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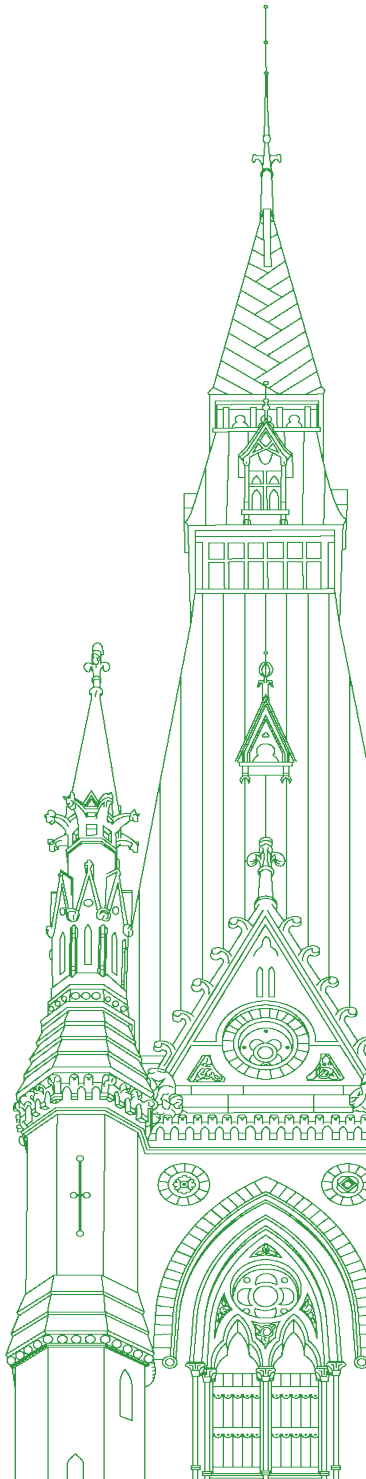

Chair: Ms. Marilyn Gladu

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thursday, April 8, 2021

● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 24 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

Today our committee is resuming its study on sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces.

For the benefit of the witnesses, when you're ready to speak, you can click on your microphone icon to activate you mike. Comments should be addressed through the chair.

Interpretation in this video conference is very much like it is in regular committee meetings. There is a button at the bottom that lets you choose English or French. When you're speaking, please speak slowly and clearly for our interpreters, and when you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I would like to welcome our witnesses, who will each have five minutes for their opening remarks. Today we have Ms. Julie Lalonde and, from It's Just 700, Ms. Christine Wood.

Ms. Lalonde, I will ask you to begin. You have five minutes.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde (As an Individual): Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the invitation to speak today.

I'm pleased that the committee decided to take some time to hear from experts in various fields, including me.

My name is Julie S. Lalonde. I've been working for almost 20 years to end violence against women in Canada. Each year, I provide training to thousands of people. I've worked in five countries, on three continents and in two languages.

[*English*]

Although I am the daughter of a former CAF member, my expertise in system change, violence prevention and bystander intervention is what dragged me into this conversation. I had a now-infamous day of training all officer cadets at the Royal Military College in Kingston in the fall of 2014. The anti-harassment educator got harassed at RMC, was the headline across the country. What was unfortunately missed is that I filed a complaint with RMC for reasons that go beyond the harassment I personally experienced. I was, and remain, deeply troubled by the comments cadets made with regard to sexual violence. Victim-blaming was rampant and the cadets insisted that women who drink too much are asking to be raped, except for one Navy cadet. He showed immense courage, and courage is what I would like to focus on for my comments today.

I was invited to train all officer cadets grouped by year on a rainy October day in 2014. The first and second years were unruly but manageable. The third-year group was by far the worst audience I have ever dealt with. Yes, they did accuse me of hating all men, laughed at the definition of consent, and took every opportunity they could to shift the blame from perpetrators to victims. During a particularly tense moment, I frankly lost the room. They were furious with my focus on bystanders and began yelling over each other and heckling me.

In a sea of largely green uniforms a man in a Navy uniform shot his hand up. He was sitting amongst the most boisterous group, so to be honest, I called on him with hesitation. To my surprise, and the surprise of everyone else in the room, he stood up for me. He began to berate his classmates for attacking me, told them they were being babies for being so upset, and went so far as to say that the way we talk about women at RMC is embarrassing.

The room was stunned into silence. I think of this man often. In the days and months that followed my day at RMC, cadets and CAF members took to social media and traditional media to praise the cadets for being brave enough to challenge the educator. Hundreds of men derailing a conversation on sexual violence prevention to call the female facilitator a man-hater is not brave. Being the sole voice in a room of 200 people willing to take a stand in support of progress is bravery of the highest level.

That is what we need from you now. You will not eradicate sexual violence, misogyny and other forms of oppression within the military, such as racism, transphobia and homophobia, unless you are willing to be brave. Are CAF members uncomfortable with terms like rape culture, toxic masculinity and survivor-centred? Absolutely, we've seen that, but you cannot change something that you won't even name.

I want to end by reminding you that I am calling on you to do something that I am doing myself. I am not asking you to do something that I am not personally willing to do myself. Since I came forward about my experience a few years ago, I have received thousands of threatening emails, social media messages and even phone calls. I have been accosted at in-person events and I can no longer speak in public on any topic without a security detail.

I have paid dearly for my courage, and so it is very disheartening to see those of you with immense power shying away from the hard work that's necessary to make change. Sexual violence has existed within the Canadian Armed Forces for decades.

The blame does not lie with one individual, one leader or even one political party. Please keep your eyes on the prize and choose bravery when having this conversation.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

Thank you for giving me time to speak this morning. I look forward to continuing the discussion with you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Now we will go to Ms. Wood, for five minutes.

Ms. Christine Wood (Chief, Strategic Engagement, It's Just 700): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is an honour to be here, and it's an honour to represent the group It's Just 700.

Five weeks ago, unexpectedly, the founder of our group, Marie-Claude Gagnon, who most people know as “MC”, stepped down. She stepped away from It's Just 700.

After six years of advocacy at the highest levels of government, she has reached a point where the cost of giving insight, voice and access to hundreds of men and women is too great a price to pay alone, so something simple but important to remember as we engage today is that this is hard stuff. This is ugly stuff. Sexual assault isn't talked about lightly. It's an ugly side of human nature.

At this point, I really believe that sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces is a national embarrassment. Our collective Canadian conscience has been hit hard by the recent high-profile allegations of inappropriate sexual behaviour by our most senior leaders. It is outrageous that two chiefs of defence have faced allegations within weeks of each other, but it's even more outrageous to accept that every year on average 1,600 people report a sexual assault within the CAF. This isn't friendly fire. It's not an accident or an honest mistake. It's rape, and it's abuse of authority.

I can tell you things that you have heard before.

Victims need supports. There are more and more coming forward and there is still no safety net there to catch them. These individuals are not coming forward to report a simple discrepancy that they saw in paperwork. They are coming forward with their experiences of terror, debilitating anxiety and shredded self-confidence. They are broken. It is simply unethical to continue to ask them to come forward without having a plan in place to support them.

To be clear, we are asking for the same supports that we were asking for four years ago: a national platform for online peer support, group therapy, outpatient therapy and in-patient psychiatric care when necessary that is MST-specific in its focus. It needs to be trauma informed and needs to be able to address the moral injury of betrayal by your brothers and sisters in uniform.

