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—
Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Members of the committee, I guess it's general practice that when we have witnesses we do the business of the committee after the witnesses are gone.

I'd like to welcome Minister Oda and Ms. Ievers. Thank you for being here.

The minister has advised me that she'll be speaking for about 10 minutes, which will give us an opportunity to question her. I hope you all have the speaking notes in front of you.

Without further ado, Minister, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women): Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Madam Chair and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

[English]

I'd like to congratulate you, Madam Chair, on your new role as chair of this committee.

I have been following the committee proceedings and I want to commend you for your hard work. I know that you will be studying the economic security of women during this upcoming session, and I appreciate your work on this matter, as we have identified it as a challenge facing Canadian women, particularly senior women.

[Translation]

I would also like to thank Ms. Mourani and Ms. Smith for their work on the human trafficking motion before the House of Commons. I know the committee spent a great deal of time investigating human trafficking.

[English]

While human trafficking is an ongoing problem in Canada, statistics from past international events such as the Olympics have shown an influx of human trafficking in host countries. With the 2010 Olympics around the corner, it is crucial that we have a system in place to deal effectively with the problem. Your work in this area will have a direct impact upon the lives of the women as we move forward.

I would first like to recognize the hard work of the officials of Status of Women Canada on the renewal of the women's program. Since my last appearance before you, there has been a great deal of

discussion around the renewed terms and conditions of the women's program and new criteria for funding.

Canada's new government believes that now is the time to act, and we want to focus taxpayers' dollars towards action. We have the studies; we know there are challenges. Our government is looking at tangible ways we can make a difference now.

For example, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs is dealing with matrimonial property rights for aboriginal women. Our government increased funding to on-reserve family violence shelters by \$6 million. As well, the minister announced \$450 million for improving water supply and housing on reserve, education outcomes, and socio-economic conditions for aboriginal women, children, and families—real money in the hands of organizations that are on the ground working to make a real difference.

In terms of human trafficking, the former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration developed a program to offer victims temporary visas. Human trafficking is on the rise, and the majority of those trafficked are women. Instead of their being treated as criminals, our government will issue temporary resident permits for up to 120 days and will provide the necessary health care required, free of charge.

As I have mentioned before, women's issues are issues that all of my cabinet colleagues are concerned with. The Minister of Human Resources and Social Development announced \$4.48 million to help train and retrain women on social assistance in New Brunswick. This three-year pilot project, Partners Building Futures, will help women on social assistance get the training necessary to find jobs.

As well, the minister has introduced legislation, Bill C-36, that will make it easier for Canadians to access the guaranteed income supplement. The guaranteed income supplement pays out \$6.2 billion a year and goes to 1.5 million low-income seniors, who are mostly women. This, Madam Chair, is a real change that will affect real people where they live.

In one short year, we have introduced the universal child care benefit to help women and their families in their homes; implemented hospital wait time guarantees for prenatal aboriginal women; expanded eligibility for compassionate caregivers, most of whom are women; introduced pension-splitting for senior citizens; and targeted tax cuts such as the GST, textbook credits, and credits for families with children involved in physical activity. Real changes, ideas, and policies are making a difference in the lives of Canadian families and women.

As I come before you today, we are in the midst of one of the most horrendous murder cases in Canadian history. The trial in Vancouver stands as a solemn reminder of the realities faced by the most vulnerable in society. This government is committed to action on justice issues. While this high-profile case garners the lion's share of national and international media attention, there are other stories just as heart-wrenching. There are stories in the paper every day about repeat offenders—men who have abused their wives, children, or girlfriends; men who are back on the street putting lives in danger because law enforcement does not have the necessary tools.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Domestic violence is an issue that this government takes seriously. The Minister of Justice has brought forward tougher legislation. We need effective sentencing when dealing with sexual predators and repeat offenders.

[English]

We need to end conditional sentencing and raise the age of protection.

If all members in the House and all members of this committee would like to make a difference to help women in their communities, I would urge all to encourage their caucus members to pass these bills quickly.

Canada's new government believes in supporting programs that have a direct impact on women. We believe in putting money into the hands of groups that will help women in their communities.

In October 2005, Canada was cited by the United Nations Committee on Human Rights as failing to adequately address the high rate of violence against aboriginal women. These women and their children deserve safe communities. That is why I committed to the multi-year funding of \$1 million a year until 2011 to the Native Women's Association of Canada.

The Sisters in Spirit initiative addresses the high rates of racialized, sexualized violence against aboriginal women. This project will have a direct benefit on the lives of aboriginal women in their communities.

There is no simple answer. The economic insecurity of women can be traced back as a root cause of the problems faced by women on a daily basis. We need to ask how we can work together to alleviate these problems.

[Translation]

How can we work with the provinces to provide better services for women? I look forward to the committee's work on this issue. When

a woman faces domestic violence, what can we do to help her get out of this situation, find a job and a home, and be self-sustaining?

• (1540)

[English]

We need to let women know that there are other options enabling them the opportunity to change their lives. This committee is a wonderful vehicle to provide input to bring forward solutions.

As Minister for the Status of Women, I will continue to work towards achieving results for women across this country. I would like to suggest putting our partisan political differences aside and working with you. Together we should strive to ensure that we are making a real difference in the lives of women.

Thank you for the invitation to be before you and with you today. I look forward to our discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will start our first round of questions with Ms. Minna, for seven minutes.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming to meet with us today.

I would very much like to follow up on your last statement about being non-partisan and trying to be as objective as we can on these issues. At the end of the day, we're all here to serve the same thing. However, I do have to deal with the facts.

The government has eliminated the equality provisions of Status of Women Canada. The government has cut \$5 million, 40% of the budget. The government has shut down offices. The government has changed the provisions so that advocacy is no longer funded, advocacy that goes to all of the things the minister mentioned a few minutes ago. All of those issues need research and advocacy. That's how they were brought to the fore in the first place by women's organizations and by your counterparts at the provincial level.

Minister, at this point I need to...since during question period you stated that the discussions today in Toronto will not deal at all with the issue of cuts. In *La Presse* today, the minister for the status of women in Quebec pretty much talks about only that:

[Translation]

Provincial status of women ministers are meeting in Toronto on Thursday to devise a common strategy to convince federal Minister Bev Oda to reconsider the decision to slash federal funding for women's programs.

