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Chair

The Honourable Peter Kent

Standing Committee on National Defence

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC)): Good afternoon, colleagues, and welcome.

We are gathered here today, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), for a briefing on the external review into sexual misconduct and sexual harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces.

We have two witnesses with us here today. They are, as an individual, former Madam Justice Marie Deschamps, who chaired the external review authority, and from the Department of National Defence, Major-General Christine Whitecross, commander, Canadian Armed Forces strategic response team on sexual misconduct.

We will begin as usual with opening statements.

Madam Justice Deschamps.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The committee will recall that at our last public meeting, on May 13, the minister agreed that he would come to this committee to discuss the matter of this report along with Madame Deschamps and Major-General Whitecross.

A motion was formally passed at that time:

That the Standing Committee on National Defence invite the Minister of National Defence, the Chief of the Defence Staff, retired Supreme Court Justice Marie Deschamps and MGen Christine Whitecross as witnesses to appear before the Committee to answer questions about Justice Deschamps' external investigation of sexual misconduct in the military, and the Canadian Armed Forces' response thereto, for two hours, as soon as possible.

We have met the last condition regarding “as soon as possible”, and we're very grateful for the attendance of Madame Deschamps and Major-General Whitecross, but the principal responsibility for the military rests with both the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff. They are not here. They are the ones with the ultimate authority in these matters. We think those two individuals not being here demonstrates a lack of leadership.

I wonder why it is, Mr. Chair, they're not here. The Minister of National Defence said he would be here if he wasn't out of the country. He's still in the country. He was at question period today.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, before I go to Mr. Bezan on a point of order, you'll recall that the minister said that, conditional on availability, he would attend. We thought, given the great parliamentary and public interest in this issue and given the availability of Madam Justice Deschamps and General Whitecross,

we should take full advantage of their availability today, and we are delighted they were willing to attend.

Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): I'll just add to that, Mr. Chair.

The motion didn't specify that it was going to be just one meeting. We had an opportunity here. General Whitecross and Madame Deschamps were available today. Unfortunately the CDS and the minister were not, but we'll definitely look at other possible days we can have them here.

Still, the spirit of the motion is being respected. We have two great witnesses here. We need to take this time to hear what they have to say and to ask the relevant questions.

The Chair: I agree.

Madam Justice Deschamps, please begin your opening remarks.

[Translation]

Hon. Marie Deschamps (External Review Authority, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Lawson, entrusted me with the mandate of examining the Canadian armed forces policy on sexual harassment and sexual assault, he told me he wanted the point of view of a person from the outside.

My report is the fruit of some intense work. I met over 700 people. I did an exhaustive and thorough study of policies, and I reviewed what are currently considered the best practices in the area of sexual harassment and assault.

I will not comment on my report here, save for two points I wish to emphasize, which can be summarized in two words: victims, and trust.

I will begin by speaking about victims. Each one of the 10 recommendations in my report aims to improve conditions for members of the Canadian armed forces. The impact has to be felt at all levels, not only in daily life, but also in the support afforded to victims and the prevention of incidents.

Supporting victims means that the Canadian armed forces have to give priority to the needs of the victims. In discussing prevention I of course refer to training. The Canadian armed forces have to teach their members what professional behaviour is and what is not acceptable. Prevention also means deterring eventual offenders by promptly imposing sanctions that will make everyone understand that there will be no compromises.

We cannot underestimate the importance and attention that must be afforded victims. It is through them that the Canadian armed forces will be able to assess the evolution of change in their culture. These men and women will allow them to verify the level of respect for the dignity of persons and the professionalism of our armed forces.

• (1540)

[English]

The second point is a guiding principle underlying my recommendation. It is the need to rebuild the trust and confidence of the Canadian Forces members in their organization. This will require short-term, medium-term, and long-term measures to bring about real changes.

Such change will take time. The first step, however, is for the Canadian Forces leadership to demonstrate to members through their actions that they acknowledge that the problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the armed forces is real. But most important, the forces need to show that they will take all the necessary steps to tackle this issue, including adopting measures that are recognized as international and national best practices.

One of these practices on which I heavily relied corresponds to what many members and people who worked with victims told me they needed. It is the creation of an independent centre where victims can seek support and advice. It is critical that such a centre be truly independent of the armed forces in order to reassure victims that by reporting an incident of sexual harassment or sexual assault, they will be able to access support without triggering negative consequences for their careers or in their personal lives.

I took inspiration from models that various countries adopted. The American and Australian forces created their respective centres in 2005 and 2012. Last summer, in 2014, the French forces also implemented a centre called Cellule Thémis.

Based on my consultation with members and with persons who worked with victims of harassment and assault, I found that the creation of an independent centre to assist and support victims of sexual assault and sexual harassment is an essential step in rebuilding the confidence of members in their organization.

In my report, speaking about the process of investigating and prosecuting sexual assault, I mentioned that each country has developed their own response to their problems. The centre I recommend is not identical to any of the existing ones and I did not view my mandate as describing in minute detail the form that it should take.

However, the Canadian Forces should attempt to draw the best features from each existing model. In my view, the more independent the centre is, the better are the chances that the victims will seek support and fully report incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Reporting is fundamental not only because the victims need support, but also because the Canadian Forces need to know how members behave.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you.

General Whitecross, please make your opening remarks.

MGen Christine Whitecross (Commander, Canadian Armed Forces Strategic Response Team on Sexual Misconduct, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide an update on the progress the Canadian Armed Forces strategic response team is making in dealing with inappropriate sexual behaviour in the forces.

You will remember that the external review authority's report and the action plan developed by the Canadian Armed Forces to deal specifically with Madame Deschamps' 10 recommendations were released to the Canadian public on April 30, 2015.

Let me start by saying that the past 17 working days since the release of the action plan indeed have been very busy. As I stated at the time of the release, inappropriate sexual behaviour is a complex problem that defies quick fixes and band-aid solutions. To successfully address it, our approach centres on identifying and treating its fundamental root causes rather than simply addressing the symptoms. Madame Deschamps' insight and analysis is absolutely pivotal in this approach. So, what has transpired during the last two and a half weeks?

First, we have reaffirmed that the strategic response team's mission is to enhance the operational readiness of the Canadian Forces by eliminating incidents and impacts of inappropriate sexual behaviour to the extent possible.

The goal is a Canadian Armed Forces that upholds a culture of dignity and respect for all. These are core Canadian values that the institution exists to defend in Canada and around the globe. In other words, in the long term we will enhance the fundamental Canadian Armed Forces' culture to the point that inappropriate sexual behaviour will not be tolerated either by targets of such behaviour or by anyone who witnesses it.

In the short term, we will trigger positive shifts in behaviour through increased awareness of acceptable norms, expectations, responsibilities and accountabilities by engaging with both the chain of command and grassroots membership across the organization.

