sometimes on deathbeds, talking about their residential school experiences, I understood deeply that what they mainly want is an opportunity to tell their story and to hear the apology, as opposed to anything financial. If there is something financial that they're looking for, it's in relation to things they want to give to families they're leaving behind. There's that deep need for healing and to be heard. The wonderful thing about that process, even though it has its limitations, is it does give an uninterrupted time for the story and the things that are evoked.

I was trying to explain to my students what is evoked in those meetings. It disturbed me at the beginning of those hearings when sometimes, if something came out that wasn't in the written report they had submitted—the tick box wasn't filled out and something came out—they were sending that back to the investigators. A number of those protested that and said, “No, the story needs to come out. These are truths that are coming out.” This is evoking really deep hurt and pain and shame, and all the things you were just describing.

I can't speak to the healing fund specifically because I don't have knowledge of it, but I do want to leave this committee with certainly my view that there is a deep need for healing kinds of things. I hope it's positively framed, though. I hope that maybe this report can celebrate the gifts that aboriginal people have to give our whole nation in terms of what they understand is needed for us all. My understanding of restorative justice is deeply embedded with aboriginal traditions—not only that tradition, but how can that be celebrated in ways that we in Canada and as nations can find healing, collaborative and restorative ways to communicate and grow together?

I hope your report will do that in positive ways so that we can celebrate the gifts we have from first nations.

The Chair: Thank you, Jane.

Bev.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Your first question, about the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, was my second priority, about healing resources for men and women to end violence. Part of the healing foundation was to address the cycle of violence as a result of residential schools. I do believe those resources need to be reinstated. It was a really good process, because it was at the community level where those resources were being used. It provided those counselling services and elder services. It even provided language programs, self-esteem, whatever kinds of things went along with it.

One of the things I want to also respond to is that we still live in a very racist society. We live in a society in which Indians are still thought of as inferior. We're still thought of as we were historically, as being primitive. So part of this whole process is not only about what's needed for aboriginal communities, but it's also what's needed for white mainstream communities to educate themselves about the role they play as the descendants of treaties, as descendants of colonizers, because they also need to end the violence of racism.

I have been teaching for a long time, and many times I talk about these things in our classes and it's the first time at a university level that they've ever heard these things. So the whole mainstream education system needs to change the way history is taught. The whole residential school system needs to be implemented in that historical context within the schools, and who we are as a people and that we still exist.

Chair, you had talked about how things have been lost. Well, they haven't been lost. We're still here. I'm still here, as a Mohawk woman, to tell you what occurred in my community. We still have the elders in our community who speak the language. We still have the resilience of our people because of our spirituality. Despite everything that's happened, our spirit is still strong, despite 500-plus years of the impact of colonization.

So I can sit here and talk to you in a respectful way about those impacts on our people, and on women especially. I always have had to give thanks to my ancestors and to those who have taught me about that honour and respect about being a woman, but also about the respect that we have in carrying that forward, and the responsibilities that we continue to have.

We've carried out our responsibilities. Now it has to be on the other side. I always think about our Two Row Wampum Treaty belt. We've done what we've done in our canoe. We've maintained our sovereignty in our canoe. But non-aboriginal colonizers and the descendants of colonizers haven't. They've violated that treaty because they've never taken on that responsibility of taking on their own responsibilities.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Bev.

Russell, do you have one more thing to say quickly, and then we'll wrap up?

Mr. Russell Wallace: Yes. There's so much to think about, to ponder, and to get across, but in terms of the aboriginal population—the urban aboriginal population—we do need access to cultural teachings. I come from a community where my language is on the endangered list of becoming extinct, so what do I tell my kids? I'll teach them what I know, but that can only go so far. To tell them to go back to my community and learn all of that...it's not entirely possible all the time.

So for getting access to cultural teachings wherever you are in Canada, we do that at the grassroots level already anyway, but having some support is always helpful.

I'm thankful for the support of Kiwassa House. They've given us rooms in their building to have meetings and whatnot. There's the Native Education College and all these places that are reaching out to the community and providing free space for a little while.

Ending systemic violence against aboriginal people and aboriginal women is another issue. Providing affordable housing for all people is another that comes to mind. Also, there's the issue of keeping families together. We're assuming that we're talking about aboriginal families and we're assuming that they're all together, but a lot of times the children are in foster care and a lot of times parents don't see them until they're 18 or whatever. So it's about ending that cycle of taking the kids away, you know, the residential school.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Russell.

I said I would give you 30 seconds each to quickly wrap up. We are now at the end of our session, but if you feel you need to say something for 30 seconds....

Go, Jane, for 30 seconds.

Prof. Jane Miller-Ashton: When I take students to women in prison, that is almost the most transformative experience they have. I find that very ironic—the most disadvantaged people are giving the biggest gift to my students.

So I agree with Beverley's comment. I hope there's something in your report about the education system and what we need to do, because students are being profoundly affected by those opportunities to meet aboriginal women. I hope you won't forget them in your report either.

The Chair: Thank you.

Bev, 30 seconds.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: My only comment is “action”.

The Chair: Thank you.

Russell.

Mr. Russell Wallace: End violence by preventing violence.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I want to thank you for spending so much time with us and for being absolutely frank with us. It is always an extraordinary thing to deal with this issue. I've always found it extraordinary, from the beginning, the lack of hope....

I just want to say this. I had a grandmother in Nunavut sit down at the kitchen table and say to me, “I buried my last child on Christmas Eve.” She said, “You know, that was my last child. I had 12 children. I'm now looking after the grandchildren.” But when her last child killed himself, because no matter what he did and no matter how much he tried, he couldn't get work, and he was turned away and he was treated like an Indian, she said, “When I saw him lying there dead, I was glad because now he was at peace.” I don't think that's a reasonable thing for anyone to have to say, that they are glad their child is dead because they finally found peace. We have to do something. We all have to work together to make sure the political will comes from this committee and that we do what we need to do to bring the hope to people that they can live reasonable lives, find opportunity, and pass on hope to their own children.

Thank you very much.

[*Applause*]

● _____ (Pause) _____ ●

● (1705)

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting to order.

This is the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We are studying, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), violence against aboriginal women. This was a unanimous agreement by the committee. It's a committee made up of all four political parties in the House, and all agreed that there should be a study.

This isn't a study inasmuch as everyone is going around sort of trying to figure out what's going on, but we really wanted to meet with aboriginal people across the country, to hear from them. Based on and picking up on work that Sisters in Spirit did, we wanted to know from aboriginal people, and from people who have been involved with them in any way, shape, or form, what are the root causes of violence against aboriginal women? What is the extent of that violence? What forms does that violence take?

We have been going on reserves. We've been going to isolated areas. We've been going into cities. We've been looking at the issues of women on reserve, women in isolated areas, and of course women in urban areas.

We're hoping that you can speak to us on these issues and that you can then give us some solutions that you think would work, because nothing seems to have been working at all over all the years that everyone has been doing whatever it is they thought they should do. So maybe we figure we can hear it from you and it might work.

What I'm going to do, because this is a huge panel, is give everybody five minutes. I'm giving the organization five minutes, not every individual, so you're going to have to decide who's going to speak. I'm really going to have to cut you short. What I'm going to do, to help you out, is indicate when you have one minute left so that you can wrap up. You're going to get a chance to answer it as the talk goes on. Many of you who have been sitting in the audience have seen how it works. During the time that you get asked questions you can throw in the bits that you didn't get into your original statement.

I'm going to begin with the Aboriginal Women's Action Network. I have Darlene Rigo and I have Laura Holland. Who's going to speak for the group? Darlene.

Then I have the B.C. CEDAW group, which has two people, Shelagh Day and Sharon McIvor. Who is going to speak for the group? Shelagh, for five minutes.

From the Pivot Legal Society I have Darcie Bennett. There's only one person here.

From the Royal Canadian Mounted Police I have Sergeant Bruce Hulan and Superintendent Russ Nash. Who is going to speak for the group? Both.

From Walk4Justice I have Gladys Radek and Bernie Williams. Who's going to speak for the group? Bernie.

Then, of course, we have the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs. I have one person, so I don't have to ask her who is speaking.

Now that we have that sorted out, we'll begin with the Aboriginal Women's Action Network.

Darlene, you have five minutes.

● (1710)

Ms. Darlene Rigo (Collective Member, Aboriginal Women's Action Network): First, I'd like to acknowledge that we're on unceded Coast Salish territory.

Second, I'd like to thank the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women for inviting the Aboriginal Women's Action Network to present to you today.

My name is Darlene Rigo, and I am of Ojibway descent. I don't have a traditional name and designated ancestral land that I can lay claim to or an aboriginal lineage that I can trace before my grandmother. I blame racism, violence, and the Indian Act for my family's dissociation from a proud aboriginal identity and lack of belonging to a larger community.

Before I go any further, I must inform you that the Aboriginal Women's Action Network or AWAN, of which I'm a member, is a collective, and there is no best representative among us. I'm speaking to you today because of my willingness and availability to do so.

AWAN is a grassroots volunteer group that was founded in 1995 in response to the silencing of aboriginal women with respect to the issues that affect our lives. Our group began with impassioned talks in women's home. Some of our most pressing concerns include violence, poverty, child apprehension, Bill C-31, and prostitution. We are here not because we are being paid to be, and certainly not because it makes us popular, but because we are committed to trying to save aboriginal women's lives by raising awareness about the realities of them as we struggle to save our own.

