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Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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• (1630)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Thank you very much to the minister and to Gina Wilson for coming today.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons announced that Thursday, March 22 will be the final allotted date in the current period, meaning that the votes for supplementary estimates (C) 2017-18 and the interim estimates for 2018-19 were deemed reported to the House yesterday. Although it would be great if we voted, these votes would not mean anything because we're already past the deadline, so today is more about information. The committee should not vote adopt nor report on the votes.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the subject matter of the supplementary estimates under the office of the coordinator, Status of Women, and the subject matter of the interim estimates for 2018-19, vote 1 and vote 5 under that same office at Status of Women.

For this reason we are pleased to have the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Status of Women. She is joined by Gina Wilson, the deputy minister, and Anik Lapointe, chief financial officer and director.

With that, I would like to turn the floor over to you, Ms. Monsef, for your opening statement. We'll give you exactly 10 minutes. Go ahead.

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Status of Women): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people. As always, it's a privilege to be with your committee today.

Gina Wilson, my deputy minister and, as you mentioned, our CFO Anik Lapointe have joined me.

I would like to welcome Stephanie to the committee. I'm looking forward to our collaboration. I would also like to thank Martin for all his contributions to gender equality, and all members of this committee for your continued efforts to advance gender equality, in particular, your studies on women's economic security and the study on indigenous women in the justice system. We are looking forward to reviewing and addressing your recommendations to the best extent we can.

As Minister of Status of Women, I'm proud of our accomplishments and the progress we've been able to make over the last four months since I appeared before this committee. A lot has happened. We introduced the first federal gender budget in the recognition that when we invest in women, we grow the economy for everyone. Canada has assumed the G7 presidency and are prioritizing gender equality to make it a theme of the presidency.

We've updated the terms and conditions for women's program funding to give more flexibility to funded organizations and initiatives and to strengthen support for the sustainability of the women's movement. We've launched a successful gender-based violence strategy call for concepts. That's \$20 million for projects of up to five years.

On International Women's Day, of course, I announced \$858,000 in funding for the Global Compact Network Canada for a project that will engage the private sector to eliminate barriers facing women in the workplace. There has also been, as we know, women rising around the world and in our communities across Canada.

With the #MeToo movement, the Time's Up movement, and global marches, we've seen a need and a momentum to seize and to build upon. I know that our work, including the investments we are making in women's organizations through the G7, is building on the momentum and moving the work of gender equality forward.

Of course, we've just returned from a successful few days at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York City. We were proud to share the significant steps that Canada has made, but also to learn about the innovative measures that other countries are taking. I offer many thanks to my colleagues across party lines who joined us in New York City. It was quite exceptional to see team Canada in such full force.

Last June, informed by this committee's work, I announced the first ever federal strategy to address and prevent gender-based violence, including investing \$100.9 million over five years, with an additional \$20.7 million per year, in this. As part of this strategy, Status of Women Canada has been coordinating the whole-of-government approach to the development and sharing of research and data not only to inform actions but also to achieve concrete, measurable, results. The \$20 million that was announced in January to address and prevent gender-based violence, particularly for underserved and undersupported gender-based violence survivors, has been an important step.

Over the next year, we intend to build on the momentum created by the activism that has been seen across the country and demonstrate how feminism can be a positive force for social progress and change. As you know, the new budget announced an additional \$86 million over five years, starting in 2018-19, to further support the implementation of the gender-based violence strategy in areas such as teen dating violence, on-line child sexual exploitation, and harassment in post-secondary institutions.

To make gender equality a reality, those of us in decision-making positions must listen, learn, and ultimately lead with our words and our actions. This is why the government has also established an agenda internationally to further prioritize gender equality.

• (1635)

In November 2017, I represented Canada at the first-ever G7 gender equality ministerial meeting in Taormina, Italy. The progress there has created momentum to help Canada put equality at the centre of its G7 agenda throughout its presidency year. Earlier this month, you may recall there was an announcement for the Gender Equality Advisory Council for the presidency. Co-chaired by Melinda Gates and Isabelle Hudon, the equality council is essentially mandated to support leaders and ministers to ensure that gender equality and the intersectional gendered lens we apply across government is integrated across all themes, activities, and outcomes of Canada's G7 presidency. I am thrilled to be serving as a liaison between the Gender Equality Advisory Council, the G7 sherpa, and the Prime Minister.