Additionally, the recently formed Canadian Armed Forces strategic response team on sexual misconduct, which I lead, continues to grow and mature. It is noteworthy that this is the first time in the Canadian Armed Forces' history that an entity has been formed for the sole purpose of addressing this important issue. I have assembled a highly capable, multidisciplinary team consisting of civilian personnel, military members and former military members with the appropriate combination of required skills and experience.

We have identified four major lines of effort critical to achieving the objective. As described in our action plan, the first is to understand the problem. The second is to respond effectively to incidents of inappropriate behaviour, including enhancing the process of reporting. The third is to better support victims throughout the process. The fourth is to prevent occurrences from taking place in the first place.

We have already made considerable progress in several of these endeavours. In terms of understanding, my team has carefully examined Madame Deschamps' report and has begun considering how best to address each of her 10 recommendations.

For example, a key recommendation in Madame Deschamps' report was the creation of an independent centre to deal with inappropriate sexual behaviour. She provided us with several examples, including those established in the United States and Australian militaries.

The analysis of an independent centre will be the focal point of the strategic response team's planning and development in the coming weeks. Accordingly, my team and I recently met with American officials on their SAPRO model and Australian officials on their SeMPRO organization. Both consultations were very productive and provided the team with better insight into a field-tested, proven option with the potential to illustrate how a similar construct could be developed to fit the needs of the Canadian Armed Forces or the Department of National Defence.

In addition to these two visits, members of the strategic response team visited the Peel Regional Police and the Canadian Army Command and Staff College to open discussions about educational opportunities. They attended an international workshop in Geneva that brought together a broad spectrum of international experts on the core facets of sexual harassment and sexual assault in organizational environments. They attended a conference on gender-based analysis plus in security and defence operations held in Ottawa. They met with Ambassador Schuurman, the NATO secretary general's special representative for women, peace and security.

A key component of the behavioural and cultural change I alluded to earlier is connecting with the Canadian Armed Forces members at every level of the organization, including at the pointy end, to both increase awareness of the Canadian Armed Forces' response to Madame Deschamps' report, and to inspire open dialogue and personal reflection on the problem of inappropriate sexual behaviour in the forces. This is quite similar to the approach previously employed in shifting internal stigmas and behaviour surrounding post-traumatic stress disorder and operational stress injuries, which we largely succeeded in doing in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

• (1550)

With members of my team, I began connecting directly with the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces across Canada starting on May 1, the day after the release of the report. Through a series of town hall meetings, individual question and answer sessions, discussions with the local chain of command, as well as interactions with interested local and regional media, the strategic response team is reaching out to Canadian Armed Forces members and setting the conditions for ongoing dialogue.

I open each session with the acknowledgement that this is a serious problem within the Canadian Armed Forces and that although no one wants to discuss inappropriate sexual behaviour, it is important to start the discussion. So far, we have been to six bases and wings where I have briefed approximately 5,300 military personnel at 16 general sessions. The questions, comments, concerns, and perspectives in these sessions have brought to light

both positive and negative personal experience anecdotes and reinforced two realities: one, the problem is highly complex; and two, while there is a collective will to move the organization forward, there is little consensus as to the gravity of the existing problem.

In the next few months, I look forward to completing the town halls at all 33 bases and wings to ensure that the majority of Canadian Armed Forces members have an opportunity to hear and understand what the team is doing, ask questions and express opinions, and learn about the direction being taken by the Canadian Armed Forces.

Similarly, my team and I will continue our focused consultations with both domestic and international entities that are dealing with a problem similar to ours. This includes military, government, police, and other non-governmental organizations that are able to provide us with applicable insight on best practices and lessons learned.

One of the reasons the Canadian Armed Forces' response to the problem of inappropriate sexual behaviour will be more effective this time is the heightened emphasis on outcome measurement. Even the most elaborate plans and outputs mean little if they do not translate into tangible outcomes and results on the ground. To this end, my team is studying program evaluation methodologies to ensure we are able to measure how effective the changes we implement actually are in practice.

Reporting will go hand in hand with performance measurement. Starting in the fall, I will deliver to the Chief of the Defence Staff my first quarterly report on the Canadian Armed Forces' progress in responding to the problem of inappropriate sexual behaviour. The report will also be released to the Canadian public. We are fully committed to open, transparent dialogue with external stakeholders. Over the past 25 days we have interacted with a total of 88 different media agencies in group and individual engagements. My team and I are committed to standing up and being held to account on this crucial imperative and will continue to be actively engaged with the public, Parliament, and the media.

We have also begun to examine how we can improve the Canadian Armed Forces' approach to training and education in order to shift culture towards enhancing the level of dignity and respect. As well, the team, in conjunction with other Canadian Armed Forces and Department of National Defence personnel, is reviewing existing policy to assess its clarity, coherence, appropriateness, and applicability. As part of this endeavour, all terminology and definitions pertaining to inappropriate sexual behaviour will be thoroughly examined.

Inappropriate sexual behaviour remains a complex problem, one that quick fixes will not solve substantively or sustainably. My team is focused on creating innovative, meaningful change tailored to the needs of the Canadian Armed Forces members and based on best practices and lessons learned from a wide range of sources. This is a no-fail mission for the Canadian Armed Forces that my team and I are completely and utterly committed to.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move now to the first round of questions, with seven-minute segments.

Ms. Gallant, please.

• (1555)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, Madam Justice Deschamps, thank you very much for the study you did. You did it promptly and in good time, so that we're able to put an action plan together.

We understand that the Canadian Armed Forces strategic response team was set up specifically with regard to your report and its recommendations. Do you think this is a good start to addressing the issues that you'd outlined?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: Yes, certainly. This is a reaction that is very positive. It demonstrates at least that the leadership is committed to doing something. I should add that I was pleased that the report was released very quickly after it was submitted; in fact, it was submitted at the end of March. It took a few weeks to translate, and very soon after the translation was completed, it was released.

The fact that they showed transparency in the report itself and that even early on they announced that there would be a task force put in place are good signs.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Can you elaborate on your own professional experience and background? Are there any cases you dealt with which, in retrospect, you found helped prepare you for this particular task?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: In many ways it called me to draw on my experience as a litigator and also my experience as a judge because we had to sit with people and ask questions. Sometimes it was easy to get the people to talk, or to confide in a certain way, and at other times it was much less easy. Both the examination and cross-examination part of my experience as a litigator was important.

Also, my 22 years as a judge helped me make sure that I listened to the whole story until the end, because the collection of data took a number of months. I started my first interview on July 11. The contract was signed June 30; the first interview was July 11, and the last interviews were mid-December. I had to wait until the end to make sure all the facts that I needed to master were computed before drawing any conclusion, or even before starting to put any recommendation on paper.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: In those interviews did you interview women in the Canadian Armed Forces who had reported incidents of sexual assault, or of harassment, and who were not already on the track out of the military?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: Yes, we met the full range. We met people who had never reported. We met people who had reported, the case was closed and they were still in the military and not on their way out. We also met people who were on their way out and others who were already veterans.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Did you have the freedom to speak to whomever you wanted?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: Yes. Early on, the Chief of the Defence Staff announced to the members and former members that they could contact me directly. I had created, through an organization, a specific address where people could write to me directly. I was the only person opening those emails because I did not want the information to lose this confidential aspect. I asked people to write to me under pseudonyms so they were confident they could communicate with me and there would be no possibility for them to be identified. I was able to receive information from people who were no longer in the military.