As I speak, many of our sisters are homeless, cold, hungry, drugged, violated, abducted, bought and sold, perhaps even murdered just down the road from here. Just east of this hotel is what we call the urban reserve, a neighbourhood infamous for poverty, addiction, prostitution, and violence. In here, in the shelter of this expensive, airy space, we are participating in another study of what may well be an abstract category of otherness, aboriginal women. You have probably heard the statistics and baseless numbers, however distorted by blurred issues of identification and poor reporting.

I'll spare you some repetition. Let's hope that those with the power and influence to make a difference do not just continue to study us to death but confront the often harsh reality of our lives and promote action for real change.

I can also get caught up in research and statistics, but I trust that in this crowd you know the staggering figures, and I want instead to situate my knowledge and my lived experience and that of my mother.

I'll break the code of silence and say it: my grandmother was a prostituted aboriginal woman. Most of what I know about her life came from frightening stories she told me as a child about her mother's early death, from whispered tales from relatives after she died, and tales my mother divulged on her own deathbed just a few years ago. Then my mother insisted that I had to tell our stories.

As I've come to learn, my grandmother, like my mother, regarded being Indian as a source of shame that was never openly talked about. I can only imagine how this must have felt in their times in the 1920s and 1930s. I remember being teased in kindergarten and chased around by little wannabe cowboys with pretend guns. My mother confessed that as a child she couldn't wait to start curling her straight black hair and later dyed her dark roots.

My grandmother's and mother's life stories combined with my own experience have taught me first-hand about the intergenerational nature of violence against aboriginal women. It starts young, with violence against aboriginal girls, and goes far back in history.

My grandmother became pregnant at 12 with my mother, who was taken from her at birth. It remains unclear which of two adult white brothers may have been responsible, but their mother took the newborn home, stole her, according to my grandmother.

Through cruel abuse my mother was taught to hate her own origins, herself, and her own mother, who, she was told, gave her away. Feeling unloved and believing there was something wrong with her, she was dressed up in pretty frocks and kept separate from her younger siblings, but they didn't fare much better. My grandmother had 10 other children who lived in extreme poverty without adequate food, heat, or hot water. She had an alcoholic husband who rarely came home. Leaving her kids, she prostituted herself in an attempt to feed them.

This was a disgraceful, guarded secret, only hinted at in my childhood but later spoken of with judgment, even by my father, who beat my mother and wanted to kill her and abandoned me to this woman's care. Although my mother managed to get away from my father, she married another violent man and he became one of my abusers.

The legacy of trauma, violence, and addiction runs throughout my entire extended family, as it does for many aboriginal women. It's pervasive in Canadian society, and the roots can be traced back to colonialism. But we believe that aboriginal women have dignity and need to be respected.

I'll jump to my suggestions because I don't want you to miss those. I didn't think it would take that long.

We want to put an end to the vicious cycle of the retraumatization of violence against aboriginal women, and we think in order to do so we need to say no to legalized prostitution.

We think that johns, traffickers, and pimps, and not the women involved, should be criminalized. Doing that would give the women quite a bit of protection.

● (1715)

To bring an end to the cycle, we think we need more detox beds, because with the violence, there's addiction that goes along with it.

We need recovery centres designed to give women cultural tools to recover and to educate them concerning the origins of violence in their lives, with consciousness-raising so they can fight to end prostitution.

We want comprehensive and compassionate medical services, a guaranteed livable income, job training, and adequate housing for women and their families.

Aboriginal women are smart, strong, and proud, and as survivors, we know what we want and what we don't want.

We don't want increased hunting grounds that would result from a total decriminalization of prostitution where men have the right to violate and harm us. We don't want one more of our sisters stolen, hurt, and murdered.

We want freedom and real choices. We want to be safe, not safer. We want harm elimination, not harm reduction. We demand the dignity and respect we deserve.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Darlene.

Now I'm going to go to Dr. Michelle Corfield, for the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs.

Dr. Michelle Corfield (As an Individual): Good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Michelle Corfield, and I am from the Uchucklesaht First Nation, which is part of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council.

In my former life I was a politician who represented 14 first nations. In that life I witnessed the murder of two young teenage girls and sat through those trials.

This stuff is deep-rooted in our communities, in our reserves, and where we live. We can view this as structural poverty: economic marginalization from the patriarchal system that has been imposed upon us.

That's our reality, and we believe that if we're to talk about root causes, the root cause is the patriarchal system, such as the Indian Act that was imposed upon us. It just stems from there.

You asked for solutions. I'm going to read the solutions first. If I have time, I'll tell a story, but five minutes is really not enough time, and instead of crying I'm just going to go into it.

We need an independent inquiry into missing and murdered children.

We need a national action plan that must put support for families at the very centre.

We must not respond with only more protection; more broadly, we must address root causes. This means broad engagement of communities, rebuilding communities, and emphasizing the critical role of women in dispute resolution and as community healers.

The women are the core of our communities. They are the centre. They have been excluded from all levels of participation: locally, regionally, provincially, and nationally. We need to increase the representation of women as our chiefs and on councils. They need to have the same opportunities as were given everybody else.

So far, we are seeing responses that only react and only put resources in the hands of authority. We must do better. We must support family and work together to build stronger solutions. We must start from the infants and work our way up. We need to raise healthy children so we can have strong, educated women and we can be providers to our families, and so we're not stuck in the cycle of poverty again.

We need financial support to create and sustain change at the local level. We need education, training, and healing. We need to create whole people. We need to look after our women and our children mentally, spiritually, physically, and emotionally.

If we were to do some of those things, we would relieve the violence against women. And as I say, in the names of Beatrice Jack and Kayla John, we have to do something better so that we are not seeing 12-year-old girls violently murdered in their communities.

We have to. We can no longer allow this to become acceptable behaviour. We need to make change, and change now.

So from a political perspective, thank you.

● (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Michelle. That was well done at one and a half minutes under time. Very good.

Now I would like to go to the B.C. CEDAW Group.

Shelagh.

Ms. Shelagh Day (Representative, B.C. CEDAW Group): I am honoured to have with me today Sharon McIvor, whom I'm sure the members of Parliament will know. Sharon also has a very long history on this particular issue, having been on the panel on violence against women and the aboriginal women's circle on that panel, and a member of the committee that oversaw the healing lodge in Saskatchewan. I'm sure that when you come to questions, you'll have questions for Sharon as well as for me.

The B.C. CEDAW Group is a coalition of women's organizations in British Columbia. We, for the past eight years, have been submitting reports to the treaty bodies that Canada reports to about Canada's compliance with its international human rights obligations, particularly under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which is where our name comes from, but also to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. We participated in the universal periodic review process as well.

As you well know, during its last review, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women made recommendations to Canada, specifically about violence against women and about missing and murdered aboriginal women, and asked Canada to report back on this issue on a priority basis. Canada did that in 2009.

We also submitted a report at that time, which I have here for you if you're interested in copies. Essentially, as you can tell from the title of our report, we said at that time that Canada has “nothing to report”. It has done nothing about this issue during this period of time. We see no action being taken on this very, very fundamental issue of the human rights of aboriginal women and girls.

All of the reports—ours and those put in by others, and also the observations of all of the aboriginal women's organizations on this issue—identify two facets of the problem. One is police failure to protect aboriginal women and girls and to respond adequately when there is violence. The second is the disadvantaged social and economic conditions in which aboriginal women and girls live, which makes them vulnerable to violence and unable to escape from it.

Now, those two facets are incredibly important. The second one I'd like to say a little bit more about, because it seems to me that this is a place where—at least in the afternoon I've been here—it hasn't been talked about enough. I really appreciate hearing about it from AWAN, and then from Michelle as well, because I think it's so important.

We have to deal with the social and economic conditions of aboriginal women and girls as an integral part of this issue of violence or we'll never eliminate it; we will never get rid of it. We are dealing with women who are stuck in the most vulnerable conditions, and that funnels them into prostitution, where they experience violence again. It makes it impossible for them to in fact provide safe places for their children.

Sharon and I have been around the province within the last year talking to women who are front-line workers in this province. They describe to us a cycle of conditions that women find very hard to escape from. That cycle is made up of these components: male violence, inadequate welfare, inadequate housing, loss of children, addiction, mental illness, and collapse. Once you get into that circle, it's very hard to get out of it.

In fact, I would say that in this country, specifically for aboriginal women and girls, we don't believe we should end violence against them. We don't have policies in place that actually make this a reality. On December 6, when we all put on our white ribbons and make pious statements about how we're against violence against women and against violence against aboriginal women, we don't have the policies in place that actually will deal with the issue.

When women encounter violence, they need adequate economic resources and adequate housing. They need not to have their children taken away because of what's called neglect, which is actually poverty, and they need to have the capacity to have their children come back if they are taken away. They need to have addiction services to actually make real, safe lives for themselves. We don't have those policies in place.

● (1725)

We say nothing's happening here. The federal government has given $10 million. Ten million dollars was 0.003565% of the $280.5 billion budget for 2010. That's not a solution to this problem, nor is the commission of inquiry in British Columbia, which is going to deal with a very small part of it. Maybe that's a good thing, but it's not dealing with how big this issue is, how important it is, and the many dimensions of it.