[English]

That is one part.

She goes on to say:

[*Translation*]

She further stated: "The message that we're hoping to convey to Minister Oda is how important these activities are to women's groups and to the role women play in Canada".

However, Ms. Th  berge is confident that she and her colleagues can exert enough pressure to bring about a change of heart in Ottawa.

[*English*]

That is only one statement today, Madam Minister.

Prior to the meeting, there were other comments in previous media. From January 11, there are quotes from Madam Papatello from Ontario. She states very clearly that at previous meetings, the minister did not stay long enough for them to have a proper meeting. Yes, they were having a meeting to discuss programs much beyond the cuts; however, a federal-provincial-territorial meeting requires the federal government to be present, and you obviously were not.

I'll quote from the previous article, again, just what the minister said:

It's hard to have an FPT (federal-provincial-territorial meeting) with no F. That sort of sums it up....It's just very frustrating because you feel like you're at the altar and the bride didn't show.

These are comments straight from the ministers at the provincial level, Madam Minister.

I'm sorry I have to bring this up again. However, given the fact that we are here to talk about equality for women, and that a lot of these things are federal-provincial partnerships, I would ask you, Minister, since then, in your conversations with provincial and territorial counterparts, have you reviewed the government's position on the elimination of the equality provisions, on the cuts, and on the closing of offices? Have you reconsidered and decided, hopefully, that in fact advocacy groups should be funded and that the equality provisions of the Status of Women are to be reinstated? Otherwise, the *raison d'  tre* of the department is in essence no longer in existence.

•(1545)

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you for your questions.

If I may, Madam Chair, I will answer the direct question, but first I would like to address some of the other comments brought to our attention here.

As I've indicated, we've spoken to Minister Papatello's office and have received a letter. The letter indicated that the purpose of the meeting was to come to a consensus on how they could make FPT processes more meaningful and action-oriented.

I can only take at face value unless we...and I wouldn't suggest this, of course, that we have something in writing, but we have a totally different message being said publicly.

I also understand, from a report that I received regarding today's meeting, that Ms. Papatello explained to her counterparts the evolution of the public statements that were reported. I welcome learning that the ministers today have agreed to work together. They've agreed to come forward. I will be meeting with a representative group of five or six of those ministers, who are going to bring together a proposal on how an action plan...to work on an

action plan. I will be with them in July in Iqaluit, where we will be discussing the next steps on an action plan.

I also understand, and I've agreed to meet, as I offered in our last FPT, which I was part of... I had offered a separate meeting to discuss the terms and conditions they'd asked for. They are indicating that they would like this meeting, so that meeting will be scheduled. They've asked for that meeting to happen in February, and it will happen in February.

I also want to indicate that whatever way in which this meeting in Toronto was characterized in the media, I would like to say that I do not go by the media, I go by what other ministers tell me and what other officials tell me. I am told that the intent was to meet as provincial ministers. Provincial ministers in many areas, even first ministers, meet without federal representation in order to discuss their responsibilities and how they would like to come to an agreement or an understanding before they approach the federal ministers or their federal counterparts. I encourage that to happen.

I see this as a very positive meeting they have, and am very encouraged that they have identified the same three focus issues—of domestic violence, economic security, and aboriginal women—as the three focuses they would like on their part.

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

Members of the committee, I would suggest that the minister is here to answer questions. You can make it an interactive session. If you could make your questions two minutes and then let the minister answer for two minutes, you could have a rebuttal, and I think it would work more efficiently.

Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

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

Good afternoon, Minister, and thank you for joining us today. Good day to you as well, Ms. Ievers. I happy to see you.

I have a great deal of difficulty understanding the new measures adopted as part of the Women's Program. I'm having a problem with this because neither you, nor I, nor any of my female colleagues would be in Parliament today if women hadn't raised their voices and demanded to be recognized as persons, with the full rights this entails.

I can't quite understand the reluctance at the point in time to admit that a program aimed at promoting women can be used to defend women or to influence governments, whether federal, provincial or otherwise. Women have been struggling for over a century to be recognized as full and equal citizens, but the battle isn't over yet. In light of all of the changes that have taken place, I get the impression the department feels that women have now come far enough that they no longer need to make any more demands. I think the department is very wrong about this. I'd like to know why women's initiatives have been deemed ineligible for funding. I'm looking in particular at item 3 in the table "Current Terms and Conditions" in the Library of Parliament briefing notes.

•(1550)

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

I appreciate your question. I hope I can give you a fuller understanding of this.

Just even out of the provincial ministers' meeting that was held today in Toronto, I understand there was an observation made at the meeting that the Status of Women has been in existence for 25 years. There was also observation made that there have been many studies, and we all share in those studies. The results those studies show, I think, have identified what the challenges are, what the situations are.

We recognize that women, in their place in Canadian society, have not had the equal opportunity to participate as employees, as employers, as part of the social and civic activities of our country. What we are saying now is that recognizing what the studies have told us, recognizing what we know from 25 years of advocacy, it is now time when we must take action.

I must say that we are not saying, certainly, that they are advanced enough. We are not saying that they are not equal. In fact, because we believe they're equal we believe that we have to help them face the challenges they are facing, so they can express their equality and can participate equally in all facets of life.

In fact, I guess the portrayal that has been made is the removal of one word out of the terms and conditions. If you look further into the terms and conditions and into the application form, it recognizes that every project must reflect the place of women within the Charter of Rights, within employment practices that are fair and equitable, and those things are all within the program guidelines and the application forms—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Excuse me, Madam, but do you really think that you will attain your objective, namely meeting needs, by silencing women and women's groups? You won't know what these needs are because you will have prevented women from speaking out. How do you expect to achieve your objectives under these circumstances? The past is no guarantee of the future. We need to look not only at what's happened in the past, but at what's happening right now. If women can no longer make demands, then do you really think you can meet your objectives. I don't think that will be possible.

Women must continue to have an opportunity to voice their demands, whether it involves their lives, the quality of their lives, their health, education, or all of the areas in which they are now represented. If they are unable to do that, then their needs will not be adequately met. Past needs may be met, but not present and future ones.