• (1600)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: You are aware this isn't the first time issues of sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces have been raised. Where do you feel we fell short in the past in terms of dealing with this issue?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: This issue is a recurring one and it's an evolving one. Of the people I met, a number indicated to me the situation has improved a lot, but that there are still improvements to be made.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: One of your recommendations is to have an independent sexual assault centre. How would this be put into use in the theatre when such an incident occurs? Would there be some satellite office, an entity?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: I can give you as examples, in Australia or in France, the first thing you see when you open their website is an incident report. There are many ways in which the members can communicate with the organization, by telephone, email, or in person. It also indicates they can go through other people. It doesn't mean, for example in Australia, that they cannot go to other military personnel, but it is felt that the victims feel more confident to seek help when it's someone to whom they can confide. They can confide knowing there is no consequence for their lives.

The Chair: That's time, Ms. Gallant.

Mr. Harris, please, for seven minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Madame Deschamps and Major-General Whitecross, for joining us.

First, Madame Deschamps, I want to thank you for your report and your very thorough investigation. You have reported an alarming story of the situation in the military, confirming what was made public in 1998 by *Maclean's* and by *L'actualité* in 2014.

One of the fundamental concerns shows that there's a fundamental lack of trust in the military justice system and in the military police's ability to deal with it, so much so that, as you report, the overwhelming majority of victims do not report incidents, so we really don't have a full handle on the extent of the problem.

One of the concerns I have, and which we even see in the name of the report, which is referred to as a report on sexual misconduct and sexual harassment, is that we're using various terms and definitions, as you point out. Of course, sexual assault is a criminal act and in the civilian criminal system is prosecuted as such. There seems to be a more amorphous treatment of criminal behaviour in the military, perhaps based on some of the definitions that we have.

Can you tell us, first of all, why it is that in the military the military police officers have the ability and discretion to not lay a charge, or if they want to lay a charge, why they have to have the consent of the chain of command? Why don't I see anything where this might change?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: I don't know why this is so, but in terms of this question, the discretion exists even in the civilian justice system. Whether it's more used in the military might be a question. As I mention in my report, my mandate was not to do a kind of survey or to do a comparison in terms of numbers. However, what I have realized is that there is not this confidence that they can go and not suffer consequences.

Mr. Jack Harris: As you point out, we see a culture of negative attitudes towards women, and apparently a culture of impunity for perpetrators of sexual assault. At the same time, victims themselves have large consequences, often resulting in their being expelled from the military, or first of all not being taken seriously, treated as troublemakers, and all of that.

I want to ask both of you a question on the timeliness of responses. We've talked about changing culture; that's not an overnight thing. You talk about new procedures, and now Major-General Whitecross is going to survey best practices around the world. How much time should elapse before a parent of a young person in Canada can have confidence in saying they would be happy to have their daughter or their son join the military knowing that they would be protected and not subjected to the kind of harassment or sexual assault...?

“Sexual misconduct” or “inappropriate sexual behaviour” seem to me to be a bit too amorphous. We're talking about criminal acts in the case of sexual assault, and obviously sexual harassment is bad as well.

How fast should this be done? Is there anything in the meantime that can say to someone who is in the military that they're not going to have to wait for the culture to change, and if they want their sexual assault charge taken to the civilian courts or to the civilian police, they can do it right away?

• (1605)

MGen Christine Whitecross: Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

My task and my mandate is to address the 10 recommendations in Madame Deschamps' report, and in so doing to identify best practices and lessons learned, as you have alluded to.

We've gone out fairly quickly on that accord. In discussions with the men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces across the country, our desire is start the discussions about this underlying sexualized culture that Madame Deschamps has reported so people

understand what our expectations of them are as members of the military.

I can't actually put a date on when we will have all of the recommendations addressed. In both our discussions with the Americans and the Australians, they have said we must take the time to truly understand the issue before we come out with full options. I can only offer that we are moving as fast as we can.

Mr. Jack Harris: But we do have a serious and ongoing problem. We heard a story last week about a sexual harassment prevention officer attending the Royal Military College and herself being, in her own words, harassed by the cadets who were there who clearly didn't understand, or perhaps didn't know anything about, the notion of sexual harassment or the kinds of things that were being described.

I need to be able to say, and I think Canadians want to know, is it still, is it yet, safe for women in the military? I have to conclude, based on this report, that this is not the case.

How are you and your CDS and the minister—I know they're not here, but they were invited—going to be able to assure people that their sons or daughters and those already serving will be safe from criminal acts and harassment, and that complaints will be taken seriously? I don't need to read all of what Madam Justice Deschamps wrote. I mean, it's pretty clear that the reason things aren't reported, they're not taken seriously, they don't do a proper investigation.... The military police don't even know what “consent” is in many cases. We have a very serious problem from bottom to top.

Is there a crisis recognized? I think you said there's no consensus on how serious this is, but I think the alarm bells are going off in a lot of people's minds.

The Chair: That's time, Mr. Harris.

A brief answer, please.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, Mr. Harris is asking General Whitecross to comment on what the CDS or the minister might say—

Mr. Jack Harris: No, I'm asking for her opinion on this serious problem.

Mr. James Bezan: That's fine, just as long as the general realizes that it's just her opinion that counts.

The Chair: A brief answer, please, General.

MGen Christine Whitecross: Yes, sir, Mr. Chair.

The work we're doing across the country to identify or to start the discussion on this underlying sexualized culture also includes discussions with the chain of command on the standard applicability of both policies and military justice throughout the Canadian Armed Forces, including victim support.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Gallant, please, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: General Whitecross, you mentioned that you're going across the country to the bases and wings, and that the breadth of the problem is inconsistent. There's a wide range of perception as to how often sexual harassment or sexual assault occurs. Are you seeing any pattern in some parts of the country, or with certain ranks, that are more accepting than others are in terms of recognizing that there is a problem?

• (1610)

MGen Christine Whitecross: In our discussions across the country, we are getting anecdotes obviously from men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who want to come and speak to us. We make ourselves available. We make social workers and padres available after each session should there be a need for that. In the discussions there is an acknowledgement from every member of the chain of command of the seriousness of this issue, and that we must tackle it, but as Madame Deschamps has alluded, there has been no scope or extent of the problem.

Regardless of what that is, the problem is serious and one is too much. I know we say that often, but I truly believe that one is too much and we must address this issue regardless.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: General Whitecross, the Chief of the Defence Staff asked you to lead the strategic response team for sexual misconduct. Can you elaborate on what experience you bring to this issue based on your military career, and especially anything that will help you to address a solution to this problem?