We need a national inquiry. We need a national investigation into the police and how they need to be coordinated to deal with this. We need a national action plan and—I'm sorry—I have to say I don't care about federal, provincial, or territorial jurisdiction. I care about the human rights of the women.

Would you please get over your jurisdictional problems and help us?

The Chair: Thank you, Shelagh.

We now go to Pivot Legal Society and Darcie Bennett.

Dr. Darcie Bennett (Campaigns Director, Pivot Legal Society): I'm from Pivot Legal Society. We're a not-for-profit legal advocacy organization based out of Vancouver's downtown east side.

As we've heard, this is a very complex issue. In your introduction you mentioned that there hasn't seemed to have been any action on this issue. I'm just going to keep my presentation very, very basic and just talk about three really basic human rights issues that I think the federal government does have the capacity to address. Those are just the basic issues: access to justice, access to housing, and respect for the integrity of aboriginal families in relation to the child welfare process.

Working in the downtown east side, Pivot Legal Society, through our community work and through our affidavit programs, have identified six key focus areas that define the parameter of our work. These include: policing, housing, sex work, access to justice for women, child welfare, and drug policy, and each of these issues has a profound impact on aboriginal women's vulnerability to and experiences of violence.

In the submission today I'm going to touch on three of those issues that I'm most intimately acquainted with, and those are: access to the justice system, housing, and child welfare. I would like to offer some concrete recommendations for change that definitely wouldn't address all of these issues. They're very complex, but I think could have an immediate impact on the safety and well-being of the aboriginal women we work with.

One of my roles at Pivot is coordinating the Jane Doe Legal Network. It's a program that provides legal support and education to women who've experienced violence. Working in the downtown east side, our services are really tailored primarily to women who are living in poverty, many of whom are aboriginal women.

We take an approach to violence and to women that we see, recognizing that violence occurs in so many different settings, not just in intimate relationships, but also within extended families, among strangers, and at the hands of people who hold positions of authority, whether they're landlords, police, or employers.

We also have a broad understanding and recognize that experiences of violence compound over a lifetime, that they're community-wide, and that there are intergenerational impacts. In this context, it's really imperative that when aboriginal women do reach out to a lawyer or reach out to the legal system, they have meaningful, appropriate access to the justice system.

In British Columbia we've seen the opposite of that. Over the last eight years we've seen a constant erosion to access to justice in this province. Those cuts have been felt most profoundly by women living in poverty, disproportionately aboriginal women. The federal government needs to hold British Columbia accountable for denying women—aboriginal women, women living in poverty—access to the justice system. They need to reinvest in legal aid in the areas of poverty law, family law, and representation for victims. Programs like the Family Law Clinic here in Vancouver, which we lost last year, that were tailored to providing support to women dealing with compounding issues of family law, child welfare involvement, poverty, disability, and violence have to be enhanced. They have to be reinstated.

Housing is one of the core issues we work on at Pivot. While violence happens to women from all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, for women living in poverty, lack of access to safe, affordable housing options is a major issue in terms of preventing violence, escaping violence, and creating a life of safety for themselves and their children.

Without a safe place to call home, aboriginal women living in Vancouver's SROs and living on the streets are at extreme risk of violence. And for mothers living in poverty, finding adequate housing is a major barrier to safety. We know that poverty rates for aboriginal children are almost twice as high as for non-aboriginal children, and this doesn't even take into account the 20,000 aboriginal children who are living on reserve who aren't even counted.

Off reserve, the core housing needs among aboriginal families is 76% higher than among non-aboriginal households. The federal government has been out of the business of providing housing and investing in social housing for nearly 20 years now. The federal government needs to commit to developing a funded national housing program and to working with aboriginal communities and working with all levels of government to address this urgent need. People need a safe place to call home before they can start to address the whole range of issues they're addressing in their lives, particularly family units.

And then, finally, there is child welfare. I don't think, in my experience, aboriginal women's experiences of violence can be understood outside of their experiences with the child welfare system, both as parents and as children themselves.

● (1730)

In 2008 I was part of a report we released called *Broken Promises*. More than half of the mothers who took part in the study were aboriginal, and 65% of them had been in care themselves. The interaction between violence in their lives and the child protection system was a core theme. Women survivors of violence are poorly supported and at times re-victimized by the child protection system. There's also a strong relationship between women's experiences of violence and other grounds on which children are removed, including addiction and mental illness.

Children can't be removed from non-abusing mothers as a result of male violence in their families, and people working in the child protection system with aboriginal families must come from a place of understanding the dynamics of violence against women and a historical understanding of colonial violence. This is essential in order to ensure that we have a child protection system that's not re-victimizing women and their children, and is instead empowering them to keep themselves and their children safe.

At the core of our work is the belief that people who have been marginalized are experts on their own lives and that aboriginal women know what they need to keep themselves and their families safe. However, the federal government and all levels of government have a duty to provide women with the resources they need to implement and develop those solutions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

From the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Staff Sergeant Hulan.

S/Sgt Bruce Hulan (Team Commander, Project EPANA, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee. I would like to thank you for inviting the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to respond to your questions today.

I am Staff Sergeant Bruce Hulan, the team commander of Project E-PANA, the investigation of murdered and missing women along northern British Columbia's Highway 16, commonly referred to in the media as the “Highway of Tears”.

I'm accompanied by Superintendent Russ Nash, officer in charge, E Division, major crime section.

As I mentioned, Project E-PANA is the investigation of murdered and missing women who are presumed to have met with foul play in northern British Columbia. The project began in the fall of 2005, and it is a long-term project designed to review, analyze, and investigate the identified files.

The mandate of the project is twofold: first, through the analysis of each of the files identified as satisfying the criteria established for the project, to determine if there is sufficient evidence to support the theory that a serial killer is responsible for a number of homicides that have occurred along Highway 16; and second, to develop and implement investigational strategies that will advance each of the files.

To meet the objectives of the mandate, Project E-PANA was developed with a three-phase approach: identification of similar-fact cases; collection and analysis of individual files; and follow-up investigation. Phases one and two are completed, and phase three, the continued investigation of individual files, has been under way since February 2009.

In an effort to meet the mandate of the project and determine whether a serial killer is responsible for a number of the offences, the search criteria were established to identify files that would be reviewed by the project team. The criteria are as follows: the victim was female; the victim was engaged in behaviour that placed them at risk, such as hitchhiking, drug use, or prostitution, which exposed them to the control of a stranger or suspect; the victim went missing from or was found along one of the major highways in northern British Columbia—Highway 16, Highway 97, or Highway 5.

Several RCMP databases were accessed to identify the files for review: the violent crime linkage analysis system (ViCLAS), the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC), and the police information retrieval system (PIRS), to name a few.

As a result of the database searches, 13 homicide cases and five missing person cases were identified for review by the project. The 18 investigations span a timeframe from 1969 to 2006 and cover a geographic area from Prince Rupert in the northwest of British Columbia; Kamloops and Merritt to the south; and Hinton, Alberta, to the east. In seven of the homicide cases, the victim is aboriginal. Six of the homicide cases identified the victim as Caucasian. Of the five missing person cases, three of the victims are aboriginal and two are Caucasian.

Very early in the creation of this project it was evident that some victims' family members were feeling disconnected from the police investigation. A commitment was made to the family members to conduct regular meetings with them in order to provide updates on the status of the investigation. Superintendent Nash and I continue to have regular meetings with the families, as a group, at which we provide them with project updates and endeavour to answer any questions they may have. There have been seven family meetings since March 2006, and at one meeting we invited the families to our project headquarters in Vancouver and let them tour the facility and meet the team.

The staffing of Project E-PANA is made up of regular members of the RCMP, investigators, forensic specialists, public service employees, and temporary civilian employees. The project maintains a staffing level of approximately 75 people, which can fluctuate based on the demands of the time and because of internal movement. The majority of the staff are located in metro Vancouver, but there are also dedicated resources based in Prince George.

We have sufficient resources to meet the demands of each and every case. We are also confident in our ability to draw in additional resources should they be required to meet investigational needs.

A significant focus of Project E-PANA has been the sharing of information with detachment personnel in the province as well as information exchange with similar-mandated projects, Project Evenhanded and Project KARE in Alberta. We have even worked with Washington State police, given their proximity to British Columbia.

● (1735)

Many of the detachments in B.C.'s jurisdiction where these offences have occurred are limited duration posts and see a regular rotation of personnel. Many of the personnel with direct knowledge of these offences are now working elsewhere.

To develop and enhance the knowledge level of current detachment personnel, the project has created an internal website that documents case histories, among other things, and explains how to report any new information to the project. Members of the project also conduct information sessions at detachments and district commander meetings.

I have provided you with a very brief explanation of some of the initiatives being carried out through our investigation. We'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now finally, but certainly not really finally, Bernie Williams from Walk4Justice.

Ms. Bernie Williams (Co-founder, Walk4Justice): I'd like to say that my name is Skundaal. That is my birth name, and my English name is Bernie Williams. I'm a residential school survivor. My number is 6690064101. I'm from the Haida nation. I'm also Nuchatlaht and Stellat'en.

I'd like to say hello to the House of Commons MPs who are here and to two of my colleagues here.

I was just looking through the paper here. The sergeant mentioned that there are 18. We've got 45. But I'm not going to dialogue; that's not why we're here.

