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Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

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● (1305)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): This is the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today, November 23, 2010, we are holding our 33rd meeting.

Today we have two witnesses, who will be talking to us about sexual assault on women and children in fragile states and in situations of conflict. Our witnesses are Ms. Christine St-Pierre, research analyst at the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre and, from the University of Ottawa, Ms. Joanne Lebert, coordinator, Progress and Opportunities for Women's Equality Rights (POWER)/Africa-Canada.

[*English*]

Hers is a double appointment.

[*Translation*]

She also represents the Human Rights Research and Education Centre.

[*English*]

To our witnesses, I know that our clerk will have already run by you the length of presentations. You're free to start at any time and divide your time between you as you see fit. When you have finished, and based on how long your presentations are, we'll determine how much time is available for each of the questions you'll be asked.

Please feel free to begin.

Ms. Kristine St-Pierre (Research Analyst, Pearson Peacekeeping Centre): Thank you, Chair.

[*Translation*]

Members of Parliament, good afternoon.

[*English*]

I am pleased to testify before you today to discuss the issue of sexual violence against women and children in fragile states and in conflict situations. l would like to share with you several observations made during a recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I will also take this opportunity to present, in my role as research analyst with the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, a number of recommendations to strengthen efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

My presentation will be in French; however, it will be my pleasure to respond to questions in both languages.

[*Translation*]

As I just mentioned, I represent the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, a non-governmental organization whose mandate is to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations through research, education, training and capacity-building.

The centre sensitizes police and military staff to sexual assault and sexual assault prevention in situations of conflict and post-conflict through various training courses, seminars and round tables.

One of the first objectives of our visit to the DRC was to study in greater depth the various aspects of the specific priorities of the UN mission in the DRC, MONUC, in particular the protection of civilians and the fight against sexual assault, in order to better design and plan our programs and to gather useful information for the purpose of developing our courses.

Sexual assault is not a situation specific to countries in a situation of conflict or post-conflict. Cases of violence are, of course, found all around the world. What differentiates this violence from what is found in armed conflicts, and more specifically in the DRC, is the permanent mark it leaves not only on its victims, but also on entire communities.

War- related violence is the most pernicious of all. Its purpose is to destroy, to humiliate families and to disperse populations. Its perpetrators are merciless, going so far as to cut off women's breasts with machetes and mutilate their genitals with broken bottles or firearms. Even worse, if that's possible, this violence does not just affect its victims; the stigmatization is such that their families and communities suffer as well.

According to UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, as many as 500,000 women were raped during the genocide in Rwanda, more than 64,000 in the conflict in Sierra Leone and more than 40,000 in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In 2009, it is estimated that more than 15,000 women were raped in eastern DRC. In Darfur, approximately 100 women are raped every day. That is hard to believe, but it's a fact.

It is in these circumstances that UN Security Council Resolution 1820, which was adopted in 2008, denounces the use of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war in armed conflicts.

That resolution, which is further to Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, goes so far as to acknowledge that systematic sexual violence against women in situations of conflict is not only an attack on the dignity and human rights of women, but also constitutes a war crime and a crime against humanity.

Despite these resolutions and numerous international efforts, the greatest injustice is the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of rape and sexual crimes. In situations of conflict, the vast majority of attackers go unpunished.

More recently, in July 2010, some 200 rebels invaded the Walikale region in the province of North Kivu, in DRC. They pillaged the area and raped more than 300 women and young girls over three days, in an undeniable use of sexual assault on the vulnerable population.

The international community reacted quickly, deploring MONUC's failure to take action in response to the attacks and demanding a greater effort on the part of the mission to protect civilians.

The question arises: could these deplorable incidents have been prevented? Opinions vary. Some say that military observers could more readily have perceived the signs of violence and prevented the attack merely by being there. Others claim that the mission should have used force and attacked the attackers. For others still, the mission could not have prevented the incident in spite of its efforts.

Wanting to blame MONUC is understandable. After all, the purpose of the mission is to protect civilians.

However, as a member of the international community, we have to consider the following question: do our expectations exceed what the mission can accomplish with its human and financial resources?

The sensationalist media find it hard to mention that the 30 military observers might not have been able to confront the 200 rebels.

● (1310)

Particularly since it can take 20 to 30 minutes to cover a distance of 30 kilometers in North America or Europe, whereas, in the Congo, that can take two or three days in a 4 x 4. That is in addition to the absence of any communication system, more particularly in the remote villages.

In view of these circumstances, is it MONUC's responsibility to protect all individuals at all times, wherever they may be? This is an unavoidable debate and it will last as long as the insecurity remains and national security institutions are unable to fully protect civilian populations across the country. It is important to bear in mind that the UN's mission in the DRC is not an executive mandate. In other words, the UN's responsibility is to support the DRC government's efforts to combat impunity and to protect civilians from violations of international humanitarian law and human rights.