The “nature, duration and severity” of our injuries is something that every affected individual is struggling to explain right now. That's the terminology used in the settlement forms for the class action lawsuit: the nature, the duration and the severity. So many people are struggling to find the words. It's not easy, and neither are the next steps forward. Up front, I need to say again that we need care. It has to be targeted. Post-traumatic stress disorder is chronic, and it can be deadly. It doesn't matter where the trauma came from. The end result is what it is.

Sexual trauma is not necessarily worse or easier than combat trauma. It's just different. I'm sure you're aware of the following: that one in five victims is a man; that military life is exceptional but places exceptional roadblocks in accessing care; and that we frequently are posted and moving or on long-term training courses and, most often, are away from our extended family.

● (1110)

It's unfortunate that we are still trying to get an agreed-upon definition of military sexual trauma, MST, as now it is an American term. If we in Canada can develop our understanding in black and white of military sexual trauma, we can have greater research, data and access, and provide targeted treatment.

The Chair: I'm sorry, that's your time. It was wonderful.

I'm sure we'll capture the rest in the questions.

Ms. Christine Wood: Thank you.

The Chair: We're now going into our first round of questions.

We'll begin with Ms. Sahota for six minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here and sharing your experiences.

Christine, you represent an organization, It's Just 700, that helps individuals who have been victims of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces. You yourself have also been a victim.

How did you go about reporting your assault and has it generally been the same for other victims as well?

● (1115)

Ms. Christine Wood: I reported my assault the day after I found out it was an assault. My drink was spiked at the officer's mess. I didn't think it had happened, but I made a mistake somehow. When the bloodwork came back, I knew.

I was advised to wait and consider whether it was a good idea to report or not because those who report face reprisals. It follows them around their career as they get posted. I waited 24 hours and I really thought about that and in the end I decided I had to; it was just too wrong.

The reporting process itself was terrifying. It was me in a room with men for about two or three hours. I was videotaped. I felt like a suspect. It was a traumatic process for sure, and I was very dissatisfied. I'll say that up front; I was very dissatisfied with how the investigation went, how it was conducted, how supported I was and how not supported I was.

I'm happy to speak to more of that but that's generally my experience.

It's maybe fifty-fifty within the group, It's Just 700. Some people report and some, don't but most people are dissatisfied with the response and the process that happens after.

Ms. Jag Sahota: You spoke about your experience and what others feel like.

What, if any changes, would you like to see implemented in the complaint process to ensure that those who come forward are treated appropriately and that the complaint process is given its due diligence?

Ms. Christine Wood: I've heard a lot of talk about an independent, external oversight committee and I fully support that idea. I believe if there is an independent place separate from the CAF where individuals can report an assault, it can be investigated, it can be tracked and a victim can have an advocate throughout the whole process, that would help immensely.

Ms. Jag Sahota: You also spoke about how you felt while you were going through the reporting process.

How do other individuals feel during that process?

Do people think there is a desire to investigate or was the culture unwelcoming and cold?

Ms. Christine Wood: I believe they took it seriously. There was a genuine interest in pursuing this.

Unfortunately, I know many people who reported within their chain of command and the complaint was not acted on. I think it is very important to make sure that this process happens outside the chain of command. It can't be influenced by the military unit where this is happening.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Recently it's been reported by the acting chief of the defence staff that Operation Honour has been a failure and was shutting down and would take the good and build something new from it. Do you believe there is anything that was good about Operation Honour and is there anything worth building from it?

Ms. Christine Wood: The greatest thing about Operation Honour is that it acknowledged that there was a problem and it brought the conversation out into the public, but it failed to define the issue. It was done in a way that did not address the deep cultural issues at play here. Sexualized culture is a real thing; an order is not going to change that. I'm happy to see that the duty to report is being replaced by a duty to respond. That's crucial and I'm willing to talk about that more, if you would like.

● (1120)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to go now to Ms. Hutchings for six minutes.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you both for being here today for your bravery, for your perseverance, and for your amnesty in getting this resolved and moving forward. This committee has such an opportunity to really put politics aside and really bring recommendations directly to the government about how to rebuild trust and how to rebuild long-term change in the current culture at CAF. The study needs to be about all members of the Canadian Armed Forces and ensure that each and every member is working in a safe and respectful work environment. The ministers stated that all options are on the table.

Based on your expertise and following the line of the questioning of my colleague, Ms. Lalonde, what are your recommendations to ensure that a real significant change in the military culture happens?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: First of all you have to build off what Christine said. You have to name the problem. Right away, you have to acknowledge that this is a systemic issue. We need to move away from this “one bad apple, oh it's this CDS, oh no it's this CDS”. Clearly it's a systemic issue.

First, there needs to be acknowledgement. Acknowledge that you're talking about sexual violence. I think we should even question language like “sexual misconduct”. Sexual misconduct is not a term that is used outside. It's a bureaucratic term and in the military context it conflates someone having a consensual affair with sexual violence, which are two very different things. The term “sexual misconduct” doesn't raise hackles in the same way within the military because it can mean so many different things. We need to have a narrow definition.

We need long-term funding commitments. Yes we can have a review every five years, as was supposed to be the case with Operation Honour, for example, but we need long-term funding commitments to ensure that things like equipment women need is not taken from the main budget of that particular group, as then there's resentment built because women are costing more to integrate, for example.

We need systemic and long-term funding for prevention strategies. Sexual violence can be prevented. This is not a revelation. That is a fact: we can prevent the vast majority of sexual violence. If we don't have that attitude, we're only going to fund ensuring the survivors get the counselling they need, which is important, but it's not prevention work.

The military needs to listen to outsiders. The military is a notoriously insular environment. The assumption is, “we are special, we are different, no one really understands us”, but the expertise does not sit within CAF. They have shown that they are incapable on their own of solving this problem, so there needs to be a mechanism to have external input informing every decision that's made.

I would say the last thing that you always need is buy-in from the senior folks. This is a hierarchical organization and there is clearly no understanding of power dynamics within the military, which is mind-boggling to the average Canadian. You work in a hierarchy; there needs to be recognition of that piece.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Thank you so much for that.

Ms. Wood, in your remarks you made reference to the fact that 20% of your members are men. Can you speak to this, and any recommendations you have to ensure that our survivor-focused approach really engages and empowers men as both allies and survivors?

Ms. Christine Wood: Yes. Thank you for that question, because it is an important thing to acknowledge.

It's difficult for women to come forward. It is way more difficult for men to come forward. The stigma and the shame are multiplied by a thousand for them.

We talk about this masculine warrior ideal. Men who have been raped by their fellow soldiers are deeply embarrassed, and they end up deeply affected by it. They suffer even more in silence than women do.

I think there needs to be a very public acknowledgement that this is not just a woman's issue. It's a human issue, and it is a systemic issue.

Going forward, men need to be a part of the conversation. They need to be sought out and engaged.

I can't speak to every one of their needs, but I know that many of them ask for what we ask for. We need supports. We need care. We need continuity with care.

● (1125)

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Quickly—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Your time is up.

Ms. Larouche, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Lalonde and Ms. Wood, your presentations were truly poignant. I applaud your courage and all your work to change this culture. You used phrases such as “toxic masculinity” and you spoke about a dangerous culture in the military.

You both spoke at length about the trauma suffered by the victims.

In the early 2000s, when I was a journalism student, I had the opportunity to speak with the ombudsman for the Canadian military. I had read in a newspaper that the Canadian Armed Forces were interested in the psychological health of their soldiers. Several other articles on this topic were then published in different newspapers. Since the turn of the millennium, we've been talking about post-traumatic stress disorder, a topic that used to be taboo.