I'm one of the co-founders of Walk4Justice. We are also front-line workers. I would like to acknowledge the elders who are here—the grassroots women who've been on the front lines. I'd like to take you on a short journey back to about 1986, along with Harriet Nahanee, Phillipa Ryan, Reta Blind, and Carol Martin. Many women have played a big part in the work that's been done in the downtown east side, but also nationally.

I'm one of the co-founders of Walk4Justice. We started the walk in 2006 from Prince Rupert to Prince George for the murdered and missing women's symposium. There were 33 recommendations implemented, and only two out of 33 were done. As a result, today we're fighting on those front lines in the alleys and on the streets.

Back in 1986 the data was started. To date we have a little over 4,000 women's names nationally. On the downtown east side they reported 69 women, and we believe that number has tripled. Since Pickton was arrested there have been more women.

One of the things we've noticed is that many organizations are coming to the downtown east side here. Many of these organizations have been building their empires down here off the backs of our people, especially our women. It's a good thing to be Indian down here. It's a good thing to be an addict, but it's also a good thing to be a residential school survivor. We've watched these empires build and build on their backs.

What we've been fighting for all these years is not only a public inquiry. We asked for a public inquiry almost 20 years ago. We wanted a national one. When we started to bring families forward to report their loved ones, we were in the families that were dismissed in that.

We've been working jointly with the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, the First Nations Summit, and the regional AFN. We had resolutions that were signed nationally in 2007 and 2008 as we walked to Ottawa. All of the resolutions that were signed nationally for a public inquiry are by treaties 1 to 11, the Congress of Aboriginal People, the Native Women's Association of Canada, and the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. If it wasn't for the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and the movement of these grassroots women, we would not be at these tables.

Along with the AWAN and all the other women's groups, I asked, “Why did it have to take 69 women for us to come to these tables?” This is not something that's isolated. It's not new. There has been an onslaught down here. The police department has been having community forums, but I don't agree with that. Why have them after all these years? The blood is already on the ground.

● (1740)

Why did it take a young aboriginal woman by the name of Ashley to be thrown out of this window, when other men and women had been thrown out of these windows, for the police department to come forward?

Why are our women being incarcerated for the sex trade when these johns are walking?

Why are these organizations allowing...? You know, our women had to be raped inside these shelters and that.

Our aboriginal community—nothing has changed in 650 years plus.

You're asking, how do we make changes in the system? One thing we've been asking for, as grassroots women, is to have our own health, healing, and wellness centres nationally. We know how to take care of our own people. We know what the problems are. We want our elders in there. We want our spiritual people in there. We have that voice. We are a very strong nation.

Hedy, I've been watching you for so many years. I admire your words. One thing you've said—it's very profound and very simple—is “We want to work together.”

You know, I get taunted. I am a woman, I am a gay woman, and I am an Indian woman. I have three strikes against me right there. For years I told people I came from the Philippines because I was so ashamed. People respected immigrants much more than they did me.

My mother was murdered on the downtown east side. We all have our stories here. We all share them. How many more tables do we have to sit at, and how many more round tables?

I have two sisters who were murdered down here. I have a younger brother who was hung three summers ago. Nothing was ever done.

There have been so many. I have a relative on the Highway of Tears who went missing back in the late sixties or early seventies. Her name is Irene White.

But it took a white woman to blow the Highway of Tears open. She comes from a middle-class family. We met with her family en route when we walked through upper Edmonton, in Red Deer.

Why did it take all these other women? Why did it take 69 women?

And why is Wally Oppal running the commission and the public inquiry?

We have a lot of questions, because I certainly don't think they're fair. I know the work that needs to be done. I'm tired of these men exploiting our women. I agree with AWAN—they've done phenomenal work—that these women are targeted every day.

We've asked for our own buildings. The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre elders council has been asking for that for so many years. We can't even get a building for them.

We are the experts. We are the front-line workers right in there. We don't get paid for this. I want to make that very clear. People think we have hoards of money and that. The Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs are the ones who get all the Walk4Justice money, all donations and that.

I want to ask one thing: I'd like to challenge all of you to take a walk with us through the downtown east side before you leave. This is in a prime area right now, because at midnight tonight.... It's welfare night. You will watch and you will see. This is a crucial time for us as women down there. We don't know how many of our women are going to die in the next four days. We don't know.

As a residential school survivor, I would not take that money, because that is blood money, to me. What they should have done with the residential school money was put it inside a trust to build health, healing, and wellness centres and safe places for our children.

We have one of the largest networks for human trafficking here.

● (1745)

There are many Willie Picktons out there. Why are they being let back out in these very streets?

I worked for one of the churches up here—I'll make this very brief, Hedy—that offered housing. I was employed in these churches. Five women had been raped inside a shelter that was supposed to be safe for the people to come into. It's funded by the city and by the provincial government, and when these women are coming to us....

I have a meeting with Pivot Legal tomorrow morning. Enough is enough. These are crimes against humanity. We are targeted every day on those front lines by drug dealers, who are immigrants, and the police allow them to sit and sell drugs and kill our people down here, right across from Carnegie Centre.

That's where it needs to start. Go after the VPD—check them out—and the RCMP. They need to be held accountable. Everybody talks about transparency and about accountability. Start from the bottom up. Our leadership needs to be questioned too. That's why a lot of us women are down here.

● (1750)

The Chair: Now we're going to move into the question period. They are seven-minute questions. We'll start with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me thank all of the panellists. I don't think we've had a panel quite this size before.

I'm sitting here trying to determine where to start. Your presentations all had a common overtone, but they each had a very different emphasis.

I'm going to start with you, Darcie, if you don't mind. Could you just expand a little bit more on the whole issue of violence against women and the apprehension of children? We've heard about it in other communities. We've heard that women are fearful of coming forward, because their children will be taken. But there are many other manifestations as well. I'd be interested in hearing from you.

Dr. Darcie Bennett: One of the key themes that came out of the last project we did with women who were involved with the child welfare system as parents was on male violence in their lives. It manifests itself in a lot of ways, but one of the biggest is actually fear of calling police if there's violence in the home, because they've seen children apprehended. What we've really seen is that the onus is on women to keep their children safe from violence, with very little in the way of support. We have worked in cases in which the court has mandated visits with the father, and there's been a violent incident during the hand-off. The women actually didn't want those visits to happen, and there was an apprehension of the children because they hadn't been deemed able to keep them safe.

We have had cases in which women have been told to leave the family home. But of course they have no place to go, or they're sent to a transition house that keeps them for 30 days. Again, the onus is on them to keep their children safe and to keep their children away from the abuser.

We've also seen a number of cases where, because our child welfare legislation here in B.C. is forward-looking, women have often been pathologized. Women who've had a history of being exploited by men or who've had male violence in their lives are actually deemed unable to protect their children, because the social workers are worried about their choices in men or the choices they're making around their children.

So the real concerns are largely that women are being asked to make decisions such as to leave the men in their lives. They're not being supported through the family law system. They are not given access to the housing they would need or the income supports they would need or the child care they would need. The onus for male violence is being placed on women, and women are being pathologized.

Hon. Anita Neville: I want to follow up, and I don't know what my time is like.

The Chair: You have four minutes.

Hon. Anita Neville: You touched on it. We've heard it elsewhere here today. We've heard, certainly, in many of the hearings, and I say it with respect to the police officers who are here today, a lot about how the systems do not support women, whether it's the social worker, whether it's the justice system, whether it's the police officer, or whether it's government bodies and institutions. I would welcome, from whoever wants to speak to it, your recommendations. Tell us your experience. How do we ensure that systems are not adding to the double discrimination or to the burdens women are having? I don't know who wants to speak.

The Chair: Does the RCMP want to answer that since it was about police?

● (1755)

Hon. Anita Neville: I'd rather hear from Michelle.

Dr. Michelle Corfield: As I said, I was the vice-president of probably one of the largest tribal councils in British Columbia. Under that we had USMA, which is a child welfare agency as well. So the role I played was monstrous, in the sense that I had to look after a lot of things.

Systemically, as we see on reserves in British Columbia, there are 203 of them. Within those reserves, many of them are isolated and semi-isolated or remote, and access to resources, such as the RCMP, hospitals, nurses, and social workers is absolutely not there.

There is not a full-time RCMP officer on every reserve.

Access is limited, and I believe that systemically, even in urban centres—and I do live in an urban centre—the likelihood of someone calling for help is minimal, because you don't want to put your kids at further risk.

So structurally this system doesn't allow for social workers to be in each community; they're not there. There is not health care in every community, and there's certainly not a hospital in every community.

Hon. Anita Neville: The issue I'm looking at is not necessarily the presence of the system but how the system responds to the individual.

Dr. Michelle Corfield: Well, I was going to say that the system responds in a very dysfunctional way, because the people are removed from the system yet are called out to the system. Right?

So that's a huge barrier when you're removing people.

Ms. Shelagh Day: It seems to me that we have so many examples —and Darcie and other people at the table have mentioned some of them—of how the system itself is punishing the women. They're punishing the women for being the victims of violence. I'll add to what Darcie says.

If you're here in this province and you have a partner who's violent to you, whether you're married to him or he's a john, or whatever he happens to be, if it's in a domestic situation and you leave, or you are trying to live on welfare because you have no other economic support...we know that welfare right across this country is completely inadequate for women to safely look after children and have adequate housing.