Our government believes in supporting initiatives that will have a long-lasting impact for all women, which is why we've changed the way Status of Women Canada does business. We've restored funding eligibility for advocacy activities and introduced measures to ensure the sustainability of the women's movement, including expanding eligibility for recipients such as labour unions, provinces, territories, educational institutions, think tanks, and municipalities; allowing longer-term and higher-value funding opportunities—that's up to \$2 million per year, for up to five years—and by enabling operational and capacity funding to increase sector capacity through skills development and community engagement, just to name some examples.

In 2018-19, the women's program, the envelope that supports women's organizations, will fund projects that remove persistent barriers to women participating fully in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada.

Let's talk about the budget. Budget 2018 cements a whole-of-government approach to gender equality. Not only was GBA+ applied to all of the measures introduced, but the budget also introduced a gender results framework to guide the budget plan, to measure the impact of investments and, frankly, to ensure accountability across the government. We will be introducing new GBA+ legislation to enshrine gender budgeting in the federal government's financial and budgetary processes and to extend the reach of GBA+ to also include tax expenditures, federal transfers, and other government spending. This will be integral to ensuring that, when we make decisions in budgets, we help reduce the potential negative impacts for women, gender-diverse persons, and other groups.

For Status of Women Canada, the new budget means \$100 million over five years to support women's organizations—that's a doubling of investment in these vital organizations—a commitment to introduce legislation to formalize the role of Status of Women Canada, making Status of Women Canada an official department; a mandate for Status of Women Canada to engage in a national conversation on gender equality with young Canadians; and, of course, an engagement strategy for how men and boys can be part of gender equality in Canada. There are also other measures in budget 2018, including a new parental sharing benefit, women entrepreneurship strategies, increasing the number of women in trades, support for indigenous women in the workplace, and a commitment for proactive pay equity legislation, just to name a few.

I'm be happy to talk to you about those today, but most importantly, I look forward to the ongoing collaboration we are all a part of to advance gender equality. I'd be happy to take any questions that our colleagues may have about supplementary estimates (C) and the interim estimates.

• (1640)

The Chair: Excellent, thank you very much.

Minister Monsef, you were 45 seconds short, so we could have let you keep talking. Thank you very much much.

We're going to go around the table, but I'll just advise you, Minister, that because we have the votes tonight, we have had unanimous consent to keep the meeting going until 5:25.

We're going to start with Emmanuella Lambropoulos for her seven minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you very much, Minister Monsef, for being here with us today to answer questions on the budget.

First of all, I'd like to hear a bit more about how we're going to be engaging men and boys help further gender equality, in order to bring us to a level playing field.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We know that men and boys want to be part of the conversation, and that frankly we can't do this work without them. That's why, in the new budget, there was an investment of \$1.8 million over two years to begin to develop that conversation across the country, but also to develop that strategy. We know from women's organizations that there's a lot of expertise to be leveraged in the feminist movements. We're going to ensure we do that. We're going to ensure that we are not taking funding away from women's organizations to engage men and boys. As someone who has been part of the feminist movement, and working with grassroots organizations, I have definitely heard loud and clear how important it is to do that. I know parliamentarians like our parliamentary secretary, Terry Duguid, have a lot of ability and capacity to lead this work, and I'm very much looking forward to doing this. If and when we get this right, Canada will be the first to have a strategy of this kind.

• (1645)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Also, obviously, another issue is that not enough women are in leadership positions, and we're not equally represented in high-paying fields. What are the strategies in this budget that will help get more women into leadership positions?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Part of it is looking around at corporate boards. When only one in five seats is filled by a woman in a country like Canada, we have a problem, and we're working to address that.

Bill C-25, which is in the Senate right now, adopts a “comply or explain” approach. With that, in the new budget there is an opportunity to incentivize and recognize corporations that are doing well around gender and overall diversity in their corporations.