There is no quick and easy solution. It is interesting to watch MONUC's numerous initiatives to create and improve ties with the communities and to sensitize senior leaders of the countries concerned to the problem of sexual violence. Despite its extent, it is difficult to identify any impact in the context of a conflict in which armed rebel groups use sexual violence as a weapon of war and where impunity reigns. Prevention is necessarily one of the best ways to combat sexual violence. For example, one of the deficiencies identified during our visit was a lack of communication between military forces and UN police and the local communities. Communication is a critical factor in any preventive strategy as it permits a better understanding of the local situation and of alarm signals.

Deploying a larger number of female police officers and military members is another prevention strategy. For example, female staff can facilitate access to local women, improve support for their needs and thus help increase the sense of safety among the local populations. In addition, as women often represent more than half of the adult population of a specific society, it seems logical that, in the context of a peace operation, an attempt should be made to achieve some balance between men and women in staffing positions. However, prevention cannot be carried out without a security and judicial system that the public can trust and that puts an end to impunity for violence against women, whether it is committed by civilians, militia members or soldiers. The security system cannot be reformed without the political will and determination of the players concerned.

During her visit to DRC last April, Michaëlle Jean, Canada's former Governor General and Commander in Chief, said: "By giving women these means, we are giving the families, communities and countries to which they belong the opportunity to live a better, fairer life." It is important to note that sexual violence prevents women from even taking part in their society, a condition that was identified by Resolution 1325 as an essential factor in achieving sustainable peace. Implementing the national action plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is another strategy for combatting sexual assault by implementing and monitoring the various indicators.

Lastly, it is also important to note the role of donors in combatting sexual violence. Despite their good intentions, we often see that donors lack an understanding of the situation. It is important that they adopt a holistic approach to ensure that entire communities receive funds while meeting the specific needs of the victims of sexual violence.

If this visit taught us one thing, it is that MONUC's ongoing work and efforts, together with those of the humanitarian agencies and organizations in the field and the national players concerned, are essential in combatting sexual violence. However, more effort is and will be necessary in future. In the short term, it is important that the assessment of current situations help determine development and investment actions that will have a concrete effect in the field.

● (1315)

I would like to conclude by citing Ms. Marie-Jacqueline Kumbu, from DRC's department of gender, the family and children: "Evil strikes suddenly but dissipates slowly." It is thanks to the contained and concerted efforts of the international community that we can hope for an improvement in the situation of women and children enduring situations of conflict.

Thank you for your attention. I will be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. St-Pierre.

Ms. Lebert, go ahead, please.

Ms. Joanne Lebert (Coordinator, Progress and Opportunities for Women's Equality Rights (POWER)/Africa-Canada, Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to thank you for this invitation to appear today and for this opportunity to present and address a subject of enormous importance: the issue of sexual violence against women and children in fragile states and situations of conflict.

As my colleague, Ms. St-Pierre, has presented her evidence in French, I will be making my presentation in English. However, I am prepared to answer your questions in French or English following our presentations.

[*English*]

As you well know, sexual violence in conflict zones in Africa is both a complex problem and a subject both of western preoccupation and of inaction. As you no doubt also know, over the last 15 years, a number of conflicts—Rwanda, Darfur, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, the DRC—have become synonymous with large-scale incidences of rape and sexual violence, combined with other acts of brutality. While the targets of sexual violence include men, women and children have been the primary victims.

In the context of the DRC, it is estimated that hundreds of thousands—possibly close to half a million—women and girls of all ages have been raped in the past 13 years of war. The acts themselves are often extremely brutal in nature, and deliberately so. Women and girls are also susceptible to repeated attacks, sometimes leaving them to suffer permanent physical and psychosocial injuries.

I would like to focus my time here today on the outcomes of three initiatives that l've led or co-led in my capacity as coordinator of the POWER project, in my former capacity as deputy director of Peacebuild, and in cooperation with other institutes and networks, such as Carleton University's institute of African studies and the international Publish What You Pay coalition.

Funded by the Law Foundation of Ontario, the POWER project is housed at the University of Ottawa's human rights research and education centre. It is a project that seeks to advance women's and girls' equality rights in Africa, and our focus is on sexual violence against women and girls in the Great Lakes region there.

Among the many initiatives we have sponsored, three workshops were held in which speakers from various conflict/post-conflict regions in Africa were represented. These bilingual workshops, which involved over 130 participants in all, examined the phenomenon of sexual violence and conflict. The first looked at causes, consequences, and possible solutions. The second looked at the experiences and the provision of support services to survivors from Africa now residing in Canada. The third examined the gendered dimensions of the activities of the mining sector in conflict situations in Africa.

Drawing on these three initiatives in particular, l've tried to distill what was discussed by workshop participants in order to share with you today general findings and recommendations.

In macro terms, the findings ultimately reflect a broader discussion of power and security, and by security I mean both human security and hard security. The emphasis on so-called hard security is an important starting point. It is important to state from the outset that this is not a women's issue. It is often dismissed as such and so tends not to garner the political will and/or the resources it deserves or requires for effective action.