Then, as Darcie says, if the children have witnessed male violence, or if welfare authorities decide that the housing is inadequate or the food is inadequate, they will take the children away on the basis of their being neglected. We have an example in the province of British Columbia, where the representative for children and youth reported a young native couple who had a three-month-old baby. They are completely capable of looking after this child. They want to look after the child. But the authorities decided that their housing was inadequate. Instead of someone stepping in to help them with the housing, which they had the authority to do and did not do, they took the child away. The child was put in foster care. The child was injured and permanently damaged and then handed back to the parents a year later, blind in one eye, with cerebral palsy, and in need of disability support for life.

Now that is a system that's not functioning. We have more children now in foster care who are aboriginal, as I understand it, than we had in residential schools. So we're repeating the problems that we already have identified, because we don't believe the women, because we don't support the women, because in whatever systems we've set up here we are not prepared to take care of them and support them adequately, especially when they're victims of violence.

So it's not just a matter of not responding; it's a matter of the systems themselves punishing them.

I would say the same thing about the police. We have the same problem with the police, in that when women call for help—and it's male violence we're talking about—the police will often not come and deal adequately with the situation. That's what women are facing all the time.

● (1800)

The Chair: Thank you, Shelagh.

You have no more time, Anita, but as chair, I would ask for a responder to respond regarding the police response.

You've heard that the response is not good. What is the reason for this?

Supt Russ Nash (Officer in Charge, E Division Major Crime Section, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Madam Chair, we are but a small solution to an incredibly immense problem. I believe that our policy within this province, especially with regard to violence in relationships, is sound. Our policy allows us to actually take proactive action against offenders. It leaves our members no latitude with respect to the actions they will take if they determine that an assault has taken place in the home. And then, of course, that does put the victim in a precarious position, because then they are often forced to provide testimony against the perpetrator.

We have a victim services program within this division that is both police- and community-based. It is there not only to assist the police in their work but also to assist the victims and witnesses in these cases. There is no doubt that because of the dynamics of these types of relationships.... And I would agree that it affects all classes within our society. It certainly seems to be predominant in the lower working class, in the marginalized class, which is extremely unfortunate. It's difficult for us, as police, to deal with that, because on the one hand—you're right—the victim is living with someone in a home. I guess in many respects that's a plus. On the other hand, reporting the perpetrator means that someone has to be removed from that residence, and the support services need to be in place to assist victims in that regard.

As I said, our policy with respect to violence in relationships is fulsome. It's very comprehensive, and our members—and I speak only for the RCMP—are trained that they must abide by that policy so that we can minimize the incidence of violence.

The Chair: I won't continue this, but I would like to know why, if somebody has to be removed from a violent situation, it has to be the woman. I just wanted to know that. So think about it. It'll come back later on as a question.

We'll now hear from Madam Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for being here this afternoon. We appreciate it very much. I know that it's getting late and that you have been here for much of the afternoon.

Sergeant Hulan, I would like to know something. In the document you presented to us, you talk about a project that began in the fall of 2005. You document 18 cases still under investigation. I assume that the perpetrators remain at large, since you do not mention it in your report. I assume that you have not found those responsible for the murders of 17 people and that you have not found the seven missing persons either.

During the same period of time, from 2005 to 2010, the Sisters in Spirit initiative conducted substantive research of exceptional worth with very few resources. Its representatives presented to us a report at the end of last year on all those who disappeared or were murdered.

How do you explain that you do not have more results to show for your investigation, considering all the resources available to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police? Why have you not made more progress? In your organization, 75 people have been working on this case since 2005. How do you explain that? Please, give me an answer. I'm confused, I don't understand.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Nash or Mr. Hulan.

S/Sgt Bruce Hulan: When our project was initially created, the mandate was to review all of the investigational files: to identify the files, review the files, and develop investigational strategies. When we began the process of identifying which files we felt we had to bring within the project, we had to create a criterion and, I would suggest, a strict guideline or strict rules as to what files we could look at.

As I explained, we were restricted to looking at files that involved females, young women, engaged in high-risk activity or activity that placed them at risk, but we have also restricted our investigation to either homicides or missing persons files that occurred within one mile of the major highways I spoke about. Our logic for restricting the numbers to that, or for criteria that low, was that to achieve success in our investigational file, we have to be able to have a manageable number of files to look at.

We could conduct a search of the entire province and end up with possibly significantly more investigations, but for the particular mandate of our project, to be able to expect or hope to achieve success in those investigations, it would be such a momentous task that—

● (1805)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Since you have not gotten any tangible results, do you think that you were maybe looking in the wrong place, that you should have taken a different approach?

There is something else. In Maniwaki, two aboriginal girls disappeared two years ago. When they went missing, the local police service took on one case, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police took on the other. Consequently, there has been no collaboration between the two police forces. That means that the two police services have not been sharing data.

Today, we still don't know the whereabouts of those two girls. At the time of their disappearance, the two missing girls were 15 and 16 years of age. Today, they would be 17 and 18. Is it normal that, when girls from the same aboriginal community disappear, there is no collaboration between those investigating the cases because they belong to two different police forces?

[*English*]

S/Sgt Bruce Hulan: First of all, I think I heard two questions there. The first one was that we haven't achieved any significant results.... I would disagree with that. We haven't been successful in charging anybody in any of the offences, but we have advanced the investigations. We have collected significant numbers in DNA. Many of our cases have suspect DNA, and we have collected over 600 samples of DNA from individuals in the last year and a half. For people who have been identified in the investigations as long-time suspects, that have carried on for years...we have proven that they were not responsible for those offences, so I think it's important to say that we have made progress.

The issue of communication between police forces is a very good point. It's something that in the last 20 years I think we have made great strides in. I can't speak to the specific investigation that you refer to in Quebec, because I'm not familiar with it, but in British Columbia I can say that within our investigation specifically we exchange information with our detachments. We share information with detachments, but also with the municipal police departments within the province, as well as the other investigations in other provinces that are parallel or similar to our investigation.

● (1810)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I have one last question. Mr. Hulan, do you think there should be a public inquiry into the disappearance or murder of some 600 young women who have gone missing?

[*English*]

S/Sgt Bruce Hulan: I'm sorry. I missed the last part of your question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Do you agree with the public inquiry that has been called for regarding the murders or disappearances of those 600 young aboriginal women?

[*English*]

S/Sgt Bruce Hulan: How much time did you say I have, Madam Chair?

Ms. Nicole Demers: It's a yes or no question.

Supt Russ Nash: The only way we could answer that would be to say that it would not be for us to demand an inquiry or to ask for an inquiry, but if the government decided that was a good idea, we certainly would cooperate.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Ms. Grewal for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Obviously, when we are talking about violence against aboriginal women, there is a perpetrator, right? And the perpetrator is a man, I assume. Are there any programs for men so that they can have some help to get them out of this cycle and all this sort of stuff? Are there any programs out there to help them out?

Supt Russ Nash: Who is that directed to?

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Anyone can answer that.

Ms. Bernie Williams: They've got john schools—

Mrs. Nina Grewal: To help the men out?

Supt Russ Nash: I'll answer that.

Yes, there is counselling that could be made available or that is made available. Certainly, there are conditions that can be placed on the perpetrators by the courts. But the notion of counselling or something like that certainly wouldn't be within the purview of the police.

● (1815)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Would anyone else like to answer?

Ms. Bernie Williams: I don't know if you heard...that there is john school. These are men who are buying and selling our women and children.

But as a survivor of abuse in the police department, I think there needs to be a lot of work to bring.... I hear the word "accountability", and yet I'm listening and they have to watch exactly what they say. When we spoke at a thing last week with the VPD, we heard how they like to ice things over. They really need to be transparent out there. There is a lot of good, but there is a lot of bad, too. But the majority that we see on the streets are the bad ones.

There was a first nations man who was sitting behind me and he was speaking to the deputy sergeant last week because Officer Jim Chu wasn't there. And this gentleman asked, "Why are you not bringing out the bad cops who are still perpetrating against our women?" They are some of our biggest abusers down there. I understand that it's like an old boys' school, whether you're an RC or political, or whatever you are.

We are hearing women say that these cops are picking up our women. If there's a warrant out for their arrest, they will say to the women, "You are going to give me"...whatever. And none of these police officers has ever been held to task on anything. They go out and they're bullies.

We've witnessed what they've been doing to homeless people on the streets. They walk by the drug dealers. They will target women who are trying to make ends meet, who go out just to buy milk or Pampers, or whatever it is. These men are in power and taunt these women, and they tell them, "We could phone the ministry on you right now if you don't comply with me." It's been going on for years, and nothing has changed.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: My other question is to the Pivot Legal Society. I would like to hear about the project you had for three years—the Jane Doe project. How did it help concerning violence against aboriginal women? How much funding did you receive?

Dr. Darcie Bennett: First I'll quickly touch on your question around services for men. I was having a conversation with a group of social workers about why the focus is always on women. One of the things they said is they have nothing for the men. They may know that she will go back, or he will go on and be with another woman.

The other thing we've seen repeatedly is that men who have been violent to women are directed toward anger management. I think it's really important that we acknowledge that this isn't about anger; it's about power and control.

Our Status of Women project involved three years of funding. There was $60,000 the first year and then $80,000 for the two years afterwards. It's running out. We really hope to be able to maintain that service. When we started that project the goal was to fill some of the gaps in women's access to legal services. Over those three years we've seen further erosion of that.