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Well, Madame, this government in any action it has taken has never muzzled any individual Canadian citizen or group from expressing its views. We have not, by changing the terms and conditions of a program, muzzled anyone or taken away their right or their ability to express their views to each other, to the

media, to their members of Parliament, or to any politician or person who has any participation in assisting their positions.

What this government has said is that taxpayers' dollars will not, through the programs available to women, be used at this point for funding of advocacy organizations. That does not mean that the advocacy organizations cannot continue their advocacy, as many groups do in Canada that represent the views and concerns of many sectors of the Canadian population.

I just want to be clear: we have not taken away that right and the opportunities they have, just like everyone else has, to express their views and to bring forward their points of concern. What we're saying now is that taxpayers' dollars dedicated in this area will be dedicated to organizations that will be able to provide direct help to women in their individual communities.

•(1555)

The Chair: Madame Demers, you have 20 seconds. Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: You're taking away their means to act. It's the same thing.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will now go to Ms. Smith, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank you, Minister, for coming to our committee and for your very huge involvement in the human trafficking issue that which members on this committee have all participated in. As you know, there is soon going to be a report tabled in the House of Commons on this very initiative that you, as Minister for the Status of Women, are very eager to hear, and I thank you for that.

Also, it's very true—I am a former member of the Manitoba legislature, and indeed you were perfectly right—that ministers do come together provincially before they invite their federal counterparts, because they get all their ducks in line and talk about the issues they want to bring forward.

One thing that has come up over and over again on this committee, as you said, Madam Minister, is that many studies have been done and now it's time for action. Women have not had equal opportunity in Canada, and I thank you today for recognizing that and the fact that our government needs to take action. We believe women are equal; it's the opportunity that we have to work on.

I just came off a tour in Ontario. I talked to a number of women's groups that really are applauding the efforts you've put forward. There was no mention at all of their voices being muzzled. They felt quite free to come to Ottawa and quite free to write letters and quite free to talk to me. There was the good and the bad and the indifferent, but they were very appreciative of the action that is going forward from the Status of Women in a real-world way.

I am hoping that advocacy organizations will understand that certainly they continue their advocacy; they're just not paid to do it. Many people are starting to realize that and appreciate that.

Madam Minister, perhaps I could ask you to comment on this. Because of my tour in Ontario, I had such a positive response about the revisions of the terms and conditions.... It wasn't like what I'm hearing often here at the status of women committee; rather, women were very happy that they could actually apply. It was as though the world had opened, and organizations that didn't have the opportunity to apply before are able to apply.

I'm wondering what kind of response there has been since the terms and conditions of the women's program were revised, and whether you would be able to tell us how many applications have been received to date and how many you expect to receive in the short term.

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you for the opportunity to report. Through the women's program, the Status of Women office has received 56 applications.

In fact—thank you for this opportunity—I'm very pleased to tell you that the first project approved under the new terms and conditions is to the Prince George New Hope Society.

They believe this project will help sex workers and sexually exploited young women, particularly young aboriginal women in Prince George and northern British Columbia. They will be working with their community organizations, their law enforcement, the RCMP, and to ensure that....

They also have a program whereby they will be one evening a week on the streets describing what this organization offers. They have programs now whereby the women and the young women who choose not to live on the streets and to undertake this activity.... They have a workshop project going there. They also have management sensitizing law enforcement and the judicial system within that small community on the challenges faced by these particular women. Their expected outcome is improved opportunities for these women who are currently being exploited.

I'm very proud to make that announcement.

The other thing I will ensure and can assure you is that with the reporting requirements, the funds are going to be used accountably. They've reported that there will be 120 participants in 10 workshops, and this is the kind of real difference that these projects will make.

As far as other activities are concerned, those are under the women's program's new terms and conditions. In fact, there are many provincial ministers with whom we have been in conversation who have approached this government on the new terms and conditions with very meaningful projects they would like to see happening in their provinces.

We've been working with them, and hopefully, as we talk to them, they're actually supporting third-party, independent, non-profit organizations who work in communities so that they too can undertake projects that would help women in various provinces.

This is very encouraging. I think the thing is that we will see measurable differences in individual lives of Canadian women as we move forward.

• (1600)

The Chair: Ms. Smith, you have one minute left.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I thank you very much. That's very exciting, and I know all of the status of women committee will really appreciate this information you've just given us.

Could I ask how many of these types you would anticipate? I know myself, after having come off the tour, that there is a group of women in Sarnia who are women against human trafficking, and they are looking forward to applying, as are many other types of.... And it really matches what we all here on the status of women committee have addressed, which is violence against women.

Could you comment on that?

The Chair: You have less than half a minute to respond.

Hon. Bev Oda: Let me just say that the changes have been very encouraging. Of course, if after 25 years you were not allowed to apply, one of our challenges is to get the messages to those organizations who have never looked to Status of Women for assistance or support. But we have a wide range of applicants.

The other thing I'll point out is that your organization in Sarnia would never have had a Status of Women office in Sarnia, that in fact now the information's available on the Internet—

The Chair: Minister, I have to cut you off. Thank you.

We go to Madam Mathyssen for seven minutes.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

We've heard that women in this country are equal, they just lack opportunity. I was quite interested in your statement, particularly the paragraph in which you asked the question about how, when women face domestic violence, we can help them to recognize the cycle of abuse, find a job and a home, and be self-sustaining.

Minister, I would suggest that there are a number of things this government could do that it hasn't done, and I'm hoping you will make a commitment to do the things that women across this country have been asking for.

For example, will you commit to real child care—affordable, regulated, not-for-profit child care? We know the plan that is currently in place has produced no child care spaces. Absolutely nothing has been created there.

This committee asked that there be proactive legislation on pay equity prepared. That request was denied.

We know women require opportunities in regard to training and access to employment insurance. Right now only 30% of the people who pay into it are able to access it.

We also know women are homeless because there aren't enough affordable homes. We need a national affordable housing program so that there is that housing stock. As the status of women minister, I'm hoping you will commit to working with your cabinet colleagues and your government to make this happen.