MGen Christine Whitecross: I'm a very proud senior member of the Canadian Armed Forces, and not just in rank; I'm also one of the senior women in the military. I'm very proud of my service to my country and of the leadership I have provided. I'm also a mother. I have children of my own who are in their early twenties.

This topic concerns me greatly. It concerns me to the core of who I am as a military member and to the military ethos that I truly believe in. Because of that, I can guarantee to you that I am committed to seeing this through and to effecting change throughout the Canadian Armed Forces.

Thank you.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: General Whitecross, I understand you're leading the strategic response team. Could you detail who else is on this team and what experience and qualifications they bring to the team?

MGen Christine Whitecross: We have about 25 members right now, men and women, military and civilian, who come with disparate backgrounds. We've split them up depending on their backgrounds.

We have a group that is looking predominantly at education, training and policy so that we can make sure that they are in line and that they are dealing with the education and training of our members from the day they enter the recruit school to the day they take off their uniforms.

We also have a group that is looking predominantly at performance measurements. As Madame Deschamps said, there has been some great work done internationally and domestically by our partners and other militaries in that venue and we want to try to

learn as much as we can so that we can incorporate these as fast as possible.

One of the things that we haven't done that we are looking at very seriously right now is victim support, what that looks like, and how we can best accomplish that.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: General Whitecross, many media and other critics, including some here in this room, have claimed that the Canadian Armed Forces are categorically rejecting eight of Madame Deschamps' recommendations.

Can you confirm that the Canadian Armed Forces are indeed looking at how to best implement all 10 of the recommendations?

MGen Christine Whitecross: Absolutely.

Mr. Chair, we are carrying out on every one of the 10 recommendations...we have an action plan identified for all of them. The big issue here in our line of operation in our very first work that we're doing is trying to understand the complexities, understand what is available on the national and international spheres so that we can take best practices and lessons learned from other organizations so that we can incorporate them into a Canadian context.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: General Whitecross, you had mentioned that in order to meet recommendation number three, the establishment of an independent centre for accountability for sexual assault, you visited and spoke with people from the United States, Australia, and France. What insight have these visits provided you?

MGen Christine Whitecross: I'd just like to mention, Mr. Chair, that I haven't been to France. We will be going to France in July. In fact, there are a couple of other European countries that we will be visiting as well, because they've opened their doors for us to come to speak to them. We went to Washington, and in fact, just this weekend I got back from Australia. What we've learned is their centres are different. Some are predominantly focused on victim support and victim care, where others are predominantly more policy and training focused.

Our needs for the Canadian Armed Forces are to take the best that we can from all of the information we're getting from all of the centres so that we can bring them back into a Canadian context and do what is right for the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces.

• (1615)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: As an addendum to the previous question, I understand that there are some significant structural differences that mean exact models can't be implemented as you've discussed. Can you elaborate on what a possible Canadian Armed Forces centre would look like?

MGen Christine Whitecross: I'm sorry but at this point it would be inappropriate for me to do that, because we haven't finished our studies of the other organizations.

I would like to add that there are domestic organizations that we really want to talk to as well: the Vancouver Police Department, for example, rape crisis centres, and other organizations here in Canada. I think after that is done and we have a better understanding of the scope and the complexities of them and what we can bring to our Canadian context, then I'll have a better answer for you.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

Ms. Murray, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'd just like to echo Mr. Harris' comments of disappointment that this meeting was scheduled at a time that neither the minister nor the Chief of the Defence Staff could be here. The contradiction in their responses to Madame Deschamps' report created uncertainty in all our minds as to a real commitment to take action. As Madame Deschamps noted, leaders' acknowledging the importance and seriousness of this issue I would say was compromised by the contradictory responses, and we would like to have been able to ask those questions.

The Chair: That is noted.

I will just repeat for the record, Ms. Murray, that their willingness to appear was conditional on availability, and I thought, as chair, that we should take full advantage and immediate advantage of the availability of our two witnesses today.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

Major-General Whitecross, you mentioned 25 members of the strategic response team. Can you tell me what percentage are women and what percentage are from the LGBTQ community, who essentially have been some of the primary victims of the culture of misogyny according to Madame Deschamps?

MGen Christine Whitecross: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, I don't have those statistics, but I will get them for you.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay, thank you. I'd appreciate that.

The initial Chief of the Defence Staff initiating directive, which was footnoted on the April 30 response action plan, places a number of restrictions on you. One of them is the assumption that the current sexual misconduct and investigation and justice system authorities will remain unchanged. Have you received a replacement directive to the one that was your orders, or are the directives drafted on February 25 still in place?

MGen Christine Whitecross: The initiating directive that I received from the Chief of the Defence Staff was to allow me the ability to put a team together and to set in motion some of the work that was needed to be done prior to receipt of the final report from Madame Deschamps. In no way have I been hamstrung in any of the work that we're doing moving out on the 10 recommendations from the report.

Ms. Joyce Murray: I'm taking it from your comment that the initiating directive is still in place, the one that appeared to be behind the lack of fully accepting all of their recommendations. Eight of them were accepted in principle. For example, the directive stated that it would be the Canadian Armed Forces that would be in charge of the centre of accountability, which was contrary to Madame Deschamps' recommendation. I'm disappointed to hear that that initiating directive has not been rescinded or replaced by another.

Of the eight recommendations that were initially accepted in principle in your report, in other words, not fully accepted nor were they rejected, and certainly no one from this committee ever implied that they were contrary to the committee member's previous

assertion.... Can you tell me which of the other eight have been fully accepted, or are they still accepted in principle?

• (1620)

MGen Christine Whitecross: Mr. Chair, I can say that we are moving out on every one of the recommendations from Madame Deschamps.

Madame Deschamps has identified particular tasks in particular organizations within the centre, and as we've said and as she has implied, we need to understand better how other organizations have put their centres together and what they have taken in, because they are all different, and what is the best way to bring this into a Canadian context.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay.

I'm taking that to mean they're accepted in principle, which was the confusion in the first place. There may be some elements that were critical to Madame Deschamps' recommendations that don't find their way into the final framework that is put together, which I'm disappointed by.

Madame Deschamps, prior to your starting your external review, you were, in my opinion, hamstrung in a number of areas. For instance, the way the Canadian military police and judge advocate general's office handled sexual assault reports was excluded from scrutiny, meaning that the review was not able to examine the systematic failure to investigate or prosecute sexual crimes in the military. Do you believe that this should be examined?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: There is a review process that is provided by the statute of the military justice system. There is a report that was handed to me in the fall of 2014, the LeSage report. I understood my mandate as looking at what goes on upstream. Because there are so few reports, very few cases get to the military justice system. If the Chief of the Defence Staff wanted to get at the root of the problem, he needed to have a better understanding of what goes on on the ground.

In that way, it might be a different perspective. Maybe it would be a good thing to do it more often than what the law provides for, but there is a review process for the military justice system. In that way, I did not find that I was limited in what I needed to look at, and I made a number of recommendations on sexual assault—

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay, thank you. Excuse me, but I have another question.