One thing we've tried to do is create legal clinics that are accessible to women and recognize that a woman may come in with a family law issue, a child welfare issue, or an immigration issue, but there are poverty issues there. There are all the criminal law issues they're dealing with, and we set them up with lawyers who understand those things and understand those dynamics.

A lot of our work is focused on training the women who work with these women, whether they're settlement workers or people in transition houses, because with the withdrawal of legal aid we've seen that they're doing more and more of the work that lawyers used to do.

So with that project we've really tried to fill narrow service gaps. But what women really need is representation in court from lawyers who understand the dynamics of violence against women and can be with them throughout the process.

We've been able to offer some bandages. We've been able to help women get visits with their kids and get restraining orders. That's important, but it's not a substitute for a funded legal aid service and training advocates who are already overworked to be able to help women write affidavits and things.

Again, it's great, it's important, and it would be a real tragedy if we were to lose that service in the coming year. But it's a bandage.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Madam Chair, do I have time left?

The Chair: No, that's it. You've gone a little over seven minutes, but that's fine.

So now we'll go to Ms. Davies for the NDP.

Ms. Libby Davies: Thank you.

First of all, thank you to the witnesses for coming today. It's been a really intense day, and I'm glad we've heard everybody. I wish we could hear more people.

Kelly was just giving me a little bit of information, which I'll bring forward, but I'm trying to think about some of the common themes that are coming forward here from all of the witnesses we've heard today. I think there are issues that come forward. Unfortunately, they're things we're very familiar with and we hear over and over again: poverty, racism, discrimination, inequality, brutality, violence—the systemic issues that continue. But one thing that does strike me is what doesn't change, which is that there isn't any trust built up. I think between the institutions in power and the people who are trying to change what's happening, there's no real relationship in terms of a sense that we're working together, that things will change. I think that's a real issue. To me, that comes back to the issue of accountability.

So whatever brilliant report we come up with, as so many other reports that were there before us—and I've been on parliamentary committees where we had very good reports and we had very good recommendations—I think the challenge is how we actually take those recommendations and move them into action and actually make progress. That's what we have to grapple with, how we actually make that progress.

So I'd really like to put that forward and ask you what suggestions you have that we can build into the report. The idea is that there should be progress reports. There should be benchmarks. There should be targets and measurements. There should be ways to ensure that the accountability happens, whether it's with the police, the legislators, the social worker, or whatever it is.

Kelly, who I was just speaking with, pointed out to me that even just this last summer, in Crab Park, which those of us in Vancouver are very familiar with—it's a small green space on the waterfront that took a long time to get as sort of a public green space. There was a very important ceremony this past August at which a number of players came together, including the RCMP, including people from city hall, including the Vancouver Police Department, and there was an agreement on one little thing, and that was to provide financial support to families for the cost of memorials and funerals and for repatriation, but nothing happened.

Kelly tells me a number of meetings with the police or whoever took place even just for that one thing, to have some money so that the families could at least, with dignity and honour and respect, bury or have memorials for their missing family members and their murdered family members, but even that hasn't happened. So to me it is about a very basic level of trust and about what follow-through there is or there isn't.

So I'd appreciate any comments you have about what we need to do to ensure that in our report, in terms of accountability and making sure that things don't just get lost.... Having it be just another report that gets lost again and gets put on the shelf, and that's the end of that...[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]...set of recommendations. That's what I think we want to avoid.

● (1820)

The Chair: Bernie, you had your hand up first.

Ms. Bernie Williams: I would like to recommend that with regard to the Highway of Tears, all of the 33 recommendations be revisited, those that were very crucial. In fact the RCMP, the Solicitor General, and the attorneys general were all sitting at the symposium.

I would also like to ask a question. The RCMP in Prince George received $6.3 million. I'd like to know what was done with that money. One of the things that is really not talked about is the family members and the children of the murdered and missing women. We know that a lot of these children are in care or in jail.

Anyway, I would like to recommend that.

Ms. Libby Davies: What did they receive the money for, Bernie? Do you know? For investigations?

Ms. Bernie Williams: For investigations and that, and yet, as I showed earlier, they're basing this thing on 18 and we have 45 women's names. Again, we know that it's much higher, but....

I would really like to see those 33 recommendations also applied to what is going on for the public inquiry. These were the families that came forward and said, “This is what we want.” It's ironic how it was all dismissed, and yet the RCMP gets $6.3 million.

I'm trying to look.... I have to be very diplomatic about it, which is a first for me, but I'm really trying to look at this. Instead of putting these moneys out—like with that $10 million—there are organizations here that need the money and they are the ones doing the front-line work out there. There are a lot of copycat organizations, like I said, that are building on the backs of the people down here. If I could recommend that....

I'd like to know what could be set in place for the families. I don't hear about anything other than offering victim services, which...it's really, really not a good relationship with a lot of the family members. Like Kelly was mentioning about the burials and all of that, why should the family members have to always keep fighting to bring their loved ones home. Why did it take so long for the family members to be given the remains? It was sad. I can second that.

I think we should all be treated as equal. I know that in my lifetime it's not going to happen, but I have to believe in possibilities too. I would just like to offer that as part of my comments.

● (1825)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Bernie.

I'm going to go now to a second round. This will be a five-minute round for the question and the answer.

We will begin with Ms. Neville for the Liberals.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions are directed to CEDAW, to Ms. Day and Sharon, on two aspects of what you talked about. One of the early groups—I think it was the first group we met with—talked about the lack of an accountability framework right now in terms of recommendations from international bodies. I wonder if you would speak to that, one or the other of you.

Second, in your presentation, Shelagh, you talked about three different initiatives: a national inquiry, a national action plan, and getting over the jurisdictional wrangling. As we just heard from Libby, even the negotiations for a park are not insignificant.

I'd like you to comment on the accountability framework, and I guess particularly on the first two initiatives. What would a national inquiry look like in your mind and what would a national action plan look like?

Ms. Shelagh Day: Well, let me speak to the accountability mechanisms first. I think accountability mechanisms are extraordinarily important, and in my mind it's not simply a question of what you think about in terms of this report.

This report is about the human rights of aboriginal women and girls. That's the whole substance of the report. We think of going to the international treaty bodies as part of what holds Canada accountable for the human rights of aboriginal women and girls, but then we find out when we come back to Canada that we have no mechanism inside our own country for dealing with the recommendations that have been made to us.

It's so clear. It has been said over and over again now to Canada, look, this is part of the international human rights law framework that you have agreed to be a part of, and what is said by the treaty bodies to you about your compliance with human rights does matter, so where's the internal mechanism to actually make sure that the recommendations that are made are taken seriously and implemented?

That accountability mechanism that we and the treaty bodies are asking for has to be cross-jurisdictional, because human rights and our implementation of them cross federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions.

So that's the first thing.

On the second thing, what does a national inquiry look like? Well, under laws in Canada, a national inquiry can look like what the federal government wants it to look like, right? The terms of reference can be written in a way that's big enough and broad enough to actually take into account the scope of the problem we have. I think this process is part of it, because in fact we keep doing this in order to get to the point where there's the political will to actually say, okay, we accept the responsibility.

Part of the reason why we look at the international treaty law is that it's so clear about saying what the obligations of government are. That's still what's missing here. At no level yet have governments actually said, we understand that we have responsibilities and obligations to aboriginal women and girls—profound ones. That's what we're looking for from a national inquiry: the government actually saying, okay, we understand the nature of our obligations and what steps we now have to take, and we understand that you're part of getting there.

A national action plan, I think, has to do with the things that the people at this table are all talking about. Let's see what the priorities are about what has to be done. Let's see that. Let's write it out. Let's say it. Let's get it on paper so that we have actual steps about what we're going to do and some benchmarks, some timelines, etc., to deal with it as a big, national, complex, essential issue of the basic human rights of aboriginal women and girls.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

● (1830)

The Chair: I think we have run out of our five minutes.

Before I go to Ms. Grewal, Shelagh, you made a comment about how there is no mechanism in Canada for dealing with something like reporting to the CEDAW. There is. There is a mechanism. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is responsible for designating the particular minister responsible for pulling together provincial, municipal, and/or every other jurisdiction that has a role to play in the particular issue, and for getting the report and going and giving the report.

We have done this before on many issues. I know there is a mechanism, a clear mechanism, and not only on CEDAW but on every issue.

Ms. Shelagh Day: Yes, but you and I are not understanding each other properly, then, because I'm talking about a mechanism to deal with the implementation of the recommendations that come back from the treaty bodies. I'm not talking about the reporting—

The Chair: Oh. I thought you said there was no mechanism for dealing with the.... Sorry.

Ms. Shelagh Day: No.

The Chair: Okay. Well, of course, it would be the ministers responsible for that particular issue as the mechanism, because federal-provincial-territorial meetings designate answers to problems. I'm just saying that there is a way to answer a recommendation.

Ms. Shelagh Day: Yes. I think there's a way too. It's just not being done.

The Chair: The next person is Mrs. Grewal. You have five minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: My question is directed to the RCMP.

In the Vancouver area only, how much funding is dedicated to Project E-PANA? And can you elaborate on what you are doing with these funds?

S/Sgt Bruce Hulan: The operating budget, the investigational operating budget, for the project for this fiscal year is $6 million. That may be the reference to the $6.3 million. But it's actually $6 million.

The money pays for salary dollars for the regular members of the RCMP and the support staff and for any investigational expenses that may be incurred during the year.