Finally, I would say that the empowerment of women is essential. Only 20% of our colleagues are women. That's not acceptable. We're far behind many countries in the world. In fact, Rwanda has more women in government than we have. I'm wondering what you have done within the governing party to make sure there is encouragement for women so that they can be included as participating members in the houses of this land.

• (1605)

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you for your question. I certainly appreciate that you are actually identifying some very concrete actions that can be taken.

As you know, as reported, this government did commit to increasing child care spaces. The work that's being done by the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development was reported in the House.

Concerning pay equity, the announcement was made that we have existing pay equity. We're trying to enforce that more stringently, etc., and I know you will be speaking with the Minister of Labour regarding the pay equity legislation and his plans.

On employment insurance, I know we have made the appropriate minister aware of the request, and attention to that has been asked for.

On the homeless, this government has made a recent announcement regarding increased funding for a homeless program.

And on women in politics, I'm quite encouraged. I know there is another minister who is actively working on an approach of working with a non-profit, non-partisan organization on specific means of increasing participation of women in civic life and in politics.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Minister, but I'm afraid you've fallen short in terms of the child care spaces and in terms of pay equity. Women asked for proactive pay equity, not the status quo.

Hon. Bev Oda: And I'm sure the minister responsible would be pleased to come before this committee to discuss with you the plans the minister would have.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I'd be delighted, and I hope the chair will make that invitation.

We're here to discuss the budget of SWC. I wonder what specifically is the budget for 2007-08. What have you allocated?

Hon. Bev Oda: The budget for 2007-08 has not yet been tabled.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: It's to come?

Hon. Bev Oda: As you know, the Minister of Finance is planning a budget and will be tabling his budget shortly.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: All right. We'll be very interested in seeing that.

In terms of the savings that were identified in SWC, what consultations took place to identify those savings? With whom did you speak?

Hon. Bev Oda: I'm going to ask Ms. Ievers to outline for you the process that was undertaken as well as the principles on which the process was undertaken.

Ms. Florence Ievers (Coordinator, Status of Women Canada): Thank you, Minister.

Status of Women Canada had undertaken cross-country consultations with a number of women's groups, equality-seeking groups and individuals in 2005. We had also undertaken a review of the governance of Status of Women Canada, with a number of phases in that initiative. At first we looked at how we were organized and how we could do better. We had two other phases we were about to undertake when the government decided we needed to look at more efficiencies in the department. Those were to look at the research entity of Status of Women, as well as the regional operations of the women's program.

The principles that guided us in doing our work included reviewing the key operations of the organization, assessing and adjusting the current mandates of policy, research and GBA, as well as the women's program and regional operations. As well, we looked at corporate services. We identified key objectives to be pursued, assessed a number of options, and consolidated human and financial resources to make them more efficient.

The basis on which we did the review was that we were focused on ensuring the integrity and the coherence of our core functions.

• (1610)

The Chair: That brings us to the end.

We will go to round two, five minutes each.

We'll start off with Ms. Brown.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Madam Minister.

Madam Minister, you said you'd like us to work in a non-partisan way, but in your own remarks, of which we have a copy in front of us, your choice of words and phrases demonstrates to me that you view the world through a very different lens than I do, and a very different lens from the women in my constituency.

I'll just give you an example. I met with them about a week ago, and they said they were dismayed about the removal of the word "equality". They don't even think the word "equality" is good enough. They say, first of all, that equality of opportunity is the lowest benchmark—and that's what you chose to talk about. Real equality, effective equality, is something quite different, and a much higher standard. They want effective equality—in other words, programs that take them from where they are below zero and move them up to have effective equality with the opposite sex. Your lens and your words are quite different.

Describing the individual projects with such pride, as you do, is very interesting. It's an interesting time filler, but it does not address the broad policy and advocacy role that Canadian women want and look to you for leadership on. So I have a few questions for you.

Regarding that Vancouver trial, which you chose to define in terms of justice issues, have you asked the Minister of Health, for example, to define addiction as a health issue? Have you asked him to set aside money for detox, treatment, rehab, and after-care for those poor women who can never be returned to life, even if Robert Pickton is convicted of all those murders? Have you asked the Minister of Health for dollars? Have you pushed for dollars? Have you asked the Minister of HRSD for dollars to make sure we get those child care spaces, seeing that the money was given away in cheques to individual families?

I'm surprised by your latter remarks where you ask what we can do to help women recognize the cycle of abuse and how we can help them to get out of these situations, etc. There are people on the ground who have the answers to those questions. You don't need to ask them how we can do it. If you interacted sufficiently with people in the domestic violence business—and I don't mean the police, but the women's groups—they would tell you how to do it, how to have more effect. I can tell you, it takes more money than we're spending now, not less.

Are you pushing your cabinet colleagues to make sure that all their programs are seen through the lens of gender equality and that sufficient dollars are allocated by each and every one of them to take care of the problems? You can't do it alone; I understand that. But it seems to me that you're giving money away and losing the advocacy role whereby women in Canada would help you do your job with your cabinet colleagues, as opposed to weakening your department so that you're standing alone trying to do this.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you for your question.

I don't suppose I'm standing alone. First of all, I respect a diversity of viewpoints. I certainly have heard from my constituents, and I've had submissions given to me individually from all constituencies, across all ridings, as well as from my colleagues. There is a diversity of viewpoints and a diversity of approaches.

What we're tasked with, as a government, is to try to be effective in meeting the needs of Canadian citizens. I would suggest to you that in every case, this government, as I've said to you, does consider and, as an integral part of its considerations, deliberations, etc., on every initiative it takes, does not exclude the consideration of women. In fact it is very sensitive to the inclusion of the consideration of the impact on women and the effects that it will have on women in a positive manner.

In my discussions with advocacy groups, I have invited them to meet with...and I've invited to bring ministers together to meet with them, whether it's the Minister of Health, Minister of Justice, or Minister of Human Resources. Every one of my colleagues understands, and they are willing to meet with those groups, to hear from them.

•(1615)

The Chair: Please wrap up. Thank you.

Hon. Bev Oda: I would say to you that we have taken...and it's heartily supported. The responsibility is there from every minister in their area.

To pay people to support me, that's not necessarily the approach I choose to take. I choose to take the approach that the support will come because we're doing the right thing.