It sounds like that—

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray: —might be a fruitful place to have some additional investigation. I see you're nodding at that.

I just want to ask whether you believe that, as committed as Major-General Whitecross is, having this implementation of a new structure done from within the military is adequate, or that it should be done at arm's length, or at least advice at arm's length on how to implement the details of your recommendations.

Hon. Marie Deschamps: In my report and in my opening statement I mentioned that independence is crucial, fundamental—the many words I use in my report. I'm still of that view. I don't have any other facts that have come to my attention. My review is completed.

The Chair: Thank you. That's time, Ms. Murray.

Mr. Bezan, the first questioner of the five-minute rounds.

Five minutes, please.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you to our witnesses.

I want to first thank both of you for the work you're doing on this very difficult file.

I appreciate the report that you prepared, Madame Deschamps.

General Whitecross, I'm glad you mentioned that you're proud of your military career, because I want to thank you for everything that you've been doing throughout your career. This probably is one of those very challenging assignments that you've received, and I know that you're going to do wonderfully in setting up the independent centre and carrying through with the strategic response team, dealing with all 10 recommendations.

Madame Deschamps, I like how you started your presentation. You talked about two things: victims and trust. Part of the trust falls into this issue of the culture that we have within the Canadian Armed Forces. As you said, it's very sexualized. How do we start changing that culture? I think the first step has been done by your providing this report, and General Whitecross with the strategic response team. I should point out that they are meeting with our men and women in uniform right across this country.

The first part of dealing with this issue is awareness, and then comes education. I'm asking both of you to talk to how you visualize having the new independent centre be that place where people can come, feel comfortable, and have trust that there's going to be an outcome, both from the standpoint of their rights as a victim and—as I know from some of the reading I've done, looking at the U.S. model, the Australian model and others—in the work that they can do in improving education and awareness within the military so that the whole dynamic within the culture can start to shift.

• (1625)

Hon. Marie Deschamps: I'm sorry....

Mr. James Bezan: Could you both talk from the standpoint of how the centre would deal with, first of all, the rights of the victim and the trust factor and how critical it is, and then also go into the area of education and awareness?

MGen Christine Whitecross: Mr. Chair, I can't comment on what will be our ultimate option, because we obviously haven't made it to that point yet, but I can state that in the Australian model victim support is a bit of a paradigm shift. The idea of their whole structure

is to take the care and needs of the victim as a priority. They have developed, as the Americans have, restricted and unrestricted reporting, which allows a victim to identify whether they only require assistance to deal with the issue at hand or whether they want to engage their chain of command in a more official manner. That's one of the things, obviously, that we're looking at.

I would just like to comment on the independence centre. It is my objective to identify a comprehensive option for an independent centre to go forward. That is an issue that our group is working diligently on as we speak.

Hon. Marie Deschamps: Your question goes to the culture and to how the centre can be linked to the culture.

The culture is a notion that's much broader than the centre.

The centre goes to the support of the victims and to the re-establishment of their confidence. They know there will be no consequences if they report. For example, if they were to file a restricted report, the kind of report where the person seeks only support, then what I describe in my report as the *effet boule de neige*, the snowball effect, which destroyed confidence because of a story being told to the others of the bad consequences, could be stopped. You could stop this reaction.

The centre in a way is one of the elements of the puzzle, of the whole strategy to reinstate the confidence in the organization, because victims will know that if they seek support, they will not suffer any negative consequences.

The change of culture requires much more than the centre. It requires the involvement of the leadership. It requires putting a lot of effort into training. The change of culture is a process that involves resources to be put at every level.

The Chair: That is your time, Mr. Bezan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor and you have five minutes.

Ms. Éloïse Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the two witnesses for their presentations and for the particularly important work they have done on this issue.

I am from a military family, and in fact my parents are still serving in the armed forces. Thus I feel the work you do is particularly important.

I would like to put a brief question to Ms. Deschamps.

As was mentioned, last February you submitted a preliminary version of your report to General Lawson. Can you tell us whether the report contained the 10 recommendations that are to be found in the final version of your report?

• (1630)

Hon. Marie Deschamps: The report contained 10 recommendations. The wording of some of them has changed a little but the substance remains the same.

Ms. Éline Michaud: So General Lawson had your report, basically, and your recommendations, in February when he drafted his memo.

Hon. Marie Deschamps: Yes.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you very much for that comment.

Ms. Deschamps, you said that not examining the military justice system did not necessarily hinder your capacity to examine the issue of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct in the forces.

Do you think that that exclusion could have an adverse effect on the positive repercussions a change in the culture of the forces could bring, or on the creation of an independent centre? Do you think the fact that that dimension is not being looked at could be an obstacle to the improvement of the situation in the armed forces?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: The objective of my recommendations is to give victims as many avenues as possible. One recommendation bears more specifically on military justice, and I recommend that victims be asked to choose.

I made that recommendation because I noted that civilian courts have a lot more means in large centres. However, in smaller centres that is not necessarily the case. I wanted the victims to be supported in their choices, first of all. That is why I suggest in the report that there be an advocate, to help the person choose, so that the victims can say whether they prefer to turn to the civilian justice system.

I think that the victims should have a choice. The military justice system is one option they could consider.

Ms. Éline Michaud: I understand what you are saying very well.

In the beginning of your presentation, you also said you did not view your mandate as including giving the details of the structure this ideal independent centre should take. However, I would imagine that you may have a few ideas and suggestions to make on that. Could you tell us what you feel the essential elements of an independent centre would be?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: I mentioned several in my report.

For instance, it is very important that an independent centre be the central authority for collecting information. In my report, I note that there is not much reliable data on sexual harassment and assault. The independent centre would have to be responsible for collecting data. It would also have to take part in drafting policies and preparing training programs. The objective is for the independent centre to develop expertise that would benefit all of the units of the armed forces, and not only some of them.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you very much.

Major-General Whitecross, since 2013, the targets for the recruitment of women in the Canadian Forces have been considerably reduced because they were considered unattainable. We now have this report, the conclusions of which are quite difficult to read, concerning the situation in the Canadian Forces.

In light of the conclusions of the report, how will the Canadian armed forces be able to reach targets for the recruitment of women? Is looking at that a part of your mandate?

[English]

MGen Christine Whitecross: My mandate is to address the 10 recommendations from Madame Deschamps. I can look into your question later, but right now, my mandate is to actually identify the 10 recommendations.

The Chair: Time is up. Thank you, Madame Michaud.

Ms. Gallant, you have five minutes, please.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: As was mentioned earlier, General Whitecross, your strategic response team has visited a number of bases and wings since the report was made public. Can you speak to what type of reception you've had from the Canadian Armed Forces members?

• (1635)

MGen Christine Whitecross: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, so far we've done 16 sessions in, I think, six or seven locations. In every one of them the chain of command is aware of Madame Deschamps' report and is aware of the action plan that has come out. They all want to be engaged in setting the conditions for, as Madame Deschamps has mentioned, better trust in the chain of command. That's fundamentally the biggest thing we're hearing; they want to regain trust in the chain of command.

