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Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Now that we have you here, Ms. Jacobs, we're going to start the meeting.

Ms. Jacobs, our normal process is that the witness speaks for 10 minutes, and then there will be questions and answers from different groups. It will be an interactive session, because they get five to seven minutes to ask questions.

You have some notes that you have sent over, right?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs (President, Native Women's Association of Canada): No, we didn't.

The Chair: Okay, fair enough.

Would you like to start?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Sure.

Good afternoon. I'm still catching my breath.

The Chair: Take a deep breath and you'll be fine.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: First of all, I just wanted to say thank you for the opportunity to present here today on this specific issue of economic security for elderly women.

I want to present an overview of the Native Women's Association of Canada, the representation within the organization, our membership, who we represent, and some of the difficulties we have in answering your questions.

First of all, the Native Women's Association represents 13 provincial or territorial member associations across the country, so we have an affiliate in every province and territory. There's membership through each of those provincial and territorial organizations. We have 22 board members. The presidents of those PTMAs, as well as four youth and four elders, sit on our board. We've been trying to coordinate an elders' council through the Native Women's Association of Canada for quite some time now in order to get feedback from the elders, in order for us to provide the necessary guidance that's needed from our elders, from our women, from those we call the "knowledge keepers" in our communities.

One of the difficulties we've had, which we've always had in the Native Women's Association, is capacity. This is an issue that is constantly brought up. We want to be able to, and I, as the national leader for the Native Women's Association, want to be able to bring issues to you when they are about specific questions you have.

Sometimes there are huge challenges to getting this kind of information, not only for the national organization and headquarters, but also for each of those provinces and territory affiliates, and to being able to provide that kind of information to our organization and to being able to tell you and to give you some guidance and some recommendations that you're asking for.

For a long time, a lot of our board members have worked on a volunteer basis because there is no capacity. And because there is the volunteerism within the organization itself, a lot of the information that I try to obtain from them is very difficult because of the lack of capacity.

When we're talking about economic security for elderly women, we also mean for aboriginal women in general. We are trying to make decisions and trying to come up with required strategies and provide answers to you on the specific questions you're asking.

It is a huge struggle. Many times we have asked for long-term core funding for our organization, and for the provincial and territorial member associations, in order for them to function and to be able to provide the research that's necessary, the policy analysis that's necessary. Many times it doesn't happen.

Also, for these committee dates, when we're asked to present with one week's notice, there's no capacity for us to gather that information from our provinces and territories in order to do the kind of research needed to be able to give you an informed answer.

I can give you the anecdotal, from experience and from what I hear from them, but that's difficult for me to do when I have a board of directors that I am responsible for and that I have to answer to, when maybe they don't agree with what I'm saying. If I say something to you and it's not what the board of directors or what the women in the communities might want me to say, that's the difficulty I have in being able to bring that forward to you.

I've taken this opportunity because you're asking a very specific question about economic security for elderly women. We have elders in our communities. We have huge issues that I would like to be able to provide to you, but I can't. I can't because I don't have the staff in my office to be able to gather the information, because we're a project-based organization. There are very specific criteria when we have a project, a contribution agreement. There are work plans; there are deliverables. So when we have to pull staff who are supposed to be directed to work on these very specific deliverables within a contribution agreement and ask them to take some of their time away to start to answer the questions you're asking us.... And we want to. We want to be able to provide that information to you, but then it takes away from what they're required to do. So that was the feedback that I also had from our staff.

When we are asking to be able to present to you on these very specific issues, that is very complicated. There's research that needs to be done, and we could go to each of our provinces and territories and ask them for information and answers. So again, it's like a ripple effect. If they don't have the capacity in the provinces and territories to be able to even provide that answer back to us, and we don't have the staff to dedicate the time to do that, then, again, it's a whole ripple effect in trying to provide those answers to you.

I wanted to be able to say that to you because a lot of the time we are trying to keep up with everything. A lot of the time a lot of the issues that we're having to deal with...it is always about reacting to issues that need to be answered or about providing guidance to or analysis of different situations. That's the difficulty we're under. We put forward a whole funding proposal to the federal government after Kelowna, because we thought at that time that there was going to be an opportunity for us to have the capacity to be able to answer these questions. Because of the lack of funding now, as a result of Kelowna, it has affected the capacity of our organization and it is no longer a topic of discussion. We have to try to be creative in trying to create project funding, again, for a national organization that represents women across the country. A lot of the economic and fiscal needs that are required for our organization are not taken into consideration.

So I think it's really important. I wanted to address those challenges with you because there is a lot of work that we've been trying to do and trying to maintain.

• (1540)

We now have a staff of about 30 in our organization, and again, it's very specific to projects that are in the organization.

The Chair: Ms. Jacobs, could you please do your concluding remarks, because you have 20 seconds left?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Okay, I'm finished.

• (1545)

The Chair: Fair enough.

I had a little intervention from Ms. Minna. She was asking me what was the information that was submitted to you. I guess the committee is looking at the factors that contribute to poverty in senior years. Is that what your question was?