This is a hard-security issue. Clearly, gendered violence destroys the lives of individuals, but it also unravels entire communities. The capacity of communities to maintain stability and address and minimize local conflict are negatively affected, which has regional and national implications for consolidating peace.

Within this broader discussion of power and security, the first of three overarching themes emanating from these workshops relates to the threat of simplification. The absence of a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon, which takes into consideration local dimensions of conflict, can lead to actions that have unintended consequences, however well-meaning.

We risk overlooking local power dynamics and tensions that undermine peace-building efforts, including efforts to put an end to violence against women and girls. We risk overlooking the power of local community and local civil society, and by doing so we contribute to their disempowerment and fracturing. Local actors know what needs to be done, but their voices fall on deaf ears, since it is often not what donors want to hear, doesn't fit within their prevailing analysis of conflict, and/or doesn't fall within their list of priorities.

A second overarching theme that emerged from the workshops was that if we need a bottom-up approach, we also need to link local phenomenon to the broader context and to larger, structural power dynamics. This requires that we critically reflect on our role and the impact of our actions as donors, humanitarian actors, consumers and private sector actors, and that we take action based on this critical reflection.

The workshop participants called for linkages to broader phenomenon, including transnational actions and dynamics, that set the stage for violence and its perpetuation. This means that we have to stop seeing rape as a natural occurrence in conflict or as naturally characteristic of some societies. Rather, rape and extreme gender-based violence emerge out of specific political and economic contexts and serve the interests of those who benefit from protracted instability.

● (1320)

In the Great Lakes region, protracted chaos is anchored in licit and illicit global markets. Local natural resources are highly lucrative. Easy access to these materials relies on fractured communities and the desperation of local residents who, for example, are willing to become diggers to survive—and this includes children. Revenues are, in large part, used to purchase and fuel the market and trade in small arms and light weapons. So in this context, criminality, violence, and the struggle for survival are normalized, rendering women, girls, and children particularly vulnerable.

In light of these dynamics, we need to closely examine the role of our private sector and its role and impact in fragile states, and we need to do so with a gendered lens.

But workshop participants were also critical of donors, funding agencies, and NGOs. While foreign interventions were called for, they acknowledged that donors were sometimes caught up in perpetuating larger and largely negative dynamics and structures of power.

For example, the multi-level channeling of funds, most often via UN agencies or international bodies, amounts to the creation of a very top-down structure, by which the execution of various contracting agreements are filtered through. The more layers, generally, the more disconnected with and less responsive to local needs; moreover, the needs of the executing agencies, donors, and NGOs are felt to be privileged above those of the communities and populations that are most vulnerable.

A third overarching theme emerging from the workshops relates to issues of voice and representation. We need to recognize Africans, and African girls and women in particular, as actors in their own right and, in fact, as experts of their own condition. We need to amplify their voices and support their protection and peace-building efforts. We need to validate their research efforts and recognize local forms of knowledge.

Countless donor-driven programs have portrayed women and girls as victims and have simply dismissed their views. In fact, some African participants in our workshops and others have said that foreign donors and NGOs are greatly mistrusted, and increasingly so.

Congolese women and local organizations are increasingly reluctant to cooperate. They often refuse to share their research and local data or to provide input because they have been consulted in the past and since forgotten, or because there's no evidence that their views have been taken into consideration.

Local research and information have been used, appropriated, and even misrepresented or used to justify programs or projects that weren't locally supported. There is a pervasive and growing sense that disregard for their own views and experiences and foreign control over their data and personal information have contributed to their disempowerment.

In the time remaining, I would like to present three sets of recommendations based, in part, on these workshop themes I have spelled out:

First, we need to rethink how we frame or approach the issue. It's a security issue, not a women's problem.

We need to acknowledge the complexity of the issue and tackle it, starting from the bottom up, to improve our analysis of the intersections of the local and the global.

We need to put ourselves back into the equation, critically examining our role as donors and aid actors, and as consumers of prized goods extracted from conflict zones, and via careful consideration and ongoing monitoring of the impact of our private sectors in these regions.

Here I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Madame St-Pierre made reference to the national action plan on women, peace, and security, which was very welcome, but there was no mention whatsoever of the private sector in that plan.

We need to change the prevailing discourse and modes of analysis, moving away from dominant top-down policy and programming approaches. Here, our research and scholarly work on conflict and war economies needs to bring in gender and gender analysis, which has been largely left out up until now. But gender is also left out of Canada's foreign policy, quite literally.

Again, with reference to the national action plan on women, peace, and security, there is not a single reference to the word “gender” in the document. I'd be more than happy to discuss the national action plan in greater detail if we can allocate some time to that in the question period, because I think it's certainly worthy of further conversation.