I have one little anecdote, which I think speaks to some of the discussions that we're having. I had a senior member come to me after one of the meetings. We were talking about the underlying sexualized culture and how we need to talk about it. By talking about it people will realize that words hurt and that what they're doing is creating this environment which can, if not checked, lead to larger or more serious events. When he heard that, it resonated with him and he told me that I was one of those people who did that. I can tell you right now that I will be one of the stronger supporters in ensuring that this does not ever happen under my watch again. I think we're reaching people in many ways.

Thank you.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Was it just the chain of command that you met with, or was it regular members of the forces who might not necessarily be officers?

MGen Christine Whitecross: In fact, it's a must attend for all members of the military.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Was your general sense that Madame Deschamps' report and her investigation went far enough and drilled down deep enough?

MGen Christine Whitecross: I think the 10 recommendations from Madame Deschamps are going to set us up for success.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: In meeting with members of the armed forces, do they feel that her study was thorough and that it went far enough?

MGen Christine Whitecross: I got many comments saying that they're very happy with Madame Deschamps' report and the fact that it's also in the open sphere and fully transparent.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madame Deschamps, when you visit the different centres in the United States and Australia, how was it that they were able to achieve independence? Were there retired military personnel involved in these independent centres, or how was it achieved?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: I have not visited the centres. I have been in contact by telephone with the director of SAPRO, in the United States. With SeMPRO I received written correspondence from the organization that did the review, which lasted for years, of what I was asked to do, but the organization that did that review led to the creation of the centre. Those are the contacts that I had with SAPRO and SeMPRO. With France and the Netherlands, the two others that I alluded to in my report, I had only written correspondence with them.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: With these centres with which you had written correspondence, how was it that they achieved the independence? Did they still have members of the military or former members of the military involved, or were they completely separate from the military?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: It depends. For example, in France, it is a model that is quite different from what you can still find in the United States, in New Zealand, in Australia and in Canada and the U.K. In France their sexual assault was processed through the civilian justice system for a long time. What is left in the military disciplinary system is sexual harassment. What they did was to create Cellule Thémis under the equivalent of the auditor. It allowed them to pursue a few goals. One of them was to make sure that the reporting was more complete, and also that the victims felt they could get support without these negative consequences.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

Mr. Harris, for five minutes, please.

• (1640)

Mr. Jack Harris: Madame Deschamps, perhaps you could help me with this. You would have learned a lot about military culture. One of things you would have learned about, of course, is the chain of command and how important that is to the military leadership, but also to those at the very bottom. Part of that culture is that you don't go outside the chain of command with your complaints. You deal with them inside.

Yet, as you report, the vast majority of interviewees who did take the step of discussing their complaint—most did not—with their supervisor, the complaint was not taken seriously. Responses ranged from warning the complainant about the negative consequence to their careers if they continued with the complaint, to openly disbelieving the victim. Ironically, warning about the negative consequences to their career may be fairly accurate, given the experience of a lot of the people who have reported publicly on their experience.

I agree with you that a centre fully independent of the chain of command needs to exist. How does a person who wants to complain—and I think you mentioned it in your opening remarks—get help without triggering a formal complaint and without triggering negative consequences for their career or life?

Can you help me with this? If you go to the independent board or centre to make your complaint and say you just need help, that

you're not going to make a complaint because you know you might get kicked out of the military, how does that give justice where what you really want is to be able to pursue a complaint and have a guarantee that you're not going to be victimized and kicked out of the military, your career stopped, or you're going to be treated with disdain by your fellow soldiers, or by the chain of command around you? How does that work?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: First of all, there are two segments. The first is the restricted report. Under the restricted report the chain of command is not informed. There are, of course, a few circumstances —

Mr. Jack Harris: You could say that you just want to get help for what happened, that you don't want to get anyone else involved.

Hon. Marie Deschamps: Yes. You're hurt. You have mental health problems, and you need help immediately.

Mr. Jack Harris: You want a place for that.

Hon. Marie Deschamps: When the person is ready to make a complaint, because she's had this mental health support, she's supported. I say she but sometimes it is men also. When the victim feels comforted and strong enough, they can move to the unrestricted report, and there kicks in the accountability.

That's why I said it's a centre for accountability, because not only will a chain of command be monitored with their reaction, because the victim is supported and protected by the centre, but also the aggressor will have to be made accountable, because the centre is supposed to follow cases from the moment of the report until the case is closed.

Mr. Jack Harris: I think you say in your report that most sexual assault charges within the military are actually charged not as sexual assaults, but as “conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline”, and you can't even see from the statistics what the actual charge is.

Is this something that should change? That's my number one question. I think I'm running out of time so—

The Chair: You have a minute and 15 seconds.

Mr. Jack Harris: —I'll put in another question to give you some time to answer it. Do you believe there should be an absolute right of the victim of a sexual assault—and I'm not talking about harassment here, because that may be a different matter—to have a case pursued in a civilian court without repercussions from the chain of command or to their career?

I know you've said that this exists in France, and in Australia most cases go to a civilian court. You seem to indicate in your report that ultimately the chain of command gets to decide whether you can go to civil court or not. Do you think there should be an absolute right for a victim to go outside of the military without repercussions and have the case dealt with in civil court?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: There are many questions in your question.

First of all, the chain of command does not always get to decide. Presently, when it's the National Investigation Service, these police

Mr. Jack Harris: They can decide.

Hon. Marie Deschamps: —they can decide, so not always.

When you say “an absolute right”, there might be a question of discretion. I did not want to go that far. Maybe in the long run it will be found to be advisable, but I found that it might be more prudent for the time being to give the choice, and to request that some explanation or justification be given when the desires of the victim are not respected.

• (1645)

The Chair: That is your time, Mr. Harris.

Ms. Gallant, you have five minutes, please.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: General Whitecross, as you're looking at how best to implement these recommendations from the report, can you elaborate on what timeline you're working with for issuing updates to the public, given all the interest in this issue?

MGen Christine Whitecross: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can't provide you with a time. We're still in the “understand” line of effort, so I cannot actually give you a timeline in terms of when certain recommendations will be fully addressed. I can say that we have promised to have quarterly reporting starting this fall both to the Canadian Forces leadership and to government and the media as well.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How do you intend to measure successful outcomes?

MGen Christine Whitecross: That's a great question. Thank you.

Right now, we are trying to learn from the Americans and from the Australians, but probably more particularly from some organizations here in Canada, in regard to how they are measuring success in this area. That's one of our main lines of effort. It's to identify those performance measurements. I don't have those right now. We're working on them and hopefully we'll have something for our first update.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Based on the feedback you've received from the bases and the wings you've visited, what have you heard elsewhere from the Canadian Armed Forces at all levels? How optimistic are you that the meaningful change can be achieved in a timely manner through this action plan you're working on?