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): No, with respect, Madam Chair. I apologize to the witness, but I think it might help the witness.

In the discussion we had about what the focus of this study would be, it was my recollection that we agreed that because what happens to women during their earning years directly affects their retirement years, as to whether or not they are poor, we need to study the determinants that go into the economic security of women during their—

The Chair: Senior years.

Hon. Maria Minna: No, during their productive years as well, not just their senior years.

It was looking at economic security for women from the time they're working adults in the work place, and also for seniors. Is this not a study on seniors? That's my understanding. Am I correct?

The Chair: You're correct.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The study in front of me is on the economic security of senior women, and we should have had that discussion last week.

But we can address those issues in our Q and A.

Hon. Maria Minna: I understand that it's for future discussion. The questions asked of witnesses should not be restricted to seniors' poverty. It really is a broad issue.

Actually, I want to go to the core, and I know that wasn't the question asked and you didn't address it, but I suspect, Ms. Jacobs, that you do have some of the answers. The core reason for poverty among senior women, in general, but also women in native and aboriginal communities, has to do with the economic costs incurred by women, in terms of their labour force attachment to take on greater roles of unpaid caregiving.

To what extent are women in the aboriginal and native communities affected with respect to having to take non-standard work, part-time work as opposed to full-time? Or is it the lack of access to training or education that would give them the kinds of skills or the kinds of jobs...depending on whether they live?

Basically I'm looking at the core reasons for women not being able to have access to the labour force in any consistent way, which ultimately also affects their poverty level when they're seniors.

Could you give us a bit of an idea of what the major determinants would be, in your view? I mentioned non-standard work and education, but I'm sure there are others that you may expand upon.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: In the sense of being prepared for the presentation, the question that was asked was on economic security for senior years. The work we have been doing specifically for what we've called the AHRDA, the aboriginal human resources development agreement is about some agreements that we have with the provinces and territories. We have been hearing a lot about the issues with respect to older women—I wouldn't say elderly women—with children who are going back to school in order to better themselves, to become educated. There are huge barriers in the sense of finding child care and finding the places that will take them in the training and education systems. If those are the questions you are asking us to do the research on, what I was saying earlier is that we have to be given an opportunity to get all of that research you're asking us to gather from the past five years of reports, so that we can provide that information to you.

I'm hesitant to try to provide that information. I would like to be able to come back once there's a concrete issue that you're asking us about and we can find that information for you. I can respond from the top of my head, from what I've heard from women, from the reports that I can remember having read and from what we're doing in the office, but again, that is something I would be hesitant to do. I would be hesitant to say at this point—

● (1550)

Hon. Maria Minna: If you were focusing on senior women only in the communities, what would you say the level of poverty is among seniors? Also, what are the causes for that poverty? Do you know?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: I guess the question is what we're talking about when we say poverty and being poor. I would tell you that the elders in my community would say they are not poor. They would say they are rich in their language, rich in their traditions, rich in the relationship they have with their community. So in addressing what the level of poverty means, to me, the question is whose analysis or on what basis are we starting from, and how are we defining poverty? If there are elders who are living on a trap line, for example, and are living a traditional lifestyle, they have food, they have what's required and what they feel is necessary within their community, and they have a lifestyle with which they're happy and living their lives.... Again, it comes back to the question of on what basis of analysis are we defining poverty. Are we just talking about economics? Are we just talking about dollars? Or are we talking about a lifestyle and a way of life?

My elders would say they would rather be living on the land, they would rather have their language, and they would rather be teaching their young people about our way of life than have to worry about anything else.

The Chair: Ms. Minna, you have about 20 seconds.

Hon. Maria Minna: It's a little bit of all of that. Maybe you can follow up on the question with some of my colleagues around the table.

I want to get a sense of how well aboriginal senior women are faring in general. I'm sure that in such a diverse community there are many different situations, and I'd like to understand what they are.

The Chair: Ms. Jacobs, when you are answering some other question or making your closing remarks, maybe you can include your response.

Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Welcome, Ms. Jacobs. It is a pleasure for us to welcome you here.

We have heard of several problems that you are living with within your association and your affiliates, all of which provides you, among other things, with an overall view of the difficulties faced by Aboriginal women. During the course of your presentation, you mentioned the Kelowna meeting. Following this meeting, there probably were recommendations, and commitments made by the government. Has there been a follow-up flowing from this meeting?

● (1555)

[*English*]

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: There have been no discussions with this government, other than with Minister Prentice, on how we can better the organization. We have talked about core funding, but again that's just talk. Because they talked about project funding, we can submit whatever we can for projects.

We have a core of people who are funded within the organization, but we only get \$300,000. All of these projects are coming on and we're getting bigger and bigger, but the core stays the same. It affects how work is done internally and how much we can handle.

If we don't have a core that's growing with the projects, it affects the capacity and the people who are working within that core. They have to work overtime to keep up with everything that's required for the projects that are growing. So it causes a lot of internal frustration in trying to maintain it.