In addition to rethinking how we reframe the problem, we need to think how we reframe the subject of African women, girls, and their communities. We need to be attentive to our perpetuation of stereotypes relating to sexual violence, conflict, and Africa. Harmful and grossly inaccurate representations ultimately reproduce unequal structures of power and undermine local capacities to identify and address problems.

Finally, we need to critically rethink our programming and policies related to sexual violence in order to integrate this reframing of both the problem and those caught up in it.

● (1325)

Above all else, this requires support for deep local research, which is sorely lacking and without which policies and programming remain weak and possibly misguided.

This also requires meaningful and regular consultation with local civil society organizations, including the churches locally and the Canadian civil society organizations as well, which have extensive experience in the region. A consultation-centred feedback loop could directly improve policy and programming development, implementation, and evaluation.

As well, a long-term vision and strategy is required, with the ultimate view of supporting social stability, and not just to return to levels of violence deemed “normal” for Africa.

In conclusion, I recognize the challenges of the many general ideas that have been put forward here. I sincerely hope tart these thoughts and workshop outcomes can contribute to improved programming and policy and, ultimately and most importantly, to meaningful improvement in the security of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict contexts.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions and to providing further detail.

● (1330)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Lebert.

We only have 30 minutes, according to the clock, so what I'm going to do is give you seven-minute question and answer periods. As always, we'll start with the Liberals.

Mr. Cotler, please take it away.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Actually, I'm going to begin where Madame Lebert invited us to, and that is with respect to the national action plan.

[*Translation*]

First, I'm going to put the same question to both witnesses.

Ms. St-Pierre, you mentioned one resolution among many others, Resolution 1325. October will mark the 10th anniversary of that resolution. You also discussed the human rights violations and sexual violence now common in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I will put the same question to both witnesses. As you know, the Government of Canada recently disclosed Canada's Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. There is a group of resolutions with which you are quite familiar. The action plan is based on four indicators: prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery.

[*English*]

My question, really to each of you, is, how effective is the Canadian plan of action?

Madame Lebert, you were inviting this question. In the context of your remarks, I'd just like you—and Madame St-Pierre—to give an assessment of the Canadian plan of action and what we might do in that regard.

Ms. Kristine St-Pierre: Thank you. I will begin and Joanne will add her comments.

Joanne and I, as a member of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, were both part of the drafting and the consultative process that occurred over the summer months. I'd have to say that to date, 22 countries have a national action plan. After 10 years, it's very little, but we're grateful that Canada is one of those countries. The consultative process was extremely welcome, even if it was over a very short period of time. The views of civil society were welcomed by government, and I think the plan was tremendously improved over that period.

What I can say in terms of the effectiveness of the plan is that effectiveness will rest on the willingness and the determination of the departments to implement the plan's various actions. Given that the plan was adopted in consultation with various government departments, there is definitely a willingness there; however, one of the concerns is that there is no dedicated funding for the implementation of this plan.

By having no dedicated funding, you thus effectively rely on the willingness of the various departments to either dedicate internal funds or reallocate funds, which is often very difficult in a time of drastic cuts or limited funding. That will be a challenge, I think, but hopefully it will be re-evaluated as we evaluate this in the coming years.

● (1335)

Ms. Joanne Lebert: As Madame St-Pierre mentioned, she and I both were involved in the consultative process. Actually, in my capacity at Peacebuild, we conducted the national consultations over the course of the summer. It was welcomed by members of civil society. We were very pleased that it finally happened. The plan was many years in the making, let's put it that way, so we were very pleased to see it.

I think that, overall, representatives of civil society see it as a starting point. It's something to improve upon. It's not as strong, I think, as we would like it to be. But as I said, it is a starting point. So beyond the obvious omission of the word “gender”, which I think has tremendous analytical implications for implementation, and the dedication of new resources to making sure that it is implemented across the Government of Canada, there's also no designated person right now, as far as I know, to see that this will happen. That's another element of resources that is lacking.

As far as I understand it, it's in Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Affairs is responsible for overseeing the coordination and implementation throughout the departments. Each department is to set up its own mechanism for evaluating what's going on in their respective department. That's my understanding.

It's my own personal opinion—and I think a number of members of civil society might also say this—that it is a starting point. The voice in the document is definitely passive. It's not terribly proactive, or as proactive as we would like it to be. There's certainly an element of leadership, let's say, that is lacking.

It's not surprising that we are reflecting Canadian interests in the document. It's about training Canadian personnel and making sure our capacity is up to speed. I find it to be very internal or inward-looking in terms of its orientation, and it doesn't reflect any leadership on the issue—or as much as I would like to see. Because we see, in the wording of the document, words like “the Government of Canada encourages”, “supports”, “promotes”, when it could be a lot more active and a lot more engaged and really be a leader on this issue.

Going back I think to issues of resources and making sure that it's properly implemented and evaluated, maybe some greater clarity about lines of accountability and monitoring over time.... Some civil society actors suggested the possibility of perhaps introducing performance evaluations of each government unit, where responsibilities to implement the plan could be tied to their performance vis-à-vis these indicators.