The Chair: Thank you.

The next person is Mr. Stanton, for five minutes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us this afternoon.

Minister, in the course of our hearings with respect to the new terms and conditions for Status of Women Canada, in particular the women's program, we've had several questions that focus on the new terms we're bringing in. In particular, I note a priority given to aboriginal women, immigrant women, visible minority women, and senior women. Does this in fact mean that would be the only focus of successful applications under the women's program?

I wonder if you could comment on what that really means and what kind of focus this brings to the women's program.

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you for your question.

I think when we indicate a focus we indicate we've identified them as areas where in studies, research, and internationally, we've been identified as not doing enough, etc. When we're saying there's a focus there, it is not to the exclusion of any organization that is advancing the opportunities for women in their communities.

The other thing to remember, too, is the economic security. There are many avenues by which an organization can support women in the community. We're saying that project, that focus would encompass everything that has an influence on economic security. With respect to domestic violence, as you can appreciate, there are many factors that contribute to domestic violence, so there's a wide range of activities and programs that could be undertaken to address that challenge.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Minister.

One other item that came up in the course of our hearings, again, especially looking at the changes to Status of Women Canada, was a question about the policy research fund. There were some suggestions that this is no longer part of the mandate or capacity within Status of Women Canada. I wonder if you could give us an update on where that policy research fund really stands.

Hon. Bev Oda: The policy research fund as a subsection of the Status of Women general operating has been altered. That doesn't mean there are no plans or opportunity for the Status of Women to undertake research. It does mean that Status of Women has restructured itself and is developing an internal capacity to identify meaningful research—research that is identified as having to be done. Consequently, there is a capacity for research, but it is going to be managed and focused for specific purposes that will show results and that will help the Status of Women and the government in its work.

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes left.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Finally, Minister, you've said on several occasions—and you alluded to it in one of your answers earlier this afternoon—that it's not just the responsibility of this committee, Status of Women Canada, that we shouldn't be the sole proponent of women's issues in the course of the responsibilities of a government. You said this is a responsibility that needs to be carried across all departments and across all the political spectrum that we see.

Could you give us a little enlightenment on what you really mean by that?

• (1620)

Hon. Bev Oda: I know that the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, for example, has many consultations with aboriginal women's groups and organizations to ensure that the programs and his legislation, the actions that he takes, are sensitive to women. In fact, if you look at some of the agreements that have been signed recently, he has been very successful after a long time of not going forward in signing agreements. He has been very successful ensuring that the situation for aboriginal women on reserves is going to be addressed. He is committed to an increase in shelters for women under his responsibility. He has also ensured that the children, etc., are going to have access to education.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I have to be fair to everybody, because everybody has to speak.

Madame Deschamps, pour cinq minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Ms. Oda. Thank you for accepting our invitation to join us, Ms. Ievers.

I listened to my colleagues' comments. We probably are not all on the same page when it comes to recognizing the equality of men and women. In my view, it's more of an impression that we want to give. A statement like the one made by Ms. Smith doesn't truly reflect the current situation.

Certainly we have heard from several women's groups. As you know, we scheduled two meetings during the last session to meet with women and get their reaction to the recent changes to the funding of the Women's Program. Some reported that they were quite satisfied, but the vast majority of the women we heard from were very concerned about the changes announced. That also concerns me a great deal.

I represent the riding of Laurentides—Labelle in a Quebec region located to the north of Montreal. I listened to the comments of my Conservative colleagues. I don't think of my riding as being located in the Third World, but the region is grappling with some serious problems linked to a tenuous economy. When the softwood lumber crisis hit, all five sawmills were forced to shut down. Situations like these often lead to family crises and even breakups. Many women are on their own and dealing with family responsibilities.

Sadder still is the fact that often these women have seasonal jobs which disqualify them from the current EI regime. We have made representations to the minister about this very issue and we have

tried to make him aware of the situation. This is just another example of the inequities that exist.

Madam, do you really believe that men and women are truly equal today?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: I think we can be very constructive if we recognize, as I said, that there are challenges. We recognize that improvements have to be made, so regarding some of the situations you've pointed out, there may be, in every level of government, programs that have to be reviewed. That's why we've supported the gender analysis work that this committee has done in the past. That's why we've supported the strengthening in every department to look at gender analysis. That's why we've maintained the ability of Status of Women Canada to give advice to every department in their work on gender analysis. I think the work that's being done there—and I would suggest that the specific issues that have been brought up, that gender analysis support that we provide to status of women that's still there—will help in the deliberations on those issues.

I would just say to you, regarding your own riding, very similarly, we would welcome.... I'm sure you have an organization in your riding similar to organizations in other ridings. From the Maritimes we've had inquiries from places where the fishing industry has had a great downslide. The women in those communities are taking up the slack and addressing the need for more resources. We're looking at a program being put forward by an organization to help women start up small businesses. As you know, the former Minister of Human Resources and Social Development introduced a pilot project in New Brunswick to help women upgrade their skills. I'd welcome any organization from any riding that would like to apply for projects such as that.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go to Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to pursue my question in regard to the cost savings, because of course that is what led to the closing of the regional offices.

We heard testimony from your own staff here in the spring that the regional offices provide an important resource for the ministry; that they dialogue with the local organizations; that they make connections with provincial and territorial counterparts; that they attend interdepartmental committees and provide advice. In fact, in my own riding of London—Fanshawe, I have worked with the London Abused Women's Centre, and they have indicated that the concrete and very important work they did to address violence against women in my community would not have been possible without the work of the regional offices.

So in losing them, we've lost a great deal. How many people in SWC were laid off, and how on earth will you be able to deliver the mandate—equality for women—with the loss of these incredibly creative and dedicated people, some of them with many years of experience?

Hon. Bev Oda: First of all, this government, because it wants to make sure that it's using taxpayers' dollars responsibly, didn't necessarily start with the number of people. We looked at the core responsibilities now being given to Status of Women under the new terms and conditions and under a renewed approach. We then looked at how we could provide the necessary services efficiently and ensure that the programs will be run, operated, and administered efficiently.