MGen Christine Whitecross: I have the full commitment of the Canadian Armed Forces leadership and their engagement on this issue. I think there are some fundamental differences between today and, say, the 1998 scenario. One of them is that we have a team that is completely dedicated to this issue, which has never been done before, a team dedicated to sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces and to eliminating it as best we can. The second thing is, as we've just mentioned, the identification of performance measurements, which will not only be identified and measured, but reported on. Again, that hasn't happened.

I think the third part, if I can say it, is that the team is completely dedicated. I am absolutely dedicated and committed to this mission

and to seeing effective change for the men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madame Deschamps, in dealing with this correspondence and the people you've spoken to from the independent centres, and dealing with sexual assault in these other nations, was there ever an issue or a reporting of false allegations in this reporting system?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: Indeed, I have discussed this issue with Dr. Galbreath from SAPRO. He provided me with references to studies where there were numbers indicating that the number of false allegations is not any higher for this kind of problem than it is for other kinds of problems.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: In your discussions with the other nations, did they mention whether or not recruitment of women in the military increased after the changes had been implemented?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: No, I did not have that discussion.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

You mentioned that you had interviewed approximately 700, or more than 700 people. How much time did you spend with them?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: Initially our sessions were one hour and a half, but we became a little more experienced and we were able to get to the topic more quickly and we reduced it to one hour to be able to see more people. Sometimes it lasted less than one hour because the person didn't have the appropriate experience, and these shorter sessions were with professionals. When we realized that they were not the right person, we did not spend too much time with them, but the average time from our third visit, I would say, was an hour.

• (1650)

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Gallant.

Mr. Bezan, you have five minutes.

Mr. James Bezan: It's been said that nobody who signs up for the Canadian Armed Forces to stand on guard for our great nation signed up to be subjected to sexual misconduct.

Madame Deschamps, on the interviews that you conducted, you said you talked to veterans, you talked to serving members, you talked to leadership, and you talked to civilians as well. I'm wondering if you found that the ones who were no longer enlisted were freer to talk and provided more details than those who were still serving.

Hon. Marie Deschamps: Obviously, those who were no longer within the military contacted me because they had something to say. Sometimes they had positive experiences to convey and sometimes it was much less positive, but those were people who wanted to speak, so there was no question about their feeling free to speak. For the others, at times during the interviews we had to use kinds of techniques to put them at ease and to comfort them that this would be confidential. We asked people, as I mentioned, to use pseudonyms. I was accompanied by a lawyer who had particular experience with victims. He had done pro bono for years to support victims, so he was very good at making sure that the stories came out, and we usually succeeded.

Mr. James Bezan: General Whitecross, in your presentation you made the comment that trying to deal with the issue and raising awareness was similar to what we've gone through with mental health within the Canadian Armed Forces and how we changed the stigma, how we shifted the culture.

During this parliamentary session this committee spent quite a bit of time studying the care of our ill and injured within the Canadian Armed Forces. One thing that we came across is that we saw change happening for sure at the top end of management within the Canadian Armed Forces, but there were still some problems sometimes with middle management and even among the ranks themselves in how we deal with someone who was suffering from mental health issues.

Do you feel that's going to be a barrier in how we view awareness, education, and training with members of the Canadian Armed Forces as we move forward on sexual misconduct?

MGen Christine Whitecross: The first phase of our approach right now is obviously the town halls, because we have had some success, as you alluded to, in the past—and it's certainly not a similar situation; I'd like to say that first off—with PTSD and OSI, where there was a stigma, there was being afraid to speak to your chain of command, being afraid to speak to your buddies. On that thing, a lot of it, we managed to effect some change based on grassroots and a leadership down, so a bottom-up and top-down approach, to start the discussion to make sure that people are aware that these exist and that we need to be able to be free and open about the discussion. This is one of the ways we are hoping to effect change on this sexualized culture that Madame Deschamps reports.

I would just like to add that there are a number of other areas that we need to also address. One of them is that as we're trying to reinstate trust and confidence in those chains of command where it does not exist, we ensure that people are aware of the policies that they must address. Granted, we're looking at all those policies to see where they need to change, but we need to have a similar address of policies regardless of where they are in the Canadian Armed Forces. That includes the procedures that the chain of command need to deal with. In the discussions, in the identifying of a comprehensive approach in terms of an independent centre, we're also looking at a number of other areas where we're trying to instill confidence back into the chain of command where it's required.

• (1655)

The Chair: A very brief question.

Mr. James Bezan: Major-General Whitecross, you've been to the United States. You've been to Australia. You looked at SAPRO and SeMPRO. One thing that the Canadian Armed Forces has always done, and most militaries do, is adopt best practices. What is your one take-away from both of those organizations? What do you feel they were doing that really stuck in your mind that has applicability here in Canada?

MGen Christine Whitecross: I like the victim support centric approach that they both have, because fundamentally they're looking at the needs of the victims first and foremost.

The Chair: Thank you, and that's time, Mr. Bezan.

Madame Michaud, for five minutes please.

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Major-General Whitecross, I would like to ask you a few questions.

Can you give us a few more details on how you chose the people who make up your multidisciplinary team? What are their particular skills? Are some of them from the social services field? Did you ensure that these people be very representative of the population that is most affected by issues of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct in the Canadian Forces?

[English]

MGen Christine Whitecross: Mr. Chair, because we wanted to put a team together fairly quickly, we first of all identified those who wanted to be volunteers on the team. Even in so doing, we interviewed every one of them to ensure that they had the competencies that we require to move Madame Deschamps' recommendations forward. I'll give you an example.

We have members of the team who have a better understanding of the performance measurements that we really need to incorporate as we're moving forward. We also have members of the team who are currently dealing with policy issues when it comes to sexual harassment, or harassment at large. They have a background in that. Men and women, military and civilian, all come with different backgrounds. We have members from the medical field. We have members from ADR, alternate dispute resolution. They're actually all multi-faceted. Each one of them brings a capability to the team that we can use today.

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you.

About how many women are a part of your committee?

[English]

MGen Christine Whitecross: We're about 25 members, and almost half are women.

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you.

There has been a lot of talk about women victimized by sexual harassment and sexual misconduct in the Canadian Forces, and talking about that is important. However, members of the LGBT community are also victims of sexual harassment or misconduct in the Canadian Forces.

Do you think it would be necessary to devise a particular strategy to help the LGBT community, or do you think a general strategy will be sufficient? The question is addressed both to Ms. Deschamps and Major-General Whitecross.

[English]

MGen Christine Whitecross: Perhaps I can start.

The policy of an environment of dignity and respect extends to you regardless of your gender or sexual orientation. We have made that very clear in every one of our town halls and every one of our discussions. The idea is that regardless of where you come from in the military, you should be treated the same.

I have one other small anecdote. I have heard from the LGBTQ community and many of them have had positive reactions in the military as well.