We also might want to look to the States, which has an ambassador for global women's affairs in the Department of State. Why can't we have here, maybe in a cabinet-level position, someone who is responsible for the leadership, monitoring, and implementation of this national action plan?

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Deschamps, s'il vous plaît.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, mesdames, and welcome to our committee. Thank you for taking the time to share your knowledge with us. For us, this is a very enriching and very informative about the subject we are currently addressing. Unfortunately, we have very little time. Otherwise, we could take a closer look at certain comments.

For example, Ms. Lebert, you said in your testimony that you had made some recommendations. But something troubled me a little when you talked about everything related to gender-based analysis. In fact you say that has been left out of foreign affairs documents; that is to say that it's no longer in them. I'm trying to understand. By removing that, they are diminishing the effort and disregarding everything that has been demanded for years in terms of parity, gender-based analysis and ways of implementing measures that will work well.

Similarly, you said, for example, with regard to voices and representation, that a larger number of women should not only take part in the consultations, but should also be in the field for training and prevention purposes. So that troubles me a little.

We talked about the action plan a little earlier. With regard to your recommendations and what you raised about understanding the unhealthy situation that currently prevails with regard to violence against women, did you perceive that the government was taking your recommendations into account in the action plan it is currently proposing?

From what we hear about the government's action plan, we get the impression that it's more a profession of faith than an action plan that would recommend implementing effective, sound measures that would have an impact. Obviously, that's very hard without funding. We all have dreams that are often borne by our imaginations, but we have to produce something in order to implement them.

I find that a bit unfortunate because, even now, in 2010, I get the impression that this aspect is being pushed aside and that no one wants to look at it. The further we move away from the field NGOs, the less we listen to them, even if we feel we are listening to them closely. We continue to close our eyes, and, in my opinion, impunity continues. I find it incredible that half of the planet is watching these strategies without implementing any measures to counter or change this male mentality.

● (1340)

Ms. Joanne Lebert: My training is in anthropology. So I have a lot of experience working at the local level. I think this is really something central to good solid analysis.

National action plans are extremely important at the macro level, but that's not enough. The Government of Canada, as a member of the United Nations, has been pressed into developing a national plan. We are the 22nd country that has done so. In fact, I believe that was done six years after the recommendation was made by the UN Secretary General.

I believe that women in the field view that as something important, but, since that is happening at the macro level, it's not enough; it's simply not enough. Sometimes there's little traction at the local level,

[*English*]

it doesn't filter down

[*Translation*]

at the local level.

That's also very important, but, once again, without resources, without the political will, without personnel to ensure that's well integrated and evaluated, we don't really move forward.

As an anthropologist, I believe the idea is to see and gain a better understanding of how these kinds of structures, these kinds of approaches, these norms can affect and improve the situation at the local level. And without integrating the local aspect and these macro structures, I don't know whether there will be any impact.

For a number of years now, there have been national action plans in certain African countries, but honestly we're seeing very little impact. That's important. There's also a lack of political will and resources. This always has to be done in combination with what is going on locally.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Do you want to add something, Ms. St-Pierre?

Ms. Kristine St-Pierre: No.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: When both of you spoke, you repeated the words, lack of understanding and the attitude of donors.

Can you explain that to me a little?

Ms. Joanne Lebert: I would like to strongly recommend a book written by Séverine Autesserre, of Columbia University. She was in Ottawa last week and made some presentations here. It's entitled The Trouble with the Congo.

To my mind, it really depicts what goes on when there's a lack of analysis from the local standpoint. The discourse, our ways of consolidating peace during negotiations, that goes on at the macro level. However, if we don't address the tensions existing in the regions, from one village to the next, at the local level, that risks undoing what is going on at the macro level. We need a better understanding and a better analysis that takes these things into consideration.

● (1345)

Ms. Kristine St-Pierre: We noted one thing, particularly in the Congo, and that's that there were a lot of uncoordinated activities.

There is the UN mission, which works together with the government. National strategies are in place, including a strategy to combat sexual violence.

However, we note that many organizations are working along parallel lines. So their activities are not part of the national strategy. That doesn't mean that those activities aren't good or that the efforts aren't good; it's just that there's a lack of coordination, and that results in overlap.

As the UN is in the field and is working with the government, we also see a very good understanding of the dynamic of power, of the context, at the local level.

Sometimes we also see that the funding the players receive is linked to very specific activities. Let's say an NGO receives funding for the victims of sexual violence, very specifically. We then note that a division will be created—a lack of analysis of the local, but in fact overall, context.

So we're asking that donors acquire a little better understanding of the local situation and work together with those who will be doing the implementation to ensure that funds not only benefit the women who have suffered sexual violence, but also all the communities as a whole because they are affected as well.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: What of the impact of removing the entire gender-specific aspect from the department?