In answer to your question on specific numbers, there are now a total of 70 staff available throughout the regions and within the Status of Women. The offices, as you know, have been reduced to four, located in Edmonton, Montreal, Moncton, and Ottawa.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Minister, I have heard several times this reference to taxpayers' dollars. Sometimes it's about citizenship. What on earth are we going to do to protect women and save their lives? It seems to me this talk about responsibility should extend to the lives of women and girls.

Have I time for more questions, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have two minutes for questions and answers.

Hon. Bev Oda: I would like to respond, if I could.

The Chair: Yes, Madam.

Hon. Bev Oda: Status of Women, prior to the changes in terms and conditions, through the funding it gave and the changes that were made, has not diminished anybody's responsibility for saving the lives of women and girls.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: But the organizations have been very, very clear that they need SWC; they need the support and funding in order to do the work that will indeed address the very questions you asked in your preamble before answering questions.

• (1630)

Hon. Bev Oda: As I said, the organizations that are coming forward...such as the one that was approved today, that actually is saving the lives of women and girls in Prince George, is now going to be supported to take those girls off the streets and to show them they have another alternative.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: What about the rest across the country, Minister?

Hon. Bev Oda: Any organization that is going to undertake that kind of meaningful activity and work with the women and girls in their communities to take them off the streets, we will support.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: When they have no access to a regional office? When their contact with SWC is limited?

Hon. Bev Oda: There is no regional office in Prince George, and we just approved their grant.

Thank you.

The Chair: You have half a minute, if you wish to pursue this further.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I do have some other questions.

I wonder, Minister, are you aware that Canada is violating the general recommendation 6 of CEDAW? I have a copy of it here, if you need it. I'm wondering what you're going to do about that.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds to respond.

Hon. Bev Oda: We've noted that. We are studying it and will make a response at the appropriate time.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

We'll now go to Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Minister, thanks very much for being here again today to answer our questions. I know we've got lots of questions. Certainly we've heard lots of questions from members of the public right across this country. We've had witnesses appear, several of them at two meetings, and we've got two more meetings coming up to hear from more witnesses and their concerns regarding the changes to the program. I know there are a lot of concerns out there; I also know there's a lot of misunderstanding out there. I think it's very important that the opportunity be given to explain the changes, and to explain them properly.

One of the things that we did hear about, which I have a question about as well, is the change that now allows for-profit organizations to be able to apply for funding under the women's program. I know there've been a lot of concerns expressed to us regarding that. Some of those concerns are centred on the fact that for-profit organizations are deemed to have more resources available to them and are more able to prepare applications, and so on, and to put a program and request together than a not-for-profit. I'm wondering how that may impact who is coming before Status of Women for funding.

Is the application form a simplified form? I know that in the areas I've been involved with before, lots of times people spend as much money trying to fill out the application form as they do on the grant they're hoping to get at the end of the day.

How is this going to impact on different organizations when we have for-profit and not-for-profit organizations vying for the same funds?

Hon. Bev Oda: First of all, I know you appreciate that within the women's program, the funding there has always been the same. It will remain the same.

On the access by non-profits, I would say that out of the examples, I think the opportunity should be there. I don't want to foreclose having an opportunity with some. Maybe a for-profit might have capabilities that a not-for-profit might not have in the delivery of the service. Again, it's a matter of saying that the forms themselves....

We also committed, as a government, to streamline. The government overall has been charged with streamlining and becoming less administratively burdensome to providing services to organizations and citizens. So the application forms, I would suggest, are equitably accessible. Of those application forms that we've received to date, we're getting very thorough application forms.

It's very clear that there is a request for measurable differences. There's a clear ability to describe the programs, to describe who else would be involved, like other partners or other non-profits. In many of the smaller communities, they see a number of organizations coming together to put forward a proposal.

So I would suggest to you that there is no disadvantaging of non-profits because of just an opportunity that's there for a for-profit organization if it comes up with a project. The reality is that we welcome the for-profit sector that would come forward with a project that is not in line with their core businesses, but does so because they believe they have a place and a way to contribute to this effort.

•(1635)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you.

Do I have more time?

The Chair: You have twenty seconds, but the minister won't have time to respond. You can pose a question and she can respond later.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I will just make a comment, if I may.

I just wanted to say that it's in my riding where the group of women have come together to form the committee to combat human trafficking and to bring awareness to the community. I'm really proud of these women. They've been doing it with no funding, so I'm quite sure they'll be applying for something.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to round three now.

I understand, Ms. Neville and Mr. Pearson, that you're going to share your time. You'll throw the questions out and the minister will answer.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): We're sharing our time. I'll ask my question, then I'll be followed by Mr. Pearson.

As a quick comment, I apologize, Minister, for not being here when you presented. I had another commitment.

As I look at this presentation that you made, I really feel for the women who have been working in the field for women's equality for years and years, because I find this to be an insult to them.

I've heard you use the word "streamline" and I've heard you use the word "meaningful": "meaningful" programs, "meaningful" research. I need to know—and I think women out there need to know—what the criteria are and what the definition of "meaningful" is.

Mr. Pearson.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Minister, I've just returned from Darfur, in southern Sudan. We had a team of ten women from London come over with us to assess the various women's programs that are going on there. They are in pretty desperate situations. What we discovered is that in the places in which money was applied to programs to help women with micro-enterprises, with education and other things, there was great success in those programs when women were also resourced to advocate together against tribal chiefs and other groups that are there. What

we also discovered is that in the area in which those resources were not there, the women's programs did not function at all well.

I'm just wondering what makes Canada so different. This is the law of international development when we work: that we understand that the need to advocate is one of the main engines that drives women and allows them to have equality. But they have to be resourced in order for that to happen.

We know that in other countries and we apply that through CIDA and through other organizations. I would just like to know why Canada is so different. How can we not fund people for advocacy? How can we trust that they'll just be able to go ahead in their own programs and make them work?

Hon. Bev Oda: This question was asked of me when I was speaking to the women in Vancouver. I was very clear, and I think I can give you an answer as to what I mean by "meaningful" and what I mean by projects such as this.

If we can take one, ten, a hundred women off the street, that's meaningful. That has changed, actually changed, the life of one woman and her children and the family. That's what I mean by meaningful.