On International Women's Day I also announced \$858,000 in funding for the Global Compact, which is an arm of the UN. They'll be working with some 20 champions in the private sector who are demonstrating this kind of leadership—folks like IKEA, for example. They'll be working on determining a blueprint, essentially, for what the barriers are to ensuring greater diversity in workplaces and how the private sector can be part of this work.

In terms of representation of women in under-represented fields—science, trades, technology, engineering, mathematics—there's funding in the budget to address that. There's up to \$6,000 in grants for women studying trades, to be able to pay for equipment, for example. That's one barrier removed, to get them to high-wage fields. We also know that pre-apprenticeship training is important; getting that interest early on will be critical. Then there's \$1.6 billion to a women's entrepreneurship strategy. When women are able to determine their destinies and create jobs for others, it's better for everyone.

These are just some of the ways we're working to address some of those contributors to the wage gap.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Lastly, if I have time, I was really happy to represent Canada with the Canadian delegation at the UN last week. One of the side events I attended, which was co-hosted, if not fully hosted, by Canada, was “Violence Knows No Borders”. There are a lot of immigrants in my riding, and not all of them are very aware of their rights as Canadians—eventually, when they get their Canadian citizenship—and even as permanent residents.

I was wondering what we're doing to tackle gender-based violence. I know we've already done quite a bit, but is there anything new in the budget that's going to help with that?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: That's another excellent question, Emmanuella, and thank you for being there at the UN. Again, having a solid Team Canada approach was really important.

There are a few measures we're taking. We recognize that gender-based violence does not discriminate between cultures. It's a reality across institutions, workplaces, and cultures everywhere. We also recognize that some groups are more vulnerable.

The much discussed citizenship guide, which is in the process of being reformed, is not to just talk about what can't be done but also to inform newcomers to Canada about their rights and also their responsibilities. We're working with stakeholders in the feminist community and, of course, with colleagues in Citizenship and Immigration Canada to ensure that it can be a teaching tool to provide newcomers to Canada and their educators an opportunity to better understand this great country that they've come to.

There is funding, of course—it's about \$20 million over five years—to protect vulnerable women and girls. This is about funding to welcome an extra 1,000 refugees. There is money set aside in the gender-based violence strategy. The \$20 million that I announced in January focused on under-represented and underserved groups like indigenous organizations and groups but also immigrant women and girls. Ensuring that those organizations have the funding and supports they need to serve these communities is going to be essential, but as you've seen through your work on the economic security of women and girls, it's not just about addressing violence. Economic security is an important way to prevent violence and the cycle of abuse that can hold women and other gender-diverse people back.

That is part of the solution, but we also need to ensure that women are doing well economically, which is why the budget was so important. When we focus on women's economic well-being, we grow the economy for everyone and make them less vulnerable.

• (1650)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I think my DM would like to add something to this.

The Chair: We're at our time, so we'll discontinue with that.

I'm going to move over to Stephanie Kusie for her seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Good afternoon, Madam Minister.

It's always a pleasure for me to see you. Thank you for being here today.

[English]

Thanks so much for being here.

Regarding the gender-based budget, a recent article in *The Toronto Star* by Jennifer Wells indicated that Australia had abandoned this gender-based budgeting. Austria had implemented gender-based budgeting and, unfortunately, it was met with ill-defined objectives, a lack of oversight, poor inter-ministerial coordination, and a lack of gender-related data. Further, only half of 12 OECD countries could point to specific examples where the gender budgeting tool had brought about significant changes in policy design and/or outcomes.

Why do you expect the outcomes for Canada to be so much better?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: That's an excellent question.

Of course, in developing our approach, we've been looking at other countries and finding ways to determine what they do best, and replicating and learning from those challenges. The foundation to effective gender budgeting, as you've mentioned, is good-quality data. That's the biggest limit, and that's an area that we have to continue to build upon, which is why, in addition to committing to legislate GBA+, there has been significant acknowledgement from provinces, territories, women's groups, and our government that we need to invest in good-quality data. We're doing that.

You referred to the OECD, and we've actually been working with the OECD not just to help us do gender budgeting well but also to help us with our GBA+ process as a whole, which is another reason we were able to introduce Canada's first gender budget.