Ms. Joanne Lebert: Actually, no mention is made of the word "gender" in the national action plan, but it talks about

[*English*]

“substantive equality between men and women”.

[*Translation*]

As a researcher, an anthropologist, that very much troubles me because it's more than a matter of equality. Equality is important, but gender is really a question of identity.

Without understanding or conducting this analysis from an identity standpoint, we won't manage to understand the relationships of power between the members of a community. Without this kind of more in-depth analysis, that's difficult. We need good analytical tools in order to be able to gather this information so that we can better understand situations. So that's missing from the plan, and that's what troubles me.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: We've used up 10 minutes.

Mr. Marston, go ahead, please.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank both of you for being here today.

I have about seven pages here; this is one of those times when it's almost difficult to know where to start. You're calling this national plan, in very polite terms, a band-aid approach to a very, very serious situation.

From your comments on village-to-village work and work on the ground, it sounds to me as if that's one of the things that you think is a very sore point in this plan, that it's not going anywhere. Also, it sounds like your analysis says there is no strategic direction; you have departments over here, but they don't have anything to coalesce around.

There's another thing that jumped out at me, Ms. Lebert, when you were talking about local resources and extraction companies. You weren't very specific on that. Are we talking about Canadian companies? Because we just had Bill C-300 before the House, which I'm sure you're aware of. It was quite a conversation piece for a number of years and was worked on by a number of people from our party, the NDP. Are there concerns about our extraction companies over there? Is that something you'd feel comfortable talking about?

I have one last question, and it's going to sound right off the wall. Funding for both of you is independent of government, I suspect. No, it's not?

● (1350)

Ms. Joanne Lebert: Just to clarify, to start off with, I don't see the plan of action or UN Security Council resolutions related to women, peace, and security as band-aid solutions. I see them as integral. I don't see them as enough. I see our current action plan as a starting point that we can work with to improve. I think we need these types of commitments at international levels.

But what I'm saying is that there is a lack of what's happening at the macro level with what's happening locally. We need both, essentially, to better understand what happens at the intersections of both and to actually have some effect.

Yes, there is a lack of strategic direction, but I do think, having worked with Government of Canada officials, that there is genuine will in making this happen and of course in improving the lives of women and girls on the ground. The plan is well-conceived. For me, it's weak, but we need to put resources and political will into it. We need to have people appointed to make it happen and to evaluate its results and to have consultation with civil society organizations on an ongoing basis to make sure we're attaining the results. Right now, as far as I know, we don't even have benchmarks to measure our progress. These have to be established as well.

On resources, yes, I was very vague. I mean two things. I mean Canadian mining companies, certainly, operating in the Great Lakes region, but I also referred to artisanal mining, which is a lot more shady. It happens at a local level, and it has many intermediaries and subsidiaries between who eventually buys those minerals and who is digging them out. So I'm referring to the extractive industry as a whole, and both of these have certain elements that are less than glamorous or positive, I think.

I don't know if you've been following closely, but Global Witness and the Canadian Centre for International Justice launched a civil suit in Quebec against Anvil, I think, about two weeks ago, precisely for its alleged involvement in violence that occurred in southern DRC. Questions are raised about other companies as well—and certainly local articulations of concerns. I think the Anvil case will be interesting to follow because of the concerns that are being articulated. It's not always known where to hang those concerns, because the law internationally, of course.... I'm not a lawyer, but my understanding is that it's very difficult to pursue a transnational corporation to hold them accountable. So yes, I mean both.

Then you asked about independent funding. When I worked at Peacebuild previously and was involved in the consultations, the funding certainly was not independent. The money came from DFAIT to conduct these consultations. Currently, the centre for human rights, where I'm the coordinator of the POWER project, is funded by the Law Foundation of Ontario.

Ms. Kristine St-Pierre: As you may know, the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre has been receiving core funding from the Government of Canada since its inception in 1994. That core funding will cease in 2012.

However, in terms of the national action plan, I think there are a lot of actions, especially referring both to training of Canadian personnel and to ensuring that peacekeepers are adequately trained and equipped when they deploy. The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre is doing just that, so a lot of the actions that are mentioned in that national action plan we will be taking up as our own organization, but really in strengthening and helping the Government of Canada achieve the implementation of the plan.

● (1355)

Mr. Wayne Marston: One of the things that concerned me in previous testimony, on another day, was talk about how our peacekeepers were involved with some of the rapes—the UN peacekeepers—from time to time. I think one of the real problems is the devaluation of women in that part of the world. It's almost like a poison that anybody can catch from time to time, especially when there's such impunity.

Is there anybody you can go back to in government to tell about the types of concerns you've raised here? In other words, is there anybody who might listen to you when you say that there should be an assigned person responsible for the lines of accountability?