There was reference to family meetings or to having meetings with families. I just wanted to comment that this is something we committed to very early in the project to ensure that they happened. Part of that money is used to pay for the expenses of all family members who attend our meetings. Initially, when we started the project, we were holding two meetings a year at the request of the families. We are now at one meeting a year, and we ask that attendance be restricted to two family members. But we pay all the expenses they incur.

We first started out holding the meetings in various communities in the north—Prince Rupert, Smithers, Prince George—and we have now restricted ourselves to Prince George.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I see. Thank you.

Dona, do you have any questions?

Ms. Dona Cadman: Yes.

I think it was Michelle who said that women are stuck in a cycle that is tough to break out of. Is there a certain point in this cycle when it's easier, girl or boy, to break out? Is there sort of a halfway point after which they're not going to get out? Or is it an individual thing and that person has picked themselves up and gone on?

● (1835)

Mrs. Michelle Corfield: I don't know if there's any jump-off point in the sense that at a certain point you give up. But I know from work I've done previously and from different projects, when we start looking at the health and well-being of the children and we work with the young families and the young teenagers, we make change, right? Because we're working with everybody—boys and girls. That's where I think we can make the best headway and have the greatest impact. I say that in the sense that in the work I've done, I've seen it in the reduction of suicide in youth.

I've seen a change when we work with the really young, but we can't ignore what's going on. That's what I mean about a whole person. We have to look after them spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally, from birth to death, lifelong, and we have to find ways to create the greatest impact throughout that spectrum in any place we live or any place we find our women or our children.

I don't know if there's a jump-off point, but Shelagh is probably better....

Ms. Sharon McIvor (As an Individual): As Shelagh said earlier, we did a tour of the province and talked to people who were front-line workers and who worked mainly with the women who were caught up in the welfare cycle. Without help, they can't get out.

We found that the cycle included the apprehension of children. Once the children were gone, that was the death knell to the family. There is no way the women can get them back, because once they're gone, the social assistance is cut and the housing they need to bring them back isn't available. So no matter what they do, those kids are gone. What happens then is that the mom usually goes into a cycle that results in her own destruction.

If you can get them before the kids go...but given the social assistance, the support, the cutting of all the programs, that's highly unlikely. We found, when we toured the province, that there were situations where the children were being apprehended at birth as well. So once they'd gone through it with the children they had, they were taken away. If they became pregnant again, then the welfare worker was hovering at birth. They would give orders to the hospital to say that the child was not to be released. They would swoop in and take the child, and that one wouldn't come back either.

The other thing that was quite prominent in our consultations was that the welfare rate...if you remove the child from the home.... There is a policy that says that if you can leave the child within the community, within the extended family, that's the preference, especially with aboriginal children. The rate for a child in a home of a relative is about half of what it is for a child in the home of a foster parent who is not related. So it doesn't reflect the desire to keep the family together.

The situation is much larger than just putting some money into it, or putting some programs in it. The situation we're talking about is systemic, and we can look at the individual little pieces, but something larger has to happen. A piece of it I think is the education of people like you who actually are in a position to make some difference. If you don't understand what's going on down there on the ground and you're making decisions over welfare rates and all of that, I can't see a way out.

The Acting Chair (Hon. Anita Neville): Thank you.

Nicole.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

You are familiar with the bill on matrimonial rights. Do you think that, if this bill were adopted as it is currently drafted, it would help women in aboriginal communities? Could you specify how it would or would not be beneficial to them.

● (1840)

[*English*]

Mrs. Michelle Corfield: I haven't read the latest draft, I'm sorry.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: It has not changed.

[*English*]

Mrs. Michelle Corfield: I'm embarrassed that I haven't. I'm sorry. I can't give you an honest answer.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: What do you think about it, Sharon?

[*English*]

Ms. Sharon McIvor: Actually, this is one of the things I've been working on for the last 30 years as well.

Any draft legislation that puts the rights of individual women below those of the band is not good for women. I know this from experience. I've worked extensively when culture is being used to make sure that women's equality rights are not being respected. So every time you say, "We'll pick you out of the regular rights protection", like you have and Hedy would have, and you separate that out....

There's solid legislation in place; you know you have a mechanism in place that you can use to address the inequity. And the legislation was put there for a reason. That's why it was put there. Somehow in aboriginal communities, the government says, "Well, the culture is different, so these men"—and they're primarily men —"can continue to abuse the women and disrespect their rights, because we'll give them the cultural right to do that." The legislation that has been put together on matrimonial property, on taking care of property on reserve, has all of that built into it. As long as it's there, the women will suffer, I can tell you that.

We've done a project on that, we've done research, and we've found that on reserve, about 90% of the land was registered to men. That was a policy of the government, the patriarchal policy of the government, that the women couldn't be on the title. Of the 5% or 8% or 10% of women who are on the title, they got it from their father, who did not have a son. That's how they got their name on the title. So if you address it in an equal way, like the family legislation across the provinces, it basically says that on separation, the land is deemed to be 50-50, regardless of whose name it's in. And then there's a mechanism for challenging that.

That's not the reality with the legislation. I think I was there when they threw the first one out—I don't know how many years ago—because of that.

The federal government today continues to tell us, as aboriginal women, that they will subject our basic human rights to somebody else's say-so, to somebody else's consent.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Do you intend to launch a campaign in order to inform women in aboriginal communities that this bill is not in their best interests? We are actually getting e-mails and letters from aboriginal communities asking us to vote in favour of the bill.

[*English*]

Ms. Sharon McIvor: I wasn't able to get to the committee when it was being considered by the Senate. I wasn't able to go. I really have a lot on my plate.

Just because you asked the question, I know enough about it to say that it's not in women's best interests. But I have no intention of taking it any further than that, as I have too much on my plate.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: So you know that the bill will probably be passed if you do nothing about it.

● (1845)

[*English*]

Ms. Sharon McIvor: Actually, I have done a lot about a lot of bills, and they've passed anyway.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Sharon McIvor: So it's not much of a threat to me now. It's just something that I don't have time to address in a really comprehensive way.

The Chair: Now we go to Ms. Davies for the NDP.

Ms. Libby Davies: I think that's very honest of you. It's like the reality of us saying, "Are you going to start a campaign to stop something we started?" This damned bill was first of all not supported, and then it was supported. It has gone back and forth. I think your answer is totally honest to say that somebody is going to take it on. Maybe we'll go back now with some new information and see what we can do. I know that our critic, Jean Crowder, has been staying in very close contact with people on the bill, from a feminist perspective. Anyway, your response was very helpful.

I want to come back to the issue of an accountability mechanism. I think this is so critical, and if we can't get it right in terms of follow-up, follow-through, and making real progress—no matter who the government is—then we're just doomed to another politically vicious cycle, I guess we could call it.

I want to come back to you, Shelagh, because you said we need an accountability mechanism that is cross-jurisdictional. I don't know how we'd do that. I'm not even sure I know what you mean. Maybe you can spell that out some more, because I think it's so important to have something in this report that gives us a road map on how we have to do the follow-up on these recommendations, relating it back to CEDAW and on and on. Maybe you can illuminate that a bit more.

Ms. Shelagh Day: Okay.

When recommendations come back that have to do with human rights, at least the treaty bodies are clear—Canada doesn't seem to be—that different levels of government may be responsible for the implementation of these rights.

For example, let's say we were genuinely going to implement recommendations that have been made to Canada about social assistance. The treaty bodies have already said it is inadequate and there should be national standards for social assistance across the country, so we don't have huge variations from one jurisdiction to another and we have some adequate standard for everyone. That requires cooperation between the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments to get standards in place that will be acceptable, to get implementation, and to get the right amount of money transferred from the federal government to the provinces and territories to do that. We need to have interaction between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments that's actually working on these issues.

Part of what's so frustrating is that we have a kind of breakdown in that relationship, so the provincial governments blame the federal government and the federal government says it's the jurisdiction of the provincial governments. It happens particularly when things have to do with aboriginal women and girls.

We can't seem to make our levels of government mesh adequately. Unfortunately, I think they're using that to say they can't do anything about these very basic human rights issues. So we've been saying that we need to have an implementation mechanism or accountability mechanism that can bring federal, provincial, and territorial governments together, not issue by issue, because that would break it up too much—to respond to you, Hedy—but with some sense that this is the meat that has come back from treaty bodies. These are the human rights flaws we have, failures, places where we're falling down. We need to have some genuine collaboration between our levels of government in order to deal with this.

Is the federation of the provinces, or whatever we call it these days.... There was a point at which I thought the social union framework agreement would give us that kind of mechanism. It has to be at such a high level that we're actually dealing with people who have the clout or the power to do something. We don't want this federal-provincial-territorial committee of officials responsible for human rights to have no power.

● (1850)

Ms. Libby Davies: Can I just ask you one thing? Do you think it would make a difference, in that implementation mechanism for federal-provincial-territorial if part of the mechanism also included civil society?

Ms. Shelagh Day: Absolutely I think that. In fact we—

Ms. Libby Davies: It wouldn't be just governments dealing with governments—

Ms. Shelagh Day: That's absolutely right.

Ms. Libby Davies: —but there would be an element of citizens being at the table, to follow—

Ms. Shelagh Day: Yes: civil society's direct participation.

Ms. Libby Davies: You know, I think this is going to be a very important thing for the public inquiry on missing women.