The focus has been on post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by soldiers who have gone to war. However, we may have underestimated the extent of post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by victims of sexual assault in the Canadian Armed Forces. As both of you clearly stated, it's difficult for victims of sexual assault to report their attackers, especially when the victims are experiencing post-traumatic stress.

[*English*]

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Christine, do you want to answer that?

Ms. Christine Wood: Why don't you start?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: The first thing to recognize is that the trauma experienced by military members isn't just related to serving in a war, even though we often hear that. Even in my field of work, which involves combatting violence against women, when someone says that they've experienced post-traumatic stress, the assumption is always that the stress relates to their role as a soldier.

I completely agree that the Canadian military must start recognizing the continuum of trauma that its members may experience. These types of trauma shouldn't be organized into a hierarchy. Just because you've been to Afghanistan doesn't mean that your trauma is any worse than the trauma of someone who was assaulted by a colleague. This really needs to be acknowledged and said out loud. It's important to insist on an end to this hierarchy of trauma and to recognize that trauma runs along a continuum. That way, people would have a very different attitude and victims would feel more comfortable reporting their attackers.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Wood, do you have anything to add?

[*English*]

Ms. Christine Wood: I would, thank you.

There is no hierarchy to trauma. There is no hierarchy to PTSD. Military sexual trauma—if we can all accept that we're using that term today—is not recognized automatically by everyone as an operational stress injury. When it is categorized as that, additional supports, programs and therapies can be accessed, but because we've been excluded from that definition, we have suffered. There have been consequences.

I appreciate the comment that it is courageous for us to be here, but it's not. I argue that it's just a moral imperative that someone is bringing this up, that someone is continuing to try to hold the government accountable for this.

I say this acknowledging that the people I know who have fought the hardest for so many years are burning out. They are at the edge. I have a dear friend who is writing emails to herself right now to remind herself of all the reasons that she should not commit suicide. The burnout and the pain are palpable, and it should not be up to us to keep sending the same message year after year. We've engaged in many meaningful consultations.

I appreciate the vote of confidence, but it really is not courage. It just has to be.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Of course, you have to do it.

In conclusion, post-traumatic stress disorder shouldn't be organized into a hierarchy. We should acknowledge that a person can be affected by the disorder without having served abroad. For example, it can also happen to victims of sexual assault in the Canadian Armed Forces. If we acknowledge that soldiers who have gone abroad can be affected, we must also acknowledge that the same is true for victims of sexual assault, whether they're men or women. That's my understanding.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Absolutely.

I can tell you that the highest rate of post-traumatic stress disorder worldwide is among victims of rape and sexual violence. The second-highest rate is in the military. We urgently need to take this seriously.

Trauma shouldn't be organized into a hierarchy. When their trauma isn't considered equivalent to the trauma caused by war, victims of sexual violence don't receive the support that they deserve. That's unacceptable.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I want to thank you both for doing your duty.

[*English*]

The Chair: Now we'll go to Ms. Mathyssen for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

I find it difficult to start and try to collect my thoughts on where we need to go. As I've often heard from individuals, the idea that you don't talk about it is so overwhelming. We should try to provide them with the idea that this time we will truly create, as we go forward, an independent external mechanism that can investigate criminal activity and isn't linked to the chain of command. What has stopped victims and survivors from coming forward in the past is the need for protection and the need for supports around them. We should create them going forward.

We've studied this a number of times. Deschamps studied it, of course. This committee studied it in 2019.

Ms. Wood, in testimony at this committee in 2019, your predecessor, M.C., talked about government-funded programs for those who are injured. She said they had a strong male-dominated focus and focused on those types of injuries. She noted there wasn't a GBA+ lens applied to the programs that currently exist.

Is that still the case, in your expertise, from what you see?

Ms. Christine Wood: For the most part, yes, it is still the same. I feel like women have never had a level playing field in the forces; we were mandated to be included. There was never the funding or the supports or the structures, the infrastructure, that were needed.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: In other words, then, that still is experienced because of that mandate?

Ms. Christine Wood: Yes. It's part of what contributes to the situation now.

In terms of supports, I think, yes, most supports that are generally offered to sexual assault survivors are within these organizations that were designed to treat men and to treat their trauma. For example, at the OSI clinic I've been offered a seat in a group therapy session. They're all men, and they're all there with combat trauma. And I don't even know who raped me, so there's no way I'm going into that room. That's a personal example, but it's across the board.

It's still, I think, at that point where we talk about GBA+. It doesn't start with GBA+. Everyone kind of checks it as a box at the end of their design. I'd like to see something that is from the ground up, built victim-centric and able to address women's needs but also those of male survivors. It's important. They are suffering in even more silence than we are.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: In terms of what your organization has seen, on Tuesday the Minister of Defence came before the defence committee and said the government has been working hard to respond to that Deschamps report, putting in measures focused on understanding the issue and preventing harm. Yet, when we heard directly from Madam Deschamps and other organizations, that's not what we're heard.

The Deschamps report, ultimately, laid it out, right? It talked about that independence, that extra review process. Has there been progress in that at all? Can you provide this committee with specific examples of where it hasn't happened or where it needs to go?

● (1135)

Ms. Christine Wood: I think there has been some progress, but I also agree that all the recommendations by Madam Deschamps have not been followed. The SMRC is a skeleton of what she envisioned it would be. Specifically, I would like to see the SMRC's mandate expanded to act as that external oversight, that external place to report. As I said, I'd like to see an actual working definition. There are so many of the basics that we're missing at this point. From the point of view of my organization, there's been some progress, but not enough.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: For both witnesses, that education piece is the fundamental start.

Ms. Lalonde, you talked about prevention, and that's where that education starts.

I've been told that, yes, there's a seminar that's held maybe once a year. That isn't enough. What would you suggest that this committee put forward to the government in terms of the structure you see for that educational reform?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: We need survivor-directed, survivor-informed bystander intervention mechanisms. I say that because when Operation Honour happened, and the military decided to do something, they did not have bystander training from a survivor-directed perspective. So what they saw was a massive increase in third party reporting, but a decrease in people actually wanting to go through with the court martial process because the bystanders did not report with the victims' permission. We need robust bystander intervention training that takes survivors into account.

The second thing I would say is that all of the research shows that if there's no booster of bystander intervention training within six to eight months of the initial training, people lose the confidence to use those skills. They don't lose the skills, but they lose the confidence that bystander training tells them: yes, it's scary, but do it anyway. We need often and early bystander training that really looks at it through a fulsome lens.

The Chair: Good.

Now we're going to go to Ms. Alleslev, for five minutes, in our second round.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you so very much to both of you.

I know you made a comment that it doesn't take courage because it's what needs to be done. The very fact that you say that shows how great the courage you have is. If people are not willing to do the things that are hard, knowing that they're going to have that personal cost, we can't make any progress, but you have done them anyway, so I sincerely want to thank you and Ms. Lalonde in particular.

I went to military college a long time ago in a place far away, and that is where the majority of Canadian Forces officers are trained. They have a separate culture. They have a separate rule system. They have a separate justice system, and yet it's so powerful that it carries, obviously, and sets the norms, attitudes and behaviours for the next 30 years.

General Vance, as CDS, attended military college, and if we believe what we've heard in the media, there were things that occurred at military college that may have formed his future culture as well.

What do we need to do, in addition to the other recommendations that you've made, at RMC or the military colleges to ensure that comprehensive training—including, as you said, even a booster for bystanders—of future officers in that captive 24-7 four years? What would you recommend, having been there and seen how powerful that environment is?