No? I didn't think there would be. The purpose of that question is that it's something this committee may be able to help you with. That's what I hope will come out of our discussions here.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Just before I move to the next question, I have a suspicion, Mr. Marston, that when you said “our peacekeepers”, you did not mean Canadian peacekeepers. It was a reference in general. Is that right?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. I just wanted to make sure that it was on the record.

Mr. Wayne Marston: No, that's fine. That was my intent.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Is it Mr. Sweet next, or Mr. Lunney?

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'll certainly endeavour to be brief and make sure that my colleague gets some time.

Thank you very much for your time and for giving us some great testimony.

In the same kind of spirit as the last question from Mr. Marston, has there been a good, robust dialogue with DFAIT regarding what the plan still requires for it to be effective? You mentioned that it has to be effective at the macro level and at the community level. Is there still some ongoing dialogue about that? Have you actually put back to DFAIT and some of the other partners the necessity of really understanding what's going on, on the ground?

Ms. Joanne Lebert: Not yet.

Mr. David Sweet: Okay. Now, when you say “not yet”, have you tried to go back to that dialogue?

Ms. Joanne Lebert: I was responsible for this file at Peacebuild, and I've since moved on. To be honest, Peacebuild has no funding at the moment, so the capacity to organize civil society around this issue has been greatly diminished. There is no central focal point right now that can go to DFAIT and make this statement.

Personally, I think the people I know who work on this issue at DFAIT would be very interested in continuing this conversation, although some of those people have already moved on. That's where we see one of the problems. Six months or 12 months on, those responsible for the file have moved on. So we've lost our focal point and have to kind of start all over. We don't have somebody who can take up this issue and carry the torch.

I am talking informally with Peacebuild and civil society representatives in my own personal capacity and am asking about having a round table on what's next, but that's on an entirely voluntary basis. Everybody does this. All of our funds are kind of up in the air, so we all do it because we're committed. We're interested in the issue and in seeing it happen.

Mr. David Sweet: Some are government funded, and some are private donations, is that it?

Ms. Joanne Lebert: Sure. Yes, it's a mix.

Mr. David Sweet: You mentioned something, and I need you to elucidate to better understand. You mentioned that there's a lack of trust on the ground in a lot of the NGOs. Is it simply what Madame St-Pierre said about duplication, or is there a broader concern with NGOs on the ground in the local communities?

Ms. Joanne Lebert: It's a lot of what Madame St-Pierre has said. There is some duplication.

About a year and a half ago, we had a woman speak to us who represented a local church in the eastern Congo. She provided very clear evidence that their community initiatives to address social violence, and to ensure that it doesn't flare up in the community, were actually quite effective. She was concerned that NGOs, the foreign NGOs that were coming into the region, had set up some programs with a lot of money. They were operating on no funds in this church-based organization, so they were essentially being eclipsed by the efforts of these NGOs with which they hadn't really had any communication and that hadn't consulted them. They were a little miffed about that.

In my own work on gender and the extractives, I had known that she had done some field work on her own in the region about this issue. But she was reluctant to share it with anybody outside of the DRC. she wanted to control that data because it had been misappropriated in the past.

Also, again, to look at this issue of representation, the way this issue of sexual violence has been portrayed in the media and in Hollywood, and at all levels, has really infantilized African women. They don't want to be caught up in that. They want to have agency and power over their own information and how they're portrayed. So there's this kind of growing skepticism, I think, and a reluctance to share information and to be held captive and hostage to these kinds of games of representation that are going on.

● (1400)

Mr. David Sweet: Okay. That's what I was going to ask you. When you're talking about the data being misappropriated, there are really these false stereotypes that are being created. Is there some other aspect of this misappropriation?

Ms. Joanne Lebert: There's that part, but there's also the information being used. Women who have been victimized are asked to tell their stories over and over. I mean, they're being re-victimized. Then that information is used to raise funds for an organization or an initiative. There is often a disconnect afterwards, once the stories are usurped. They don't see the benefits—or only certain women in the community see the benefits. It's not a community-based approach; it's a very individual approach. Those are the dynamics as well.

Mr. David Sweet: It might be oversimplifying it, but it's, “I endure the emotional pain to revisit my story and yet I never see anything coming in the community”.

Ms. Joanne Lebert: Yes.

Mr. David Sweet: My colleague has a question.

Thank you very much, Ms. Lebert.

The Chair: Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, David.

Many of the problems we're discussing, these horrendous abuses that have taken place, are still going on, and that we're all concerned about, exist where there's a lack of governance capacity. There's a lack of judicial capacity. There's a lack of police, or if there are police, control structures are not in place. There is all of that.

When you're addressing the issue of how we're not putting enough money into solving the problem, I'm sort of hearing that here.... You know, the Government of Canada is putting a lot of effort into these countries and, wherever we have access and willing partners, trying to build governance capacity, judicial capacity, and police training to get some authorities in place.

This is not the kind of thing that just happens instantly, regrettably, so I'm just wondering what role these efforts have in addressing the concerns you're mentioning here in terms of the focus of money solving the problems. How do you see that in terms of building governance capacity to address these issues?