Another thing that's different about Canada—and it's more challenging but it's really important for a country as diverse as Canada—is the fact that our gender budget isn't just a gendered budget. The plus is there too. It's an intersectional gendered lens that is going to make a significant difference. Legislating GBA+ ensures that there is more accountability. There will be public reporting, of course, to Parliament but also to the public as a part of it. Ensuring that Status of Women Canada has the ability to monitor the quality of GBA+ that leads to an effective gender budget is going to be critical to our success.

This is just our first year doing it. We know there will be opportunities to improve it, but I can't overemphasize two things: one, the importance of reliable, valid intersectional gender-disaggregated data; and two, the importance of fostering a culture and a workplace that ensure that every decision that cabinet makes has that intersectional gendered lens applied before we get to the budget-making process that the finance minister and the Prime Minister are part of.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I'm very glad to hear you're working with the OECD countries to see how the ones that have been in the top six have found success. I am very curious and interested in the specifics of the data analysis you mentioned repeatedly. I was wondering if

you could please give me three examples of analytics that will be used in the gender results framework to measure process, such as benchmarking, standard deviation analysis, or multiple regression analysis. What data tools or numbers specifically will show us that this is succeeding, please, Minister?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: You're talking to a data geek. Yes, absolutely, I would love to.

The government's current and future budgets will be guided by a new gender results framework. It will be divided into six pillars. The first will be around education and skills development. The second is economic participation and prosperity. The third is around leadership and democratic participation. The fourth, which we've been talking about a lot lately, is gender-based violence and access to justice.

The fifth is around poverty reduction, health and well-being, and gender equality around the world. This analysis is robust but it will be enhanced by new investments in data in partnership with Statistics Canada, with community-based research on the ground across the country, and with concrete examples showing what this looks like from the policy to its implementation.

Over the next 10 years, some \$40 billion will be invested in the national housing strategy. Women's groups work really hard, as you have in your work on this committee, to ensure that housing and that connection with women is made. At least 25% of that funding will directly support women and their families.

Who is going to be building these houses? Who is going to be benefiting from these good quality jobs over the next 10 years? We know that fewer than five per cent of women are in construction as electricians or carpenters. In recognition of that and to mitigate it, there's new money in the 2018 budget to support women entering these fields so they can benefit from the significant investment. This is exciting for us and just one of the ways where policy tools ultimately lead to better outcomes. If we keep applying this rigour, we're going to make sure that at the end of the day, Canadians feel the impact of better investments in women and girls, and this leads to a stronger economy for everyone.

● (1655)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Minister.

I certainly hear the many excellent themes and initiatives. I think Canadians would be comforted if they had more confidence and understanding with regard to the data analysis that will take place and the methods it will include.

You mentioned intersectionality a lot. How do you define that, please, Minister?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The results.ca website—it's up already—is an opportunity for Canadians, but updating it will be an ongoing process so Canadians will be aware. Of course, we're also building a knowledge centre for the information and data we're keeping. Through Statistics Canada, much of this knowledge will be available to the public.

Intersectionality is a recognition beyond our gender identities, the recognition of other realities that we identify with and that can affect our day-to-day realities. These include age, race, whether we live in rural or remote communities or urban centres, indigeneity, migratory status, disability and exceptionalities—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We're going to move on to Sheila just because the time is short.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Sure, we can talk about this later.

The Chair: Sheila, you've got your seven minutes.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

It was really good to be with the Canadian delegation at the United Nations last week. We heard some devastating presentations. One that I think particularly affected a lot of us, which we've been hearing testimony about at this committee, is the experience of indigenous women in the justice system and incarceration.

One of the very strong messages we've heard at committee, and it was certainly echoed at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women last week, is the problem of solitary confinement. Here's a statement by the Native Women's Association of Canada that we heard at committee, calling for a complete end to the practice of solitary confinement by any name and for any duration. The associations says:

Segregation is a particularly cruel practice for women with histories of trauma and abuse, another area in which indigenous women are overrepresented.

Along with a lot of other people, I was devastated that the federal government decided to file an appeal the BC Civil Liberties Association's win on ending indefinite solitary confinement.