● (1140)

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: First of all, I want to reiterate what I said from the start, which was that the third years were the worst group, which means those are people who have been there for three years. If the first years were unruly, you could argue that we pulled from a bad pool. Third year means they've been indoctrinated to believe this is appropriate behaviour.

The other thing that's important is that when I was there to present, I found out later, there were a number of students who got in trouble for crossing campus without having their uniform in proper order, so people are being punished for not wearing the proper belt when crossing campus, but not punished for yelling and catcalling at the anti-harassment officer.

An attitudinal shift needs to happen, and rather than being a simple policy, it unfortunately needs to involve a combination of different things. There's no silver bullet to solve what happened at RMC that day. There certainly needs to be an attitudinal shift. RMC students fundamentally believe they are above those who come up through the ranks via taking basic training and joining the reserves, for example. There is an elitism within RMC that needs to be put in check in a big way.

Second, we're talking about sexual violence, which is important, but we're not going to solve sexual violence in the military unless we also look at it through an intersectional lens. RMC is a very "white" institution. It is very male-dominated, but it's also very "white", so again there are power dynamics at play that are just not being called out.

My belief is that if you can punish people for not wearing their uniform properly, you can absolutely mandate that they take training every six months, and you can absolutely mandate that it's done effectively. What we know is that having male and female co-facilitation is the most effective way to reach those audiences. We have the answers but, at the macro level, RMC's problem is that it thinks it is special. It thinks it is better than everyone else and so it feels as though it is removed from the conversations happening within the broader CAF, and that absolutely needs to be called out and put a stop to.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: And 30 years later, they are the primary senior officers, the vice-admirals and the admirals and the chiefs of the defence staff.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Yes, it's a feeder school essentially. So if you're a third-year student who can say to my face that you didn't listen to me because I'm a woman and a civilian, and I know that 18 months later you are going to be leading troops, I'm concerned, and we should all be concerned. It wasn't just about me.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: And 30 years later he could be a four-star general—

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Absolutely.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: —and that attitude has remained. Exactly.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Absolutely.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: So when offences like, as you said, not wearing a belt, crossing a parade square not around the edges, not having the right books at a lecture are considered serious, but sexual misconduct, assault, or even just behaviour is not viewed the same way, would you—

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's your time.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I'm sorry, Chair.

The Chair: We're going to go to Ms. Hutchings and Ms. Sidhu, who will be splitting their time.

We will start with Ms. Hutchings.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Quickly for you, Christine, I know you didn't get to complete all your suggestions in your opening remarks, so in a minute, can you just finish off your opening remarks? Then I will pass it over to my colleague.

Ms. Christine Wood: Thank you.

There are definitely specific asks. I can explain why it's so important to have an online platform for peer support. Group therapy, outpatient treatment and inpatient treatment.... There is a model of inpatient treatment in the United States. USVA has an inpatient program to address soldiers with MST-based trauma.

This bears back to what Julie was just saying. I think one of the most important things that need to be re-examined at this point is the ethics and the professionalism we expect our leaders to have. I think that's part of the core problem. I think we need to revisit what we are taking an oath for. What does it mean? How do we hold ourselves accountable? Also, how do we hold our leaders accountable for anything?

I would like to see a justice system that holds senior leaders accountable. A CDS cannot be tried, so the system itself is broken. There are many different things, as Julie said, that can be done to address it.

The Chair: Ms. Sidhu.

● (1145)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank both of our panellists for coming forward to share their testimonies. We want you to know that the work you do with survivors will help us to end the culture of silence and bring an end to assault in the armed forces. Your testimony matters to us.

If you feel you are not able to complete your testimony due to time constraints, please submit a written testimony to us.

My first question is to Ms. Lalonde.

Can you discuss why it is crucial for the survivor experience to inform the solution in the path forward?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Absolutely. I'm going to go back to the piece around third party reporting, because I think that's a really good, concrete example.

When Operation Honour happened, when there was an emphasis on our having to eradicate this behaviour, it was still framed as this: We have to get rid of the couple of bad apples. I feel like that attitude still hasn't changed, but the belief was report, report, report everything you see, but because it was framed from a legal perspective and not, as Christine said, from an ethical perspective, you had bystanders who were just reporting things right away to, frankly, just cover their own backs should it ever become public.

That's what happens when you don't have survivors informing the policy, because the survivor-directed approach would say what's best for the person who has been harmed in this moment. This isn't about checking off a box. This is about making sure that the person is empowered to make a decision.

Maybe that person doesn't want to report because they just want to confront the perpetrator and have a conversation with them directly, but you removed their ability to do that.

The last thing I would say is I really think it's important for us to address the fact that we have a woman who has come forward right now because she was outed by someone who leaked her story to the CBC. Whether they leaked it for partisan reasons or they leaked it because they thought they were doing the right thing, that victim was not helped. I think she has been very generous in saying that her accuser was also deprived of a fair trial because it was leaked to the media.

I think that's a clear example of survivors owning their stories, and nobody should be able to take them away from them.

Ms. Christine Wood: Yes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

Ms. Christine Wood: Could I jump in very quickly and add to that?

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Sure.

Ms. Christine Wood: A good friend of mine through the group I know was in a remote location when she was assaulted, and she did not want to report at that time because there were no supports around her. Someone reported on her behalf, and it was catastrophic for her career. She has released since.

Consent is the very most basic component of all of this. We were denied consent when we were assaulted. We should consent. We should have the ability to consent to what happens after.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Recently, Lieutenant-General Eyre announced that, in addressing sexual misconduct cases, there will be a change from duty to report to duty to respond.

Ms. Wood, can you expand on this distinction and why this has been received as a positive step?

Ms. Christine Wood: Yes. The distinction is that other members who may have witnessed an assault or inappropriate behaviour are no longer compelled to come forward and report it. A victim can choose to report and start a process when it is suitable for them, for their family and for their career. It is an important step that gives agency and choice back to the individual.

I'm sorry. I forget the second part of your question, ma'am.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: How can we include a trauma-informed lens in this study? What recommendation do you have for us as a committee as we run with not only the systemic impacts of this issue, but also the effects it has on individual survivors?

Ms. Christine Wood: If I'm understanding you correctly, you are asking if this new system is developed for independent reporting. It gives victims choices. It ensures their privacy and their confidence. It's a deeply personal issue so it needs to be treated as such.

The Chair: That's very good.

Now we have Madame Larouche for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Lalonde and Ms. Wood, your comments are very informative. I'm taking many notes.

You both said that people in authority and senior officers must set an example at all times. As you explained very well, Ms. Lalonde, you sometimes train soldiers who don't fully understand the issue and who don't know how they can set an example. However, it would be even more difficult to explain it to them 30 years later, when they're higher up in the hierarchy.

Do you think that senior officers who engage in deviant behaviour should face appropriate consequences in keeping with their positions?

I'd like to ask either witness to comment on this.

● (1150)

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I'll let Ms. Wood give you a more specific answer to your question.

I personally feel that the importance of this training must be emphasized. In the four sessions that I led, none of the senior officers stayed in the room. So, from the beginning, they didn't send the message that the training was important and that it had to be taken seriously. If the senior officers were to take the time to attend this type of training, it would send the right message.

Training must be provided to the members from the beginning. However, it's also important to keep in mind that the senior officers need training as well. They create the policies and lead the discussion on sexual violence. If they aren't trained in this area, they can't provide the right information.