Ms. Joanne Lebert: I'm not sure how to tackle that question. I think it's important for these things to happen simultaneously. I think we're all very pleased to see the Government of Canada's commitment, and that of the DRC in particular, which has invested quite a lot of money on sexual violence programming.

I don't know if I can speak on behalf of those who work on this issue, but we want to see it improved. We want a dialogue to be happening to ensure those local contexts are taken into consideration.

We have also invested, especially from DFAIT, in governance-related issues. These things are necessary, obviously. My personal understanding is that the approach from the government side has often been a very quick injection of funds and the creation of actual physical structures, infrastructure, and training, which is important, but these kinds of very short and quick-impact projects demonstrate visibly that Canada has done something—because we built this police station—and then we leave or the funding ends.

That is my concern. Those are all wrapped up in governance. Governance is important, but what do we mean by governance? Which element are we supporting and funding? I guess what I'm saying is that I do recognize governance as being an important element to address, but I'm a little wary of it.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you. I'm just trying to understand how we can intervene in these terrible abuses when you don't have a police force that's helpful or, worse yet, when they're actually involved in perpetrating some of the crimes. NGOs functioning in that kind of environment have no cover or protection either. It's one of the very big practical problems we have in many parts of the world. We have to find a way to address that, it seems to me.

Ms. Kristine St-Pierre: I can say from the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre perspective that one of the difficulties is in taking a long-term approach with short-term funding from one to three years. This is the same issue that a lot of international NGOs, or governments implementing programs, deal with.

One of the things that definitely came out of our research in the DRC is the need to work with the actors who are on the ground, whether it is the UN mission or the government, as slow as it can be. Those are the structures in place. In order to advance, we need to work with what is there as much as possible.

● (1405)

Ms. Joanne Lebert: If I can add to that from a social scientist's perspective and from my fieldwork elsewhere, with the police in particular, I think we have to make it a viable option: an opportunity to contribute to somebody's livelihood, quite frankly. People often go unpaid for long periods of time. It's not seen as a source of stability. It's not seen as a source of status for a young man or a young woman in that community.

Status symbols are shifting in these profoundly turbulent situations. Where status before for a young man was about attaining land and getting married, now it's about arms. Your path to status and success is through violence. What it means to be a man, for instance, has changed. From a social science perspective, with that kind of lens, if we can make policing—the securing of security—something that's attractive and that's seen to enhance a young person's status and security, I think you would get a lot more purchase and a lot more people committed over the long term.

The Chair: Unfortunately, that will have to conclude the questions. We've run out of time.

I want to take the opportunity to thank our two witnesses. It's very much appreciated that you were able to come today.

I should mention that today's proceedings have been televised, so this will be going out to a wider audience. That's a practice we've adopted for all witness testimony.

As a reminder to members of the subcommittee, on Thursday we'll be looking at the issue of treatment of sexual minorities in Uganda. Our witness, attending by video conference, will be Chantal Desloges from Toronto. That meeting will be televised as well.

A motion was submitted to us a while ago by Professor Cotler regarding Sergei Magnitsky. We held up dealing with it because it was necessary to get some associated documents translated and for Professor Cotler to see if there was consensus on the document.

Professor Cotler, maybe I can turn the floor over to you.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I know that David Sweet had some suggestions, and I agreed to them. Madame Deschamps had some concerns and I sought to incorporate them in the motion itself. It's up to the members now as to what they wish to do.

The Chair: Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: I'm suggesting adding just three words of an amendment, and of course, as Professor Cotler said, it's friendly now. In the fourth item, under “BE IT RESOLVED”, it would say: “THAT the Subcommittee CALL UPON the Government of Canada”, and then we would place within that “to explore options”, before “to impose visa restrictions”. So between “Canada” and “to” we would add “to explore options”.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Madame Deschamps, s'il vous plaît.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Chairman, I find it very hard to agree to Mr. Cotler's motion because we're relying solely on the testimony of a single witness. I don't believe that's very enriching. I don't believe I have the basis for a clear and informed decision. These are only allegations. Consequently, based solely on a single witness, I find it hard to support Mr. Cotler's motion today.

● (1410)

[*English*]

The Chair: If I might make a suggestion, then, the reason that this was brought up now was on the theory that it might be easy to get consent rapidly, so given the fact that we're actually over time, I suggest we set this aside and deal with it at a different time. Is that agreeable to everybody in the room?

Okay? Good. In that case, I once again—

Oh, I'm sorry. Mr. Marston, my apologies.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Just on the point of the lunches we get here, what happened to lunch today? I'm still waiting for it. No, I mean...not to tease too much, but there's just soup back there. There's nothing of any kind of substance at all.

The Chair: Maybe we can figure that out offline, as it were, after the meeting is over. I'll follow up on that.

Again, I thank our witnesses.

We are dismissed. Thank you.

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