I mean that if we can give women the confidence and assurance they need to remove themselves from a situation of domestic violence, to know there is somewhere to go, but also to know that... and I do know a little bit of the realities of those situations. The shelters available right now have a limited time that women and children can stay there. My conversations with my provincial counterparts concerned how we can work together to look at the secondary residential needs of women who have been victims of domestic violence. We're working on that part. That's what I mean by meaningful.

I've asked every provincial minister to tell me what the real needs are in their communities.

As far as advocacy, yes, we support advocacy in those situations, as you've expressed, but I would suggest to you here in Canada it's been 25 years since Status of Women was established, and the times were different. We have had 25 years of advocacy. We have not said that advocacy should stop. We've encouraged people to advocate, and the research has been done for 25 years. What we're saying at this point is that domestically we've chosen this particular resource that's made available for women to work in a different way at this time.

•(1640)

Hon. Anita Neville: Who will advocate for them, Minister? I don't understand that. Who will speak up for the need for more shelters? Who will speak up for the issues that are identified for women on the street?

Hon. Bev Oda: They will continue to advocate, I would hope, and I would encourage them.

Hon. Anita Neville: Who? How? Where?

Hon. Bev Oda: What we are saying is that they will not be funded by government money to support that. They will advocate as do many other organizations who do not receive government money for advocacy.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do you think the banks will help them?

Hon. Bev Oda: You know, with respect, we have many sectors that have many needs, and they advocate, certainly.

And if I know one thing about women, it's that they will speak loudly and they will speak with great clarity. But this government has chosen not to use taxpayers' dollars to fund organizations that advocate.

The Chair: Thank you.

We next have Ms. Grewal for five minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Madam Minister, for appearing before us, and for your time and your presentation.

Madam Minister, much concern has been expressed about the removal of the word “equality” from the terms and conditions of Status of Women Canada. I note the new terms seek to achieve the full participation of women in the economic, social, and cultural life of Canada.

Can you please explain how this new objective addresses their concerns about equality?

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you.

I guess the best way I can do this is just to reiterate the fundamental principles. In order for women in Canada to realize their equality, for women in Canada to have an equal opportunity—that's what equality essentially says. You should have equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of this country, to enjoy the responsibilities and the benefits of this country. We have to have equal opportunity.

The challenges that women have are not being denied. In fact, they're being identified. What we're saying is that because we believe women are equal and should have equal recognition in all aspects of Canadian life, we have the task of reducing or removing the challenges they are facing.

Madam Chair, if I could provide a correction in order to be very clear and very precise, I would like to say that this government has decided not to fund organizations for their advocacy activities. I have indicated to many groups who have spoken to me that they too, if they have projects that will help women directly in their daily lives.... It's not the organization; it's the project and how the money is being used that this government has decided not to support.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Madam Minister, have you talked to your provincial colleagues about the changes? What have they said on your future plans?

Hon. Bev Oda: Yes. As I reported earlier, we have talked. Prior to the House break, at the last meeting we had, I had offered a separate meeting for further discussion on the new terms and conditions. As a result, they have agreed they would like to have that meeting. I will be arranging that meeting, and we'll do it as soon as possible.

•(1645)

The Chair: You have two minutes, if you want to share.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Thank you.

Minister, I have one more thing I want to ask you to address. I'm very gratified by what I've heard today simply because the numerous women's organizations have been very mindful that Status of Women now is not a closed thing. It's open to everyone, and it's not based on certain advocacy groups or certain friends of government. It's open to the Canadian public.

Could you please talk a little bit about the application and the kinds of people or organizations or individual groups that can apply?

Hon. Bev Oda: I certainly will.

I would say that the qualifications and the eligibility are clearly spelled out. They certainly don't reference any limitations as far as the organizations are concerned. They indicate profit, non-profit, etc. They indicate a requirement to be a registered corporation or non-profit organization because of the accountability as to the establishment, the organization, the kind of governance, the kind of management of the resources that would be there within the community organizations or any organizations, so I would look at this.

As you know, the Department of Canadian Heritage has a number of grant and contribution programs outside the Status of Women. The qualifications are no different from those spelled out here.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Madame Demers, pour cinq minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Minister, you alluded in your presentation to women who are the victims of human trafficking and you stated that the former Minister had established a new program for these women. As part of the program, rather than treat these women like criminals, temporary visas of up to 120 days are issued to the women and they are offered any necessary health care free of charge.

Can you tell me, first of all, if physical and mental health services are provided? Secondly, do you feel the level of care provided is adequate? Do you not think that special steps should be taken to ensure that these women are not sent back to their country of origin and forced to resume their old lives? If deported, they will be forced to live under the same conditions with the same persons who were responsible for making them victims of human trafficking.

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you for that question.

As I understand it, they are as accessible to the health services as any other Canadian would be accessible under the existing programs as well, so they are treated no differently from any Canadian citizen as far as accessing health care or the range of health care.

I also would like to thank you for asking if this is sufficient, and what the next steps are. That's why I'm looking forward to receiving the report from this committee. I hope you will give us some very concrete suggestions as to what next steps could be done. This committee has taken a very proactive and a very positive action, and I know you are moving into other areas. I look forward to recommendations and suggestions that might come forward from the committee on looking at your next topic, which is the economic wealth of women.

The Chair: Madame Deschamps, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Madam Minister, I'd like to focus for a moment on the fact that organizations demanding rights for women are now being excluded from the Women's Program. As you know, on September 25 last, your government also abolished the Court Challenges Program which helped many agencies defend certain rights, notably those of women's groups, before the courts.

In your opinion, Madam Minister, was the decision to do away with this program a wise one? What options do women now have when it comes to defending their rights?

• (1650)

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: I think the court challenges program was set up to fund court challenges to the government itself. I would suggest that it's about taking the full responsibility that each one of us has to ensure that the rights of every individual, within any legislation or any act taken by the government, are equitably and fairly and judiciously applied. That's where the first responsibility lies.

I would also suggest that the rights of women should be defended by this committee. When it looks at any bill or any program of any government, its responsibility.... You can certainly listen to different organizations, groups, viewpoints, etc., and that's what I would suggest. We have a committee whose responsibility it is to work on behalf of women. You have the ability to review any piece of legislation or call before you any minister if you have concerns.