I know that this is a fairly controversial topic that people don't like to discuss. However, the military environment and culture must be changed. Otherwise, the members who maintain the existing culture will only keep coming up through the ranks. To be successful in the Canadian military, you must believe in your culture. Currently, the culture in the military is toxic. If opportunities for promotion are given to military members who believe in that culture, it speaks volumes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Wood, can you take a few seconds to answer my question?

[*English*]

Ms. Christine Wood: Yes, I double down on what Ms. Lalonde said. The leaders need to lead by example. One of the challenges to that is that five generations are serving in the CAF right now. Upper leadership feels clueless in some ways. I was in a meeting with General Vance two and half years ago and he looked me in the eye and said it was the first time in his career that he honestly didn't know what to do. Since then my opinion of everything has changed, but they need to be trained just as much as the folks coming in. It's top down and bottom up.

The Chair: That's very good.

Now we'll go to Ms. Mathyssen for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: We continue the conversation about that education, that piece, the fact that it needs to happen at least every six months for reinforcement; that it has to be continual throughout an entire career not just to be reinforced, but for those at the top to know what they have to do and their responsibility. I wanted to talk to you about the need for those greater resources—of course education—to put it into the supports the survivors need: the counselling, the programs. We talked a lot about what happened within the Canadian Armed Forces. I would like to shift and see if you have examples that you would like to recommend for Veterans Affairs Canada. Obviously there's a continuation there in programming and what's required. Could you put in your expertise on that and requirements for that as well?

Ms. Christine Wood: I could jump in on that.

The very first thing I'd like to say is that there needs to be greater co-operation between CAF and VAC, especially in that time of transition for a member. Also, in terms of the SMRC and their mandate, one of the expansions I would like to see is that they would expand to cover veteran survivors of MST.

I would also say that there needs to be a massive amount of research done into the fallout from sexual trauma in service, whether it's psychological, physical or spiritual. There are a lot of different aspects to the injury. There are a lot of consequential conditions that are not necessarily recognized by VAC yet.

Just to give you a quick example about me, since being diagnosed with PTSD, I've gotten an autoimmune disease. I've gotten fibromyalgia. I have chronic migraines. The list goes on from there. It's had a total physical effect on my body. That's something that I have had to fight to get VAC to recognize and to properly compensate me for.

I'll stop there. This is all happening really quickly. I'm not used to this kind of quick back-and-forth. I'm sorry if I'm taking too much time.

● (1155)

The Chair: No. You're doing very well.

I think we have enough time for one question each.

We'll go to Ms. Wong for one question and then to the Liberals.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Without spending too much time, I want to ask both witnesses to follow up on what my colleague Leona just said about the culture and the years. You mentioned about five generations. I just wanted both of you to comment. You have the last word.

Ms. Christine Wood: If I were to speak about culture change, the number one thing is truly levelling the playing field at this point, so that women have the same ground to stand on as men. This means money for women's health care. This means money for MST research. It means providing education programs for healing, for mentoring and for leadership.

I think we need a national day of recognition for women in uniform. I think we need to celebrate and acknowledge the women who have made CAF more accessible for other women. I would like to see an emphasis on women being as good as they can be, not on women being as good as men. We are different, and we do bring different skills to the table.

A lot of women who are at the top, who have succeeded in this culture, have put their heads down and ignored what was happening in order to persevere. To be honest, while I admire them, they are part of the problem. The silence around this issue.... The majority of people are silent, and it takes the actions of a few and the silence of the majority to create this point where we're at right now.

There are a lot of things to do to change a culture. There's no easy answer here, but I believe the very first step is levelling the playing field for all members.

Hon. Alice Wong: What about you, Julie? Are there any additions from you?

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: Yes. I would reiterate what Christine said in terms of collaboration between VAC and CAF. I would also say that WAGE needs to be leading a lot of these conversations. We need an important GBA+ analysis, and they are the folks who created that analysis. They need to be included in these conversations.

Lastly, this is truly an intersectional conversation. As Christine has said, for adult men in this country—not children, but adult men—the highest rates of sexual assault are if they are incarcerated or if they join the military. We need to look at this from an intersectional lens.

I would also say an intersectional lens includes the fact that there's a significant amount of racism in the military. The Proud Boys were recently designated a terrorist organization. There were proud members of those groups who were also proud CAF members.

You can't talk about power unless you talk about all the ways in which power manifests itself in the military, and that includes racism and homophobia. A huge reason men don't come forward, as Christine said, is shame: shame that's directly tied to the homophobia within the CAF.

You have to look at intersectionality, and that means having all the players at the table: VAC, CAF and WAGE.

The Chair: Very good.

Now the last question is for the Liberals. Is it Ms. Vandenbeld?

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Yes, thank you very much. I do want to say how much we appreciate our witnesses, Ms. Wood and Ms. Lalonde, for being very articulate today in expressing what needs to be done. That is incredibly valuable for the committee and for the government.

When we use the term “sexual misconduct”, it refers to everything from an off-colour joke to an inappropriate relationship to outright rape. All of those things create culture, whether it's at the level of a joke or remark, or things that are just sort of laughed off and overlooked. To what extent do we need to do to respond at every single level to creating that culture?

Perhaps I could have Ms. Lalonde, and then Ms. Wood, if she wants to respond to that for a moment.

Ms. Julie S. Lalonde: I'm an expert on bystander intervention, and what I hear from bystanders all the time is, “I didn't say anything because it was just a comment. If he had touched her, I would have said something, but it was just a comment. It was just a joke. Oh, you know how he is. He's old school,” and so on.

I think it is vitally important that the very philosophy of the path, which is what we're currently calling this discussion, explain that sexual violence exists on a continuum and that comments are directly related to abuses of power and directly related to gang sexual violence, which is happening.

This idea that we have to focus on the serious forms of violence—you cannot just focus on those without pulling back and doing that macro piece. We need to equip bystanders and to say that maybe an intervention for a comment doesn't look the same as it would for someone being cornered, but it's still an intervention that's necessary.

● (1200)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Ms. Wood.

Ms. Christine Wood: I would agree one hundred percent. I think it starts as very tiny microaggressions, and each little instance chips away at a person's self-confidence and their sense of belonging.

If I could take just one moment, I would like to address the issue of peer support because it's so fundamental to our asks. I would like to make sure it's on record.

We need this space, this online platform. It needs to be online because we are mostly women who are at home with different commitments within our families. We often are unable to drive. An online platform is the safest, easiest way for the government to provide a minimum standard of care and access to everyone. However, that space needs to be kept as safe as the person who was raped yesterday needs it to be today. It has to be moderated by professionals, not by people who have been trained in peer support and are volunteering. We are asking for actual funding to guarantee that the site is moderated by professionals and that the conversations are kept as safe as the newest person joining needs them to be.

The Chair: Excellent.

Thank you so much to our witnesses for the amazing testimony today.

We're going to suspend now momentarily while we do the sound checks for our next panel.

● (1200)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1205)

The Chair: We'll begin.

We are very pleased today to have with us Stéphanie Raymond as our witness.

We look forward to your comments. You'll have five minutes for opening comments and then we'll go into our questions. You may begin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond (As an Individual): Good morning. My name is Stéphanie Raymond. I was a member of the Canadian Armed Forces from 2001 to 2013.