I'd like to hear you, from your heart, how you feel to have our government spend our tax dollars fighting this really cruel and terrible practice. This is the appeal filing.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you for your question, Sheila, and of course it's always good to have you at international and domestic fora representing us so well.

On the issue of the significant overrepresentation of indigenous women in the justice system, I think the percentage is 36%. That's significant given that they make up about 2% of the population.

Your report is going to be incredibly appreciated and will help inform the aspects of the justice system that need to be addressed. Overall, we acknowledge that the system as a whole has failed a lot of people, including black Canadians and indigenous people in Canada, and indigenous women—

● (1700)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Minister, I'm sorry, but with respect, it's about the appeal of the solitary confinement ruling. How do you feel about that?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I won't comment on ongoing court cases, but you asked me to comment from the heart, and Sheila, I can tell you that one of the reasons I'm here is that I know, as a settler to this country, having been here for 22 years, I have more opportunities and privileges afforded to me than many of the people whose land we're on. That's a wrong that I have an opportunity to right, and it's one that we all do. You've heard the Prime Minister say that there's no relationship more important, and it's a shared commitment by individuals in government and the government as a whole.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: With respect, it's just very hard to square that with the government's appealing some really progressive decisions of our courts, so I'll leave that with you.

We also heard at convention of, I know that you have met with some of these amazing women from the east coast, Persons Against Non-state Torture, who have been fighting for 20 years to get non-state torture named a distinct form of gender-based violence. Non-state torture is when someone is tortured but it's not done by a police officer or in a prisoner-of-war situation. The parliamentary secretary and I saw a wonderfully told but terrible movie on prostitution: young girls being lead into prostitution. Anyway, there were just terrible family circumstances, and we know that there's a parliamentary committee studying human trafficking right now.

Are you going to include non-state torture as a distinct form of gender-based violence in the strategy work you're doing? You would be fulfilling some of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations. You'd be working with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights if you were to do so.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I don't have an answer to your question, but I have met with organizations that are doing this work across the country, and they've helped inform the gender-based violence strategy. Their recommendations for ensuring that their organizations can support these individuals who are finally able to seek the help they need have been instrumental for us, and we'll continue to support them.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'm glad to hear you talking about operational funding for women's organizations.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I thought you would be.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'm still not clear on whether it's funding that will help these organizations keep the lights on and keep their operations staff. Can you give us a couple of sentences of assurance on that?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We're changing the way we do business. Consistently, across the country, I have heard the same thing from organizations in both rural and urban communities. They say that as much as they appreciate the dollars, the way we fund them could be done better with a simpler process, with longer-term funding, and in terms of the reasons we fund them. We're in the process of turning that ship around by ensuring that instead of one- or two-year funding, they receive up to five years of funding, so they have predictability. Operational funding, as you know from that recent GBV call for proposals in January, was included as being eligible.

We're also working with provinces and territories. We had our FPT meeting in Toronto for the first time since I took this role. We'll be meeting again in Yukon in the fall. We talked about co-funding these organizations so we can make better use of the dollars and better target our investments to ultimately support them in taking care of, and advocating for, the people who count on them. We are looking at doing things differently, but we're also working with other entities that fund these organizations, such as provinces, territories, unions, and so on.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: My time is short, so I would love it if you were willing to file with the committee a little bit more of an explanation about how the operational funding side is going to work, because it has been hard for us to track.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Sure.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I know that you and the finance minister are proud of the gender budget. As you know, I still have some big pieces that are missing. In order to expand on this, Chair, if I could move my motion, I would like the committee to invite the finance minister, Bill Morneau, to come to the committee to explain the effects of the budget on women and girls.

I have a motion that was distributed. It reads:

That the Committee invite the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Bill Morneau, at the earliest opportunity to explain the effect of Budget 2018 on women and girls; and that this meeting be televised.

• (1705)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: That's an excellent idea, for what it's worth.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on this motion?

I see no debate. All those in favour of inviting Mr. Morneau to the status of women committee in camera.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: It was voted down last year, so good, this is progress.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I know I'm not on this committee, but just to clarify, is he going to be in camera or televised?