Ms. Shelagh Day: I do too.

The other thing is that we've put forward models that would actually provide a way for civil society to come forward with particular issues to say, look, we really know about this particular recommendation that was made and what's needed in order to implement it fully, in a way that's effective. There could be some real interaction, real dialogue, between civil society and government about these very basic issues.

So I agree with that completely. The participation of aboriginal women in the design of the implementation of recommendations that have to do with violence against women is just essential.

The Chair: Thank you, Shelagh.

That's it, Libby.

We don't have room for another round. We only have about six more minutes. I would have liked to give everybody 30 seconds to say what it is you'd like to see, but Libby has brought up something really important that I think I would like us to explore a little bit.

Accountability is something that I think is at the heart of it all. What do we mean by accountability? Is it that the Auditor General says you have $50 million for a thing and you spend the $50 million in the right place? I think that's part of accountability, but it's not accountability. Accountability, as Libby said earlier on, is when you say you're going to achieve this goal. You look at what you are doing when you set up the structures and the strategies, and you say, three years later, “Are we anywhere close? Did we get there? Are we going in the wrong direction entirely? Are we going backwards?” That's a piece of accountability: to achieve objectives and goals that were set out.

However, I also think that the thing I would like to explore just a little bit is the RCMP.

I'm not picking on you guys, but you're the only police people or police institution around the table here, so....

Obviously there is an accountability to what your department suggests you should do, but when you come to a meeting like this and you hear that there are real, concrete problems and challenges on the ground to achieving your goals of (a) protecting society, including aboriginal women in that society, and (b) protecting women from violent situations, and you believe that the strategies that you've been given from on high aren't working and that there is a reality where the rubber hits the road, don't you believe that you have to do something about it from your ground up? Don't you believe you need to now go back and say, “Guys, it sounds good on paper, but it isn't working; what we're doing is revictimizing women and we're not actually achieving the goal of protecting and creating safe places”?

Do you guys do that? I know it's difficult, but do you do it?

So that's the question I want to throw at you, Libby's question about accountability, which Shelagh is touching on. At the end of the day, when the United Nations as a multilateral body says to a country, “Da-dah, da-dah”, they're speaking to a nation-state. Canada, whether we like it or not, is the nation-state that has to be accountable to that international body for getting it done.

We know that in Canada, as a federation, we have constitutional jurisdictional things. The federal government cannot go to a province and say, “I demand that you do that”. But it does mean...and I believe, Shelagh, from where I sit, and having been in cabinet a length of time, that the federal government has the responsibility to find a way, whatever that way is, to achieve what it is as a nation-state they have to answer to. And it's up to them to find the structure and take a leadership role in doing it.

[*Applause*]

The Chair: You know, this is what I would like to hear us talk about as a committee, that we cut through this nonsense, because of all the people who have fallen through the cracks, aboriginal people are the ones who continue to have people play football with this. I really feel, and I hope...and this is something that we're hearing from you. You've articulated it extremely well.

I just wanted to pick up Libby's question on accountability, therefore, in terms of the reality of actually achieving goals.

So what is it you—either Russ or Bruce—can tell me about what you heard today and how you're going to go back and make a difference? I know you're only two....

I'm not going to put you on the spot—

Supt Russ Nash: Oh, okay.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: No, no, but there have to be mechanisms for you to be able to say, “You know what? It ain't working, guys, on the ground.”

● (1855)

Supt Russ Nash: Madam Chair, thank you for that.

Certainly I've listened a lot today, and certainly I've learned a lot today. With respect to the RCMP and our ability to change and modify our behaviour and react within those areas or that circle of influence we have control over, I think what we've heard today is that this isn't just a policing issue. As a matter of fact, when Shelagh spoke, she mentioned two major problems. One was certainly addressed to the police. But the other one was socio-economic—it's the conditions these poor victims are living in. So there's a greater thing that certainly we have no influence over.

Within the RCMP, within what we can do, our policy is ever evolving and ever changing. When we see that something isn't working, that is communicated.

I am the officer in charge of the E Division major crime section. I have 400 personnel who report directly to me. So I have control over that sphere that spans this province. My people, on a fairly routine basis, approach me and speak to maybe certain areas of protocol or to policies we've enacted that we maybe need to amend, and we do that. Within division policy and within our national policies, we continue to evolve. So when we see that there are areas where we can improve, we do. Certainly in the areas of violence in relationships, I believe that we have a very good policy.

From what you mentioned earlier, I think you were under the impression that in every situation involving violence in a relationship, the victim is removed from the house. That is not our policy. Certainly, when we have evidence to support that an assault has taken place, the perpetrator is removed from the house, leaving the victim safe there.

In those instances when we're called and there's no overt offence that has been committed but we believe that to leave the two people in the residence together could possibly create further problems or to someone being victimized, the option is there for someone to leave the house voluntarily. Then there are shelters available.

On forcible removal in the situation when there's no offence...we don't forcibly take anyone out. I think what you're hearing about as well is a social services system that may return to the residence when the victim is back with the offender, placing the children in jeopardy. It's at that point, then, unfortunately, that people are forcibly removed.

With respect to accountability, that's one of our core values. Certainly, I hold my people accountable, and we do strive.... The 400 people who report to me are people who come to work on a daily basis wanting to do the best they can for the citizens of this province and this country. On a daily basis they make me proud. Do we make mistakes? Absolutely. Do we learn from those mistakes? I hope we do. It's through those mistakes that we actually alter our policies and procedures and hopefully perform and provide a level of support and service to the people of this country to the best of our ability.

The Chair: Thank you for that answer. You are in a difficult position to give the answer I think we want to talk about, which is about outcomes-based accountability or results-based accountability. I think that's what everyone is talking about. It's difficult being in a bureaucracy and having to deal with that. I know that. I'm not going to put you on the spot any further. But it would be nice for the RCMP division in British Columbia and Yukon to be the best practice for Canada down the road. Right? You've heard things here, so you can start some best practices.

Supt Russ Nash: I'll certainly try.

The Chair: Did somebody else put a hand up?

What I'd like to do now is ask for 30 seconds, starting with Bernie and moving on to Darcie, Shelagh, Bruce, Michelle, and Darlene.

You can make this happen. What would you do to make it happen? You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Bernie Williams: One thing, I would like to go out and educate more. I would like to educate in our communities.

● (1900)

Dr. Darcie Bennett: I'd like to see us use some of the legal mechanism we have in place that I think have been underused, particularly the charter. For example, the issue of housing has come up across the board today. We have a provision, section 7, that refers to security of the person, and that's never been interpreted as the right to housing. I think when we start to establish these things as rights, it becomes much easier to hold governments accountable for them.

The Chair: Shelagh.

Ms. Shelagh Day: I want to talk very briefly about root causes. We've heard a lot of people say colonization. Remember that the colonizer was also a patriarch. Patriarchy is part of what colonization means. We're still doing it. When we talk about matrimonial property, when we talk about Bill C-3, which just went through and has not taken out all of the discrimination in the Indian Act, the government is still legislating, overtly, about aboriginal women in a way it doesn't legislate about any other group of women in the country. So we are still in the process of playing out the patriarchy of the colonizer. Aboriginal women and children are still suffering from it. And that's part of the violence and part of the gravest conditions.

The Chair: Thanks, Shelagh.

Bruce.

S/Sgt Bruce Hulan: I'd just like to finish off on your comments about accountability.

As part of the RCMP, my project is ultimately responsible and accountable to the RCMP, but we're also accountable to the family members of the victims, and that's who we work for.

The Chair: Thank you.

Michelle.

Mrs. Michelle Corfield: I think if we were to be accountable to ourselves and to the work we do, creating a national action plan and having the resources to implement that plan would be the accountable measure we could have. It's about having political champions like yourselves at all levels of government, and having the ability to create change and a movement of women supporting national change in how aboriginal women and children are treated, and the resources to make a difference.

The Chair: Thank you.

Darlene.

Ms. Darlene Rigo: What I'd like to say is that I don't think apologies are enough; we need resources.

I don't think resources are best spent on more policing and more law and order, but on helping women to break those cycles of violence, abuse, prostitution, and addiction. So we need resources at a grassroots level to help women deal with the layers of abuse they've faced that have led them into these lifestyles, and not to give up on them with half measures, like harm reduction, but to believe that, yes, some people can get out of that cycle. We have to believe that. We can't give up on the women who seem to be caught up in it—there are too many of them—because nothing will be done then.

So, yes, I think that's where we need to focus our attention.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Laura Holland (Collective Member, Aboriginal Women's Action Network): AWAN thinks it's really important that all apologies are backed up with redress. We think apologies should be backed up with action.

I'm sorry, but with the apologies by Canada to aboriginal people for residential schools, the murders of children, land theft, cultural genocide and intended genocide, and white supremacy, all of these things, we must have redress. Apologies and restitution are not enough. It's shameful and humiliating. What we want is the restoration of our rightful places in our homelands. We see billions of dollars on a weekly basis that cross the borders of this country that belong to aboriginal women and children.

We want our rights restored, and we want to be treated with dignity, respect, and equality. We want everyone sitting at this table to look at what they are accountable for. Have they lived up to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

The Chair: Thank you, Laura.

Ms. Bernie Williams: And get rid of the Indian Act.

The Chair: Will someone move that the meeting adjourn?

Hon. Anita Neville: I so move.

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

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