During my military career, I experienced more than one incident of sexual misconduct, including assaults. The last assault occurred in December 2011. I filed a complaint with the military police in January 2012. In the 10 years since then, there has been a back and forth between the appeal courts and the Supreme Court; investigations have been opened and then closed; I've filed complaints with the Canadian Forces provost marshal and with the military police; and the list goes on. As you know, in January 2020, I was finally able to have my case heard in criminal court. In March 2021, my attacker pleaded guilty. As you can see, these processing times aren't exactly normal.

That's it.

I'm sorry. I didn't use the full five minutes provided.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's no problem.

We will start with our first round of questions.

Ms. Sahota, you have six minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Raymond, for being here and sharing your experience.

Your courageous step led to the creation of Operation Honour, but now, after several more high-profile reports, the acting chief of the defence staff has reported that Operation Honour has been a failure and is shutting down and would take the good and build something new from it.

Do you believe anything was good about Operation Honour, and is there anything worth building on?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: I can't answer this question perfectly. I haven't been a member of the Canadian Armed Forces since 2013.

I believe that Operation Honour has had some positive effects. However, it isn't aimed at the right target. It addresses the symptoms rather than the source of the issue.

[*English*]

Ms. Jag Sahota: Under the previous Conservative government, we acknowledged that our Canadian Armed Forces had a cultural issue towards women in the military, and had former Supreme Court Justice Deschamps do an external review. Her report was released in 2015. It places a heavy emphasis on the need for an external, independent body to oversee and investigate allegations of sexual misconduct. Given the recent revelations that include the chief of the defence staff, his replacement and the head of HR being under investigation for sexual misconduct, what are your thoughts on the creation of this independent body?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: The establishment of an independent body is key.

Throughout the assault proceedings that I undertook while in the military, I noticed the level of influence of the chain of command and the significant lack of confidentiality. I also noticed that victims faced retaliation as soon as they reported a member who was even the slightest bit liked or higher up in the ranks. Senior officers are more protected than soldiers and new recruits. There's no comparison.

Organizational culture issues and criminal acts must be considered separately. Sexual assaults are criminal acts that must be treated differently than sexual misconduct, which includes a number of behaviours.

Even though sexual assault is a criminal act, it isn't treated as such. Military members who commit sexual assault aren't tried under the same laws as other Canadians who commit sexual assault. In the military justice system, the rights of both the victims and the accused are different from the rights in the criminal justice system.

● (1210)

[*English*]

Ms. Jag Sahota: Given the more recent information that has come to light, that the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence and the former Clerk of the Privy Council were all aware of the allegations against former CDS Vance from 2018, should such an independent body be under a ministry in the Government of Canada, or should it be an office and answer to Parliament?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Good question.

I can only tell you that the body that would intervene and monitor this type of misconduct or assault shouldn't be headed or funded by the military. The military shouldn't be able to influence the judgments of this entity or the course of events.

[*English*]

Ms. Jag Sahota: We had the Minister of National Defence appear before this committee and my colleague, MP Shin, asked him for some clarity on who was ultimately responsible for the handling of the sexual misconduct investigation into CDS Vance.

The minister talked a lot about the process, to which my colleague, MP Shin, said:

> My concern is that we're trying to bring about a cultural shift. You keep bringing that up. You also bring up a lot about process, how you depend on a process. You don't want to bring clarity to that responsibility. You're just talking about process.
>
> A shift in culture comes when we can transcend the process, when we recognize a responsibility. It was three years before General Vance was suspended. To me, that speaks volumes about abdication of responsibility.

The former and current ombudsmen have also said that going to the minister with the information was the correct path, and it was Minister Sajjan's responsibility to look into the matter.

Do you believe that in order to start addressing the culture in the military, everyone has to take their responsibility seriously, including the minister?

The Chair: I'm sorry, that's your time.

We're going to Mr. Serré for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Thank you, Stéphanie, for your continuous courage in shining a light on the sexual misconduct of the Canadian Armed Forces. I hope you are aware that your story is creating a ripple effect throughout, for many other individuals who really feel heard since your story in 2011.

Unfortunately, a lot of the burden in advocating and making the systematic changes in the Canadian Armed Forces has fallen on women, marginalized people and survivors of sexual assault.

I want to get your opinion. How can allies within the Canadian Armed Forces and allies outside of the Canadian Armed Forces advocate for more of a multicultural change here?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: I think that everyone should feel affected. Yes, you're right, whenever we talk about sexual assault or sexual misconduct in the military, we think that women and victims are the only ones affected. Often, men don't feel affected by the issue. They think that it's a women's issue.

Unfortunately, the situation won't improve if the general public fails to get more involved in the issue. They see the military as a remote entity that doesn't concern them as much. We have a major issue because not many people want to get involved. People aren't taking responsibility.

It's difficult to eliminate offences and criminal acts when the people who commit them suffer no consequences, remain unpunished or receive protection. There's no deterrent effect if, at the end of the day, you don't suffer any consequences for your actions. I think that's where the issue really starts.

● (1215)

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

We heard the ideas of Julie S. Lalonde and Christine Wood. You talked a bit about your ideas at the beginning. I'd like you to speak about the importance of having a group of independent counsellors, specialists, and therapists available to victims throughout the complaint process. I'd like you to elaborate on this.

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Yes, it would be important to have an organization or a team that is truly independent of the Forces to direct, support and assist victims and answer their questions. It would also be important to have adequate support in French. I personally noticed that it was very difficult to obtain resources for francophones. This problem already exists everywhere in the Forces health care system, and the care for victims of assault is no exception.

Personally, I feel strongly that sexual assault cases in the Forces, which are criminal acts, should be tried outside the Forces, not by court martial. That's my battle cry. There's no good reason for these cases to be tried by court martial.

Mr. Marc Serré: Do you feel there are major gaps in the services offered in French? If so, is it in victim services or in services in general?

Can you elaborate on the support offered in French to victims?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: I am going to try to choose my words carefully.

As a francophone, I have experienced discrimination during my career. It happened especially when I was working in the regular force at Valcartier, even though the city is predominantly francophone. I experienced discrimination from a medical standpoint. When I called the ombudsman, for example, I had to call back later or wait for someone who spoke French to call me back. In the end, no one could serve me in French, and I had to manage in English. Often only one French speaker was working per shift and they had to serve all of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

What changes do you feel would be important in order to encourage more survivors to come forward with their stories or to file complaints?

Could you answer my question in 30 seconds?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: At the moment, victims are not speaking out because of the negative impact it has on their careers. We already have statistics on the release of defendants. However, not enough attention is paid to the number of women who are kicked out after reporting their attackers.

Unfortunately, that's the problem: women know that if they speak out, their careers will be over.

Mr. Marc Serré: All right.

Thank you very much for your service.

The Chair: Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

We can't hear you, Madame Larouche.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré: You are on mute.

[*English*]

The Chair: There's still nothing.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Stephanie Bond): Can we please suspend?

The Chair: Yes, let's suspend while we fix this technical issue.

We can hear you now.

● (1220)

[*Translation*]

You can start over. You haven't lost any of your time.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: As I was saying, Ms. Raymond, your testimony helped to cast light on assault cases, at least in Quebec. Thank you very much.

As a result of your testimony, we had Justice Deschamps' report. Your battle got a lot of media attention in Quebec thanks to the efforts of some reporters and yourself. I'm thinking in particular of the 2014 article by Noémi Mercier and Alec Castonguay in *L'actualité*, which led to the Deschamps report. When you blew the whistle, it helped expose the assault cases.

In your opening remarks, you also talked a lot about processing times. As you point out, you began this fight over 10 years ago. The court process takes far too long.