The Chair: It would be televised.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: You're more than welcome.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: He wanted to come to the UN, so he wasn't able to—

The Chair: You had only 12 seconds left, and the motion has been cleared, so we're going to get back onto business.

Marc Serré, you have your seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Minister.

I will share my speaking time with my colleague Mr. Fraser.

Madam Minister, thank you very much for your comments and your enthusiasm at the United Nations General Assembly. I also had the opportunity to attend a number of meetings, and it's obvious that Canada's message as a world leader was very well received.

So, before I ask my first question, I will give Ms. Wilson the opportunity to tell us what she wanted to say earlier.

Ms. Wilson, we're listening.

Ms. Gina Wilson (Deputy Minister, Office of the Deputy Minister, Office of the Co-ordinator, Status of Women): The only thing I wanted to add is that there is a brief section of the

[*English*]

gender-based violence strategy that's dedicated to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, which is actually there to fund settlement operations, particularly for those women who are experiencing violence.

[*Translation*]

That's all I wanted to add.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

[*English*]

The theme at the United Nations was empowering women and girls in rural areas. We know that in Canada—for me in my riding and for many of our ridings across the country—rural services for women and girls are very important. I wanted to get your perspective on what budget 2018 has done to really focus on rural women and girls. A lot will be learned from the UN at the same time.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, Marc. It was so great to have you and Terry there as a demonstration of how men are already part of the conversation to advance gender equality.

Yes, we were at the UN with a lot of pride about the progress made in Canada to put gender equality at the heart of what we do, including in our budget, but we also went there with some humility. I will get to that later because we know that other countries have a lot to teach us in our work.

Rural women and girls' reality is also important to me as an MP. I represent a mixed rural and urban riding. Before the UN meetings, I heard in Peterborough—Kawartha about women having issues with transportation in rural communities, and lack of access to rural broadband. These are key key concerns not just for their security and safety but also as an economic barrier.

Curve Lake First Nation is in my riding too. I also heard that the realities for indigenous women and girls in rural and remote communities are distinct from those of settlers, which needs to be kept in mind. I also heard that there is an opportunity to promote women entrepreneurs through access to capital for those who are in agriculture. It's so important to tell the stories of great women in rural communities who are holding them together and also building a better Canada as they have for decades.

What does that mean in our work as a government? The investment in infrastructure, \$186 billion, is nothing to laugh at. There is money for transportation for smaller communities. Two billion dollars has been set aside thanks to advocacy by rural members. Five hundred million dollars has been set aside for rural broadband. This is going to be an important economic driver for all Canadians, not just those in rural communities. For access to farm credit, there is more money now available through budget 2018 for those women who are interested in pursuing work in agriculture, and, of course, \$1.65 billion for the women entrepreneurship strategy.

For Status of Women Canada, we know that organizations in rural communities often play multiple roles. They are not just a rape crisis centre. They are also doing immigration settlement work. They are also doing youth support. They are also providing employment advice. They need more attention. We heard that loud and clear.

Since 2015, 97 projects have been funded related to rural women and girls for a total of \$29.5 million. That means 60% of the \$48 million we have already spent on women's organizations is directly related to rural women.

However, our work isn't done. We have a lot of work left to do. I sincerely hope that one of the outcomes as a follow-up to our joint trip to the United Nations is that we ask ourselves the following question: "Okay, we all went and heard everything that has been done, but how are we going to do differently so that the issue of rural women and girls' empowerment stays at the forefront of this committee's work?" Of course, as we continue to apply that intersectional agenda lens to our policies, we must continue to elevate that moving forward.

● (1710)

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you so much for your commitment. I will pass it on to Mr. Fraser for the last two minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much, Minister, for being here with us today.

I would like to touch on a few themes you started to raise, and perhaps allow you to elaborate a little more on them.

First, one of the barriers to economic success we've heard a great deal about during our study on the subject at this committee has been, as you referenced, a lack of access to capital for women entrepreneurs. It was astonishing to me how difficult it was for women in business to get the seed funding they needed to get businesses off the ground, to scale up, and to thrive.