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud: Ms. Deschamps, did you want to add something on that or do you think the answer is complete?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: The reply is quite complete, but I would simply add that in our interviews, there were members of the LGBTQ community, both male and female homosexuals. These people told us some very sad stories about their environment. However, in the context of our meetings, they spoke out freely.

• (1700)

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you very much.

Major-General Whitecross, you are in the process of determining how best to assess the success of what is going to be put in place by the Canadian Forces. However, we have very little information on cases that have been settled via a summary process. The sanctions imposed were in fact in connection with other types of offences.

Have you begun to think about ways to compensate for the lack of prior information that may make progress difficult?

[English]

MGen Christine Whitecross: You are absolutely correct. We do not have comprehensive data on many of the issues. One of our priorities is to identify a database that we can implement, and we've learned some good points from both the Americans and the Australians in that.

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud: But we must focus on the situation in Canada. It is difficult to have an overall perspective when the statistics on this type of incident, which occurs frequently in the Canadian Forces, are not clear.

Have you thought of a way to obtain conclusive data on the current situation?

[English]

MGen Christine Whitecross: As Madame Deschamps has identified in her recommendation, there are a number of areas, including ensuring that all of the data resides within the independent centre, and that's one of the things we're looking at. The Americans have a fairly consistent database that we're also looking at.

The Chair: That's time, Madame Michaud.

Mr. Chisu, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Thank you very much Madam Justice Deschamps and General Whitecross for your great work in addressing an issue in the Canadian Forces that might influence and might affect the operational readiness. That is very important new work and I commend you for it.

As you know, I served for 24 years in the Canadian Forces. There's a front end of the Canadian Forces and a back end. The front end is recruiting. Did you visit any recruiting centres? All the issues start with the recruiting and it is very important that these issues are addressed before we get into problems when the service begins. On

the back end, you have people who are not constrained, who are not afraid of the progression in their career and who come forward.

It is very important if you have seen anything in the recruiting centres, because your recommendation number two is to establish a strategy to effect cultural change to eliminate these issues. Can both of you address this?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: As a matter of fact, I have not visited recruitment centres. I asked myself to what extent recruitment could be improved. However, this discussion was difficult to address not only because at present there did not seem to be a peak, as I heard there was in the period when Canada was very much involved in Afghanistan.... I heard comments about that period and there were criticisms about the way the recruitment was done at the time, but the comments did not seem to be aimed at the present recruitment, and in a way, I had to circumscribe my energy to focus on what goes on on the ground.

I agree that recruitment is a very important element, and good screening is important. I asked Dr. Galbreath at SAPRO to find out whether they would recommend any methods to do this kind of screening, and the answer I got was there is no actual test, no method that is currently used, at least in the United States, to improve recruitment.

I agree with you that it's an important issue, but I did not have the time or the possibility to explore it in more detail.

• (1705)

MGen Christine Whitecross: I would just like to add, Mr. Chair, that one of the first areas we went to on our town halls was the recruiting school in Saint-Jean for that very reason, and one of the objectives we have in education and training is education and training that starts from the moment they put on the uniform until the day they take it off.

Thank you.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Another issue that I would like to raise is in recommendation seven. You are making a recommendation to simplify the harassment process by directing formal complaints to COs acting as adjudicators in a grievance. A grievance can take a very long time.

The effective way is to deal with these issues as quickly as possible.

Hon. Marie Deschamps: Currently, there is a process that already takes a lot of time, and then it is followed by the grievance process, so to reduce the amount of procedure, my recommendation is to go directly to the grievance process with a simplified process. We're not talking about the grievance process with pages 1, 2, 3 as in the collective agreement, but to go directly to the CO to act as an adjudicator.

The Chair: That's time, Mr. Chisu.

Ms. Murray, please, for five minutes.

Ms. Joyce Murray: I really appreciate the expressions of heartfelt commitment by both of our witnesses to change this culture and bring in a positive culture of trust and confidence. As a woman with a daughter and a granddaughter and a great respect for the Canadian Armed Forces, I share that commitment as well.

The questions I am going to ask are about process, because I think good people cannot always overcome a bad process, so process is important.

To follow up on the discussions that have been happening around measuring and reporting, that structure to measure and report has to be created. Madame Deschamps, are you confident if those are created in-house in National Defence that will be sufficient, or should there be an external independent component to the measuring and reporting and/or an independent component to delivering the reports?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: First of all, if it's located in National Defence as opposed to the Canadian Armed Forces, to me it would qualify as an independent process. I didn't suggest that it is like in the civilian system or by contractors because there has to be some means of communication. If a perpetrator is to be prosecuted, there has to be some kind of communication between the two.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay.

Hon. Marie Deschamps: It has to be located somewhere as far as possible from the Canadian Armed Forces, but I would not say that giving it to a contractor with allocation of contracts and.... I'm not sure this would be.... But this is a personal opinion at present.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay, thank you.

Major-General Whitecross, would you consider implementing an external review, such as the one that was just conducted by Madame Deschamps, on a regular basis so that these issues stay in the spotlight until such time as it's clear that the changes you're looking for have been made, or do you think the reviews are fine to do from within the organization?

MGen Christine Whitecross: Mr. Chair, I can tell you right now that the Australians actually do that. They have garnered the support of Madam Broderick throughout the process, so it's something we're looking at.

• (1710)

Ms. Joyce Murray: You're considering that. Okay, great.

Going back briefly to the process, Madame Deschamps, the military ombudsman refused to participate in your review, I believe, and you found that none of those who went that route found it helpful.

When the ombudsman was at our committee after the *Maclean's* articles, I asked the ombudsman how many complaints he had received. He said that he was not the place to deal with those complaints; he turned them over to the military police. Also, I asked him what his record was of how many came in that he turned over, and even that wasn't being tracked.

What role, if any, do you think the ombudsman should have in relation to sexual misconduct complaints that may go into his office? Also, is there a structure of accountability or tracking that you think should happen?

Hon. Marie Deschamps: In my report I say that he should not be referred to as an element of the solution for the victims. That's clear enough.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay, so people should know that's not where they go.

Going back to my concern about this initiating directive, when I read recommendation five, it refers to developing "a simple, broad definition of sexual harassment that effectively captures all dimensions of the member's relationship with the CAF." However, when I look at the basis for the requirement that you were provided with by the CDS in this initiating directive, it says very clearly that the definition of harassment as developed by Treasury Board and reflected in DAOD 5012-0 will remain in effect.

Those are two different answers. How do you square that when this initiating directive is still in operation?

MGen Christine Whitecross: In recommendation five there are four or five different definitions that Madame Deschamps has asked to look for, and we're actually looking at every one of them. Also, I have the support of the CDS in doing that.

The Chair: That's time, Ms. Murray.

Thank you, Madam Justice Deschamps and General Whitecross, for your time with us today. You may well receive invitations from this committee in the future as you proceed with your action plan. We thank you again for sharing your time and expertise with us today.

The committee will now suspend as the room is cleared, and we will resume in closed session.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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