Before I ask my questions, would you like to take a moment to tell us more about how long the process takes?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: In my case, the process took as long as it did because the Canadian Armed Forces had been unwilling to lay criminal charges against my attacker. According to the military police and the military prosecutor, it wasn't a sexual assault, but simply what they called “transactions” that stopped as soon as I said no.

After a complaint was filed with the military police, the investigation was reopened. It reached the same conclusion: it was not an assault. The investigation was then closed again. Then the article came out in *L'actualité*, and charges were laid. My attacker was acquitted, which was to be expected, because the jury was made up of five military men.

Those 10 years brought not only periods of inactivity where things came to a standstill, but also delays related to legal and administrative issues. Actually, they were trying to put obstacles in my way. It took me almost 10 years to get through all that.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: As you said, the two people directly involved however, were members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the alleged assault occurred in military facilities.

A panel of five military men found Mr. Gagnon not guilty of sexual assault. In other words, some men tried another man in a sexual assault case. It's as if the investigation was conducted by his own peers. That can influence the outcome.

As you say, the Court Martial Appeal Court of Canada then overturned the warrant officer's acquittal and ordered a new trial. The verdict was then upheld by the Supreme Court in fall 2018 and the case was transferred to civilian court.

Can you remind us why it was important that your case be taken out of the military justice system so that they could ultimately reach a different verdict?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: That was critical. That choice was not available at the outset, and when I was offered it in January 2020, I immediately said yes. From that point on, the defendant pleaded not guilty again, but there were other delays, including COVID-19. More than a year later, as we got closer to the cutoff date, he decided to plead guilty. If the trial had been held as a court martial, it would have been different. I'm not able to get inside their heads, but I feel they were playing a different game. The rules and laws were not the same. He knew he had less chance of winning. Otherwise, he would have pleaded not guilty again.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Once again, this demonstrates that it was important to get your case out of the military justice system and that it's imperative to establish an independent body that can adjudicate sexual assault cases.

As you mentioned, from the time you filed your complaint in 2012, your superiors made your life much more difficult, until you were dismissed in late 2013.

Can you tell us more about the consequences of whistleblowing in the Canadian Armed Forces, because you experienced them firsthand?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: There are all sorts of consequences. They range from intimidation and psychological harassment in the workplace to payroll consequences. Personnel played around with my benefits again [*Technical difficulties*], for example, and deducted $5,000. After that, I was denied my annual leave, even though it had been approved for all other members of the regiment.

Those are just a few examples. I was no longer allowed to work out during my work hours, while all my colleagues were allowed to. I was no longer allowed to wear civilian clothes when I did fundraising for the United Way on Fridays, while everyone else could, because supposedly I was liable to provoke attacks. It just kept piling up. I was issued a written warning and placed under surveillance.

There are countless measures that I have forgotten over time, but they led to poor mental health. Derogatory comments were also made about me and I was subjected to really unhealthy treatments by military doctors.

● (1225)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: It's much harder to report sexual abuse in the military than in civilian society. That's what I'm taking away from your testimony today.

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: It's hard enough for victims to do it in civilian society.

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Yes. It's because military men feel like they're under attack. They feel that they and their profession are the ones under attack. So they attack the person who is speaking out.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Okay.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Mathyssen for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Thank you so much for your testimony today.

I also want to build off what Madame Larouche was doing.

You specifically said that, in your case, people who tried to report.... And you had several instances, unfortunately, but during that time, there was direct interference by the chain of command. Can you talk about those examples that you saw directly?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: I was not kept up to date on the progress of my assault complaint with the military police, but I was hearing discussions in the hallway between my superior and his superior about my complaint and the details of what had happened. They were saying that it wouldn't go far. So I saw that my superiors knew about it.

A captain in my unit met with me to say that they had discussed what had happened, because the police had called them to tell them the story. To cut a long story short, everyone knew about it. I even got an intimidating call from a military police officer I did not know. He told me that the complaint would not be reviewed again because he had just learned that I had made a complaint about the military police to the Provost Marshal. The harassment investigators and the police officers also discussed it.

They were all talking to each other, actually, because I tried knocking on every door I could, even the sexual harassment response team. They were all talking to each other and they were all being ordered to stop talking to me and giving me information.

I'm having a bit of trouble summarizing, because so many things happened.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: It happened over many years, yes.

I appreciate your trying to do that, but you also said that the higher someone ranked, the more popular they were, the more protected they were. Do you think that's ultimately what happened with General Vance in terms of that internal ability to protect their own and to close ranks? In a lot of the same ways they shut you out, they did the same to protect him.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Yes, like many others, General Vance had to be protected because he was seen as a rising star during his career and therefore a good move for the military. It wasn't in the interest of the Forces to cast him aside or investigate him due to an allegation of sexual misconduct or assault. You don't want to tarnish the career or cause the loss of a valuable co-worker who is your right-hand man, for example. So General Vance's superiors or peers certainly had an interest in hiding these things, because they liked his work, operationally speaking.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: And those in positions of power above him at the time, who continued to ensure his advancement, did just that. It continued; that protection is at the very top the entire time.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Exactly, peers have no interest in reporting someone if they witness unacceptable behaviour, because they know that they themselves will not be protected if ever they are found guilty of inappropriate behaviour. This is a culture where you help those around you so that they will do the same when you need them.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Yes.

In the previous hour here today, Ms. Wood spoke not only about the trauma—the impact of her experiences, her rape—but what it did to her physically as well. The fibromyalgia, the constant headaches, a lot of those other physical side effects, if you want to call them that...implications. She said there were no services to truly help her with the sexual trauma, the experience she had, but also no services to help her with all those other effects it had. Was that your experience as well?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Yes, it was the same for me. One doctor even told me that, as long as I hadn't bought the rope to hang myself or the tube to attach to my car's exhaust pipe, I hadn't suffered anything really serious. Another doctor refused to treat me because it was common knowledge that I had complained to the media about the situation. A military psychologist analyzed me. He told me that basically I was responsible, that I could have made it stop, that I had a responsibility to stop it, but I hadn't.

So I really did not feel safe, even in medical terms, in the Forces. That was the defining moment, when I realized that I had to get out of the Canadian Armed Forces.

[*English*]

The Chair: Now we're going to Ms. Alleslev for five minutes in the second round.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Your story is truly incredible. The process lasted for more than 10 years. I thank you sincerely for your courage and tenacity, because obviously it was extremely hard to go through.

The process started when you filed your complaint with the military police.

Can you briefly explain the process you went through and why, in the end, you felt the solution was unfair?

Can you tell us why you decided to initiate the process in civilian court?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: I did not believe that the military court was truly independent. I didn't trust the military judge or that so-called jury made up of military men selected by the Canadian Armed Forces.

I had read about military law and its interpretation of criminal acts. Military law is somewhat behind the times; it is not as advanced as criminal law. I knew that my assault was going to be tried as if it were the 1940s and that the chances of acquittal were extremely high. But I wanted to continue the process to show the public that it didn't work. I feel I succeeded, because, when my case was heard in civilian court, the defendant suddenly pleaded guilty. He confessed to what he had done, even though he had been acquitted before. You can see a degree of absurdity in that.

● (1235)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Of course.

Knowing what you know now, would you go through the same process if you had to?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Yes, I would. I don't regret what I did, because it got results.

However, I would not go through the process a second time if I was assaulted again. Once in a lifetime is enough.

After the first acquittal, I wondered why I had done all that work for nothing. Now I can easily say I would do it.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you. Your process is making history and providing us with important information. Without an example, it's hard to change a process and show people how important it is to make changes.