I'm curious about what plans we have in place to ensure that women have better and equal access to financing so they can contribute to the economy to the same degree men can and experience all the benefits that come with it.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Access to money through EDC and BDC and regional development agencies will allow women entrepreneurs to start up businesses and to grow them. Also, through the new trade agreements we're signing, there are new investments in the budget to help them find access to greater markets. We know they need to come together as an entrepreneurial community, so we have set aside money for a conference on that.

There is also a recognition that boot camps, mentorships, and all these other opportunities are critical to their success so that we can ensure that they continue to create jobs. A lower tax for them starting this year, and a further 1% reduction next year to 9%, will help ensure that women entrepreneurs will not only continue to contribute to the economy in Canada, but also serve the international community with their goods and services.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

Now we have time for Rachael Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

Minister, your government recently announced a policy to welcome members of ISIS to return to Canada and find refuge here despite the fact that these ISIS terrorists have not renounced their acts of genocide, torture, or terrorism. The Prime Minister said that these ISIS members would be an "extraordinarily powerful voice for preventing radicalization in future generations and younger people within the community".

Meanwhile, Ralph Goodale, the public safety minister, said, "Once a person has been in a war zone, once they've been actively engaged in terrorist-related activities, the capacity to turn them around is pretty remote".

Minister, as the Minister of Status of Women, I'm wondering which framework you agree with. Do you agree with the public safety minister that the ISIS terrorists returning to Canada are a threat, or do you believe that the Prime Minister is correct in saying that these terrorists who are returning to Canada are, in fact, a strong voice that could empower young Canadians?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: That's an interesting question. I think we can all agree that the safety of Canadians is our number one priority. No one in this room, indeed no one in the Parliament of Canada, supports terrorism. We will continue to be committed to that work.

We also heard today in question period from the Minister of Public Safety that over the decade the Conservatives were in power there was a significant cut to Public Safety and the ability to deport those who should not be in the country. Significant investments are being made to ensure that the right approach around restorative justice is taken—

● (1715)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Minister, with all due respect, that didn't answer my question. We certainly did a great deal as a government, and we certainly did not bring ISIS terrorists back into Canada and claim to reintegrate them and use them as a great voice on behalf of young Canadians.

I've had an opportunity to visit refugee camps in northern Iraq and Jordan, which is a part of the world where many of these ISIS terrorists are active, and I've talked with women and girls who have actually faced incredible atrocities at the hands of these men. Many women and girls who were victims of the brutal atrocities that were committed against them now call Canada home. We've welcomed them and provided a place of safety, or at least that would be my intent if I were in government. I'm deeply concerned about how these survivors are coping with the fact that the same country they now call home is serving as a place of refuge for the men who actually brutalized them.

In your opening remarks, you said it was important "to extend the reach of GBA". Minister, my question for you is very simple. Was GBA+ applied to the decision to welcome ISIS fighters back into Canada and to use them as a voice to influence young Canadians from coast to coast? If the analysis was, in fact, done, then my question for you, on behalf of all Canadians, and in particular on behalf of these women and girls who have been brutalized by these men—

Sorry, are you smirking at that, at the fact that I'm speaking out on behalf of these women and girls?

No? Okay, my question is: did the analysis account for the trauma and fear that this decision caused the women and girls who have fled from Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and other countries across the Middle East where these ISIS fighters were active?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Deradicalization is an important effort that our government will continue to be committed to, because safer communities are better for all Canadians. Welcoming those who have escaped oppression and war, like those whom Rachael mentioned, is and has been from the very beginning an important part of our government's efforts. Whether it's been the welcoming and ensuring the settlement of Syrian refugees from places like Jordan and Lebanon or the welcoming of those Yazidi women and girls into our communities, these are all examples of our commitment to ensuring that those who face oppression find a safe home here in Canada. We are also working to reduce the violence that happens internationally.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Maryam, I think it's clear that GBA+ was not utilized. You've made that very clear in your non-answer. Minister, in order to get to the bottom of this, I do believe that further study is required and therefore I am going to move my motion. I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the Government of Canada's decision to welcome ISIS fighters back to Canada, the trauma and stress this decision caused the women and girl refugees from Syria and Iraq who have settled in Canada, and the Gender-based Analysis that was used to support this decision; that the committee study this for four meetings, and that these meetings occur before June 2018; that the Committee report its findings with recommendations to the House; and, that the government provide a response to the recommendations made by the committee.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I'm going to check. That motion was already provided to us previously. Is that correct?