The court challenges program, as you know, was specifically set up to take a government to court. I ask you to be very diligent in the responsibilities we all share together.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go on to Ms. Mathysen for five minutes.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

With all due respect, Minister, this committee asked for proactive pay equity legislation, and we were denied. So I'm a little concerned about the influence we have with this government.

I did want to come back to the consultations. I didn't get a full answer on that. At any point in these cost-saving consultations, did you actually talk to the staff in the regional offices to find out what kind of expertise they could bring to this process?

Ms. Florence Ievers: As I said, we had built on processes—a consultation process and a governance process—which we had undertaken quite some time before. So we had the basis of that information on which to make our decisions. But the director general

of the program did informally go to the regions and have discussions with the staff of the program on things in general.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Okay.

Now, part of the rationale for all of this—getting rid of staff and closing down offices—is this notion that SWC spends 31¢ of every dollar of the money that they have on delivery. I'm wondering what analysis you did to come to this figure of 31¢. And if you did analyze that, can you provide that to the committee so that we can have a look?

Ms. Florence Ievers: That number was first mentioned in the evaluation of the women's program that was done in 2005, and that report is available. We'll make sure you get it.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Okay, but can you explain in any way how you came to this figure of 31¢? What was it specifically that led you to come to that figure?

Ms. Florence Ievers: The evaluators came to that conclusion. In the regions there was more than strictly the delivery of the program. Now we're concentrating strictly on the delivery of the program.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I look forward to seeing that.

• (1655)

I have one last question.

Just before the break in December, we received information—in fact, I have a copy of the press release here—indicating that Conservative MPs were calling shelters in their ridings and telling them to apply for funding from the women's program.

It seems to me that this is most inappropriate. It smacks of influence peddling. I'm wondering, Minister, if you're as concerned about it as many of us were—certainly the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses was concerned enough to send out the press release—and I'm wondering what you've done in terms of investigating this.

Hon. Bev Oda: First of all, I don't see it as a situation that needs investigating. In fact, I would encourage all members to let the organizations in their communities become aware of the opportunities that are there under the women's program and the new terms and conditions. As I indicated, you have a number of organizations that are never eligible, and would never even have considered applying to Status of Women. Consequently I would suggest that every member talk to their local organizations and work with them and identify their needs—as we do in many areas—and see if there is a program available that can help them meet their needs.

I know I do this and that my riding office does this many times on many occasions in many areas. I have environmental groups that say they want to save the marshes, etc., and it's our responsibility to see what support might be available, even informing them of government programs available to help these organizations that are doing good work in their communities.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Well, that's odd, Minister, because it seemed to be only Conservative MPs who had heard about this windfall.

Hon. Bev Oda: No, Conservative MPs were as aware as any other members of the new terms and conditions.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Other members were not aware, Minister, and I would say to you—

Hon. Bev Oda: Of the new terms and conditions? Certainly there were lot of—

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: It seemed to me, Minister, you were pitting one women's group against another, and that's how the women in Canada saw it, and that's why they complained.

Hon. Bev Oda: I don't understand how—

An hon. member: Can I respond?

Hon. Bev Oda: Can I respond?

The Chair: Yes, the minister has to respond, please.

Hon. Bev Oda: As you know, the terms and conditions were made public. There's been much discussion in the House of Commons about the new terms and conditions. All members could certainly call my office or Status of Women and ask for copies. Those terms and conditions were posted on the website as soon as they were available, so I would say the accusation or suggestion is unfounded.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

There's a last question, and then, Minister, I'll give you time to wrap up.

Ms. Minna, you have two minutes.

Hon. Maria Minna: I'll be very quick.

Maybe, Madam Chair, we could ask the minister to table the letter she mentioned, which Minister Papatello sent to her.

More importantly, the minister has said we've had advocacy for 25 years, but I don't understand how she feels that because we've had that for 25 years it's been enough, as if we've already attained every possible equality and don't need it. In the past, regarding violence against women, the only reason that men were being charged without the spouse's permission happened because of advocacy. Women were not able to do that before the advocacy. With all of the research that's been done with respect to pay equity, we still haven't attained it, and so advocacy is still needed there. There's still a lot of advocacy being done on EI stuff, on court challenges, on a whole lot of things.

So, Madam Minister, you're basically telling Canadian women that they've had 25 years and that's enough; they can't advocate any more; that's it, they've reached their limit.

Is that what you're saying?

Hon. Bev Oda: No, that is not what I am saying.

Hon. Maria Minna: That's what you're telling us.

Hon. Bev Oda: The answer to that question is no. What we're saying is that taxpayers' dollars will not be spent or used to fund organizations in their advocacy activities.

Hon. Maria Minna: Then with all due respect, Minister, it's a no.

Hon. Bev Oda: We have not said that no one can continue to advocate. You've identified a number of issues that many organizations will continue to advocate on.

The Chair: Ms. Minna, you still have 30 seconds.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thirty seconds, okay.

Basically the minister has said no. She says they cannot be funded, and if you cannot be funded.... Most organizations do not live on thin air. In essence, advocacy is no longer going to be funded; therefore, there will be no advocacy allowed any longer, except by those who are wealthy and can get lots of money from banks, or somewhere else, I gather.

• (1700)

Hon. Bev Oda: Ms. Minna, I know of a number of organizations that do good work in the community, whether it's advocacy or any other, and they do it through many other means. Consequently, I would suggest that there are many, many groups that advocate and get heard, and not necessarily because they're only publicly funded.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

This brings us to the end of the discussion.

What I'd like to do, Minister, is to ask if you wish to take a minute to wrap up, if there are things you haven't said but would like to say.

Also, before you start, I received a letter written by Sandra Papatello. It's not bilingual, so we will make it available to the committee later.

Hon. Bev Oda: Yes, that was in response to the request of the minister to table the letter.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today. I will not repeat my remarks, but I would say that I do look forward to your report on human trafficking. I look forward to some very concrete recommendations that this government may be able to act on. I recognize that there were some very good questions regarding the next steps that could be taken. I invite the committee to continue their work on that and many areas. I applaud you and commend you for your work.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Madame Ievers.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Members, I'd like to temporarily suspend while the minister leaves.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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