Would you have done anything differently? Would you advise other victims to do anything differently?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Certainly, everything I did was not perfect. However, nothing comes to mind that I would not do again. Every action I took made sense and served some purpose sooner or later.

I was fortunate to have the help and advice of Mr. Drapeau. I was able to make good decisions because of the help from others. So I wouldn't change anything because I did everything I could. At the time, I was not able to turn to the civilian police. I tried, but it was not possible.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I'm sorry, that was not a criticism.

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: I didn't take it as one.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I asked the question to give me better information.

How are you now?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: I am doing very well now. I am happy with the way things have turned out. The work I have done may help others in the future. I will not have done it in vain.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Do you feel that you have received the support and the compensation you need?

It's impossible to determine what sufficient compensation would be, but do you feel that there is a balance?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: I consider myself very lucky because I received compensation from Veterans Affairs Canada as the result of the labour dispute. I was not able to receive any compensation for the sexual assault because the attacker was acquitted. There is also an out-of-court settlement with the government.

I am content and I can go on with my life.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Is there—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's your time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Leona Alleslev: My thanks once again.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going now to Ms. Zahid for five minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I want to thank you, Ms. Raymond, for your courage all along and for shining a light on sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces. Thank you for that.

Ms. Raymond, given the presence of the chain of command, the military environment has another layer of complexity when subordinates report sexual violence. Can you please talk about how power imbalances make it difficult for these survivors to report sexual misconduct?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: The difficulty is that it's like a civilization unto itself, more like a family. We are told when to train and where to train. We can't see our normal doctor; the Army decides which doctor we see. We have to show respect to our superiors at all times, even when passing them outside the workplace. The general public has no idea how hierarchical the environment is or the extent to which everything is supervised. Someone is always in charge of us and everything we do must be approved. We cannot do what we want and we cannot go where we want to report a situation, to look for assistance, and so on. That is the environment we are in and we can't get out of it.

I hope that answers your question.

● (1240)

[*English*]

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Ms. Raymond.

I know that the fear of repercussions at work is one of the barriers that individuals experience when they are trying to make up their minds whether to report sexual misconduct. What are some of the challenges with regard to confidentiality throughout the reporting process, and how would you recommend that we improve that process?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Having a criminal act dealt with by police outside the Armed Forces would provide greater confidentiality. When you file a complaint in the military, everyone ends up knowing. It goes up the chain of command to the commander at the top, then it comes back down again. All your colleagues are aware, then you are judged, fingers are pointed at you and the unsavoury comments start coming. In addition, the attacker or the bully often has a higher rank, so you have not a lot of power. If you are not very important in a regiment, you are more easily sacrificed. The Army wants to keep those with most experience and they are the ones committing the misconduct.

In terms of confidentiality, having criminal acts investigated outside the Armed Forces would give the victims some protection. It's critical.

[*English*]

Mrs. Salma Zahid: How can we ensure that there is confidentiality throughout the reporting process? Are there any suggestions you have that you can give to us that can help us in making sure that there is confidentiality throughout the reporting process?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: If those in the military continue to investigate each other, I really have no hope of confidentiality. Moreover, it's not limited to military justice or the military police. I have experienced it in a medical situation too. Confidentiality is often violated.

So my only recommendation is for matters to be handled and examined by people who are not in the military. Now, I don't see why there would be breaches of confidentiality along those lines, but, if the military continues to head up the investigations, there will always be emails and phone calls spreading the news and the rumours, because that is the military world we are in.

[*English*]

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Before we end, are there any gaps that currently exist throughout your process based on your experience, and what do you think could be done better to close those gaps?

The Chair: I'm sorry, that's your time.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: All right. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Once again, let me thank you for all the insight you have provided us with today in your remarks, Ms. Raymond. The word “tenacity” comes to mind. That's what you have demonstrated over the last 10 years.

Not only did you experience difficulties in terms of reporting the attacks you suffered, but you also mentioned, when you were in Valcartier, having difficulty obtaining services in French, even as a francophone in the Canadian Armed Forces. You therefore felt a form of discrimination based on language.

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Yes. In Valcartier, even francophones speak English. I don't know why that is the case. Francophones even use English forms.

Most Canadians are anglophone. Military personnel are regularly posted to anglophone bases. Francophones in the military constantly speak English and use English terminology, because that allows them to become familiar with working in English and to be more useful. Even though they are on a francophone base, they continue to use English terminology. Personnel who speak only French have to learn a new vocabulary.

In addition, when you're on a telephone helpline to HQ, or to Ottawa, you do not hear a lot of francophones on the other end of the line, and the anglophones are not bilingual.

● (1245)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: That is another problem you had to face.

You were the victim of a number of assaults. You were assaulted more than once, over several years.

Do you feel that the government is courageous enough to get to the bottom of the current investigations into alleged cases of sexual assault and misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces?

You were the victim of sexual assault in Canada. Is it possible that members of the Armed Forces elsewhere have been victims as well? Is it possible that this culture also exists in overseas missions?

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Yes. Unfortunately, the public does not know about that. I am aware of certain things that I will not disclose and that the public does not know. Honestly, some things are more horrible than what I went through.

Attackers overseas are even more protected. They are there on the ground with children in Afghanistan or Bosnia, with no one to watch them or report them.

I am not convinced that the government really wants to solve this problem. It has not demonstrated that it does. If it did, it would make sure that criminal cases were no longer handled by the military justice system. In my opinion, it's outrageous that they are still handled by the Forces.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: So they could become national security matters.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we're going to have our final round of questions with Ms. Mathyssen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Actually, I would like to have you continue, Ms. Raymond, to talk about those international supports.

Do you have any suggestions that we can pass on to the government as to how to start to create the provisions of the supports, of course, domestically, but also internationally?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: It is a little difficult for me to answer that question because I did not go into an operational field.

It is difficult to report assaults in the Canadian Armed Forces, even here in Canada. If you are overseas, it's even more difficult. There are additional difficulties to get over because the Army can solve its problems itself without having to inform civilian authorities about them.

The problem is that information becomes sealed; family secrets stay in the family. No outside eyes are watching. No one will report assaults because they know the major consequences it will cause.

I can't say anything more about it, unfortunately.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: I want to quickly ask something.

In the previous session, we also talked about the extension of supports to Veterans Affairs Canada. You said that luckily your case had been taken and you are now receiving compensation.

In terms of the supports for victims of sexual misconduct, abuse and assault, what would you say needs to be provided or what would you say are the gaps that need to be filled?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: I didn't receive any assistance specifically for victims of sexual trauma.

They agreed to open a file for me, but for a reason that had nothing to do with the assaults. I knew that, if I asked for reasons that did have to do with an assault, no file would be opened for me.

Later, I received some help from a psychologist. I was supposed to receive help from a military psychiatrist, the same one who had told me that I had decided myself that the assaults would continue. So I asked to be seen by a female psychologist who was not in the Army, and that is what happened. I was fortunate there, but it was not easy.

It is difficult to find help. They say that help is available, but you really have to look for it. I even had to appeal the Veterans Affairs Canada decision, because I was being told that I had no lasting effects and didn't need psychological help. Yet, at that very moment, I was being assisted by Veterans Affairs Canada.

● (1250)

The Chair: That is all the time we have.

I must thank our witness for her loyal service and her excellent comments.

Ms. Stéphanie Raymond: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Now we are going to go in camera for committee business, so we'll suspend for a few minutes.

The meeting is suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]