Ms. Rachael Harder: That is correct.

The Chair: The motion now takes precedence over the Qs and As. We're going to debate this motion.

Rachael, you have the floor.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Madam Chair, as members of Parliament and leaders in our country, as champions of women's rights advocating for the most vulnerable among us, including specifically these women and girls who have faced these brutal atrocities at the hands of these men whom this government is welcoming into our country, it is incumbent upon this committee to study this issue and to understand whether or not proper analysis actually was done to ensure that these women and girls are being properly protected and that their needs are taken into account by this government.

I'm done.

• (1720)

The Chair: Okay.

Are there any comments or questions on this?

Go ahead, Sheila.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'm sympathetic to the safety need; however, we've already had our debate as a committee about what we're going to be studying next. The Conservatives chose not to file any suggestions for study by the deadline, and I feel that as a committee we've already made commitments that take us right up to the end of June, and actually into September and October of this year.

I will not be supporting the motion.

The Chair: Okay, Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I would just like to point out that that it's interesting to me, because the deadline Ms. Malcolmson refers to was actually a deadline that was just self-imposed upon this committee. There is no such thing as a deadline.

We are welcome to bring forward motions at any point in time.

The Chair: That is correct.

Ms. Rachael Harder: In fact, that is the purpose of this committee, to find those issues that matter most to Canadian women. If we restrict ourselves to a deadline, then what we're saying is that we're actually more concerned about our needs and our timelines than about the needs of women across this country.

Sorry, but with all due respect, there is no deadline, and I certainly have the freedom, I would hope, anyway, to bring forward a motion and gain the respectful support of this committee. More importantly, this motion is about these women and girls who live in this country and who have found refuge here. I have sat with these women and these girls and listened to their stories. I have seen the scars of conflict on their bodies, and they deserve that this committee look into this and to understand what the repercussions are of bringing these ISIS terrorists back into Canada.

The Chair: As the chair I just want to make a clarification as well. There is not actually a deadline. The deadline that was imposed by the chair was for the fact that in previous sessions, we've had up to 30 motions, and we're just trying to be most efficient in recognizing that there needed to be a third study.

That is why this deadline is actually an asterisk, because it's called the "Karen Vecchio deadline". It's not something that's real, and that was for...

Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): In terms of the next study that we're doing, we did make a decision to do that. In terms of the returning ISIS fighters, that has been going on long before we came to office and—

Ms. Rachael Harder: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have the floor right now. Thank you, Ms. Harder.

It was happening under previous governments. I certainly don't see any urgency to be studying this. I think what we're doing right now as the status of women committee is important. I also think we have to be mindful of the time here, Chair.

The Chair: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I would like to correct the record since this meeting is being televised and Ms. Damoff just said that the previous government started this initiative. That's certainly not the case, and I welcome the Canadian public to look into that.

In fact, we took a direct stance against terrorism and would never have sign off on allowing ISIS terrorists back into this country and to somehow reintegrating them, and, according to the Prime Minister, use them as an effective voice on behalf of young Canadians to help this country. To suggest something like that is absolutely horrendous.

At the end of the day I'm not interested in engaging in petty remarks with you. I am interested, however, in studying the implications of this decision by the Liberal government and how drastically it will impact the lives of these women with the trauma and fear they have already undergone.

The Chair: Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Just quickly, as a member of the public safety committee and as a proud member of this government and the very strong stand we've taken against terrorism, I just want to make sure that this is on the record as well. That's all I have to say.

The Chair: With no further comment, I see that Ms. Jordan has recommended it's a good idea to vote.

Is this just a regular vote?

Ms. Rachael Harder: I would prefer a recorded vote.

The Chair: We will have a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 2 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm looking at the time.

Minister Monsef, thank you very much for your time today. I recognize that Pam had some more questions, but maybe you can have a tête-à-tête afterwards. Thank you very much for coming.

Thank you to Ms. Lapointe and Ms. Wilson for joining us as well.

The next meeting will be Thursday at 3:30.

The meeting is adjourned.

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