After Kelowna we had discussions and were told by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development that they were looking at core funding, but we haven't heard any more.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Did you also receive funding from Status of Women under its Womens' Program, for example?

[*English*]

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: We have the Sisters in Spirit initiative that's funded through Status of Women. That hasn't changed. It has been maintained because it is very sensitive, and we were promised \$5 million for it over five years. We are working with the families of the missing and murdered aboriginal women across the country.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Have you finished?

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I could give up some of my time.

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

Ms. Jacobs, thank you very much for being here.

In order for an elderly woman to have financial and emotional security, she must have had a good job during her working life. However, in 2001, only 7% of Aboriginal women, aged 25 years and up, had a university degree.

Are there any special programs being offered in the communities in order to encourage your Aboriginal women to pursue a post-secondary education?

• (1600)

[*English*]

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: There may be programs on reserve. I don't have that specific information.

The Native Women's Association of Canada has been doing AHRDA work for aboriginal women living off reserve, regardless of their status or where they live. One of the difficulties we've been finding is the specific focus for young aboriginal women. We're working right now on the need for young aboriginal women in post-secondary education, or trying to get them to consider post-secondary education.

I can give you the specific example of my own daughter. We live in Six Nations Grand River territory. I went to law school and did my master's degree in law. She was eight years old when I started and I was a single mother. After the Oka crisis, and because I'm Mohawk, I thought maybe I should learn about my enemy's law, and learn about the colonizer's law. So I made that decision to understand it. Now my daughter is 23 years old and has two babies. She has made the decision to become a doctor. So she's trying to finish her post-secondary degree and work it all in for herself with her two babies.

She is one example of how difficult it is for young aboriginal women. There are a lot of young aboriginal women with young families who are trying to obtain post-secondary education. There are barriers that exist, not only institutionally in trying to obtain the education required, but also in the programs and services needed so they don't have to worry about whether they can feed their kids—

The Chair: Finish your sentence.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: —pay for day care, pay the babysitter, or find a babysitter after day care is over. So those kinds of very specific things are needed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): It certainly is an honour to have you here at our committee, and an honour to speak with you and have your intelligence and your expertise come to the table. As a committee, we thank you for that.

Today in Winnipeg we had a very disturbing story about kids and the sex trade, about kids as young as eight years old being used and abused by men, with 70% of those children being aboriginal children.

As you know, Ms. Jacobs, we have been studying the human trafficking issue here at the status of women committee. Today we asked you to come to speak on economic concerns of aboriginal women. When I listen to you speak today, I think we're at a point in

our Canadian history when we have to think a little differently from how we thought before.

Many of the things you talk about I'm personally aware of only because our son is married to an Ojibwa girl. She tells me many things. Her sister is in social work and family services, and many stories and many testimonies come forward.

We as a committee wanted to talk about how we could attack the problems that are facing women. When I read a story and know about what's happening to these young children coming from homes where they don't have enough to eat, it's sometimes what you call survival sex, and it's not only by human traffickers, but by peers who also encourage them to do the tricks so that they can survive.

We talk about programming. I've also been a firm believer that education is a window that helps a lot of people. I think about your testimony today, about going through school and becoming a lawyer, and about your daughter now wanting to be in the medical field. Could you please comment on the education side of it from your perspective?

What kinds of things could be put in place to help young families and children? There are many young moms who are raising children. I've met many of these young moms, and they love their children just like I love my children. They want the best, but the worries and the stress on their shoulders just from daily life, whether it's substance or whether betrayal or whatever happens to them, impact them in a very negative way. Could you please make some comment on the education side, as you see it, in terms of opening doors to economic stability for young moms? We are talking about more than seniors, as my colleague Ms. Minna said. For young moms, as well as seniors and young people, I know that's a big question, but could you do that?

• (1605)

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: There are so many issues I can address. Things do need to change—the way of thinking in institutions and how they're created. There are a lot of holistic ideas, which is part of what I see is needed, rather than putting things in boxes and saying this is one thing and this is another. When you're talking about specific issues, for example, the education system, it's put in a little box where, again, it's, let's see what can be changed.

In reality, there are a whole bunch of other issues. With respect to an aboriginal young woman wanting to be educated, even before making that decision it's knowing who they are, where they want to go in their life, and that they want to make changes in their life. There are two sides to education. Education is also about knowing who you are as an aboriginal person, that you have a history and that you have a community.

There is a lot of oppressiveness that has been occurring in our communities. A lot of young women are coming out of the oppressiveness now. You'll see there's a high percentage of aboriginal girls and women who are becoming more educated. Because of that, and because of what's happening within our communities, there's a lot of personal healing and a lot of acknowledgement of the education system.

It's taking a risk. You're moving away. If you decide to go to university in Saskatchewan, for example, your home is where your home is, but you make the decision to move and you take your kids with you. You have to figure out what you need when you get there. So housing is an issue.

• (1610)

The Chair: We'll now go to Ms. Mathysen for seven minutes.

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

Thank you, Ms. Jacobs. It's a privilege to have you back again.

I find it quite ironic that we are again asking for your advice and guidance in terms of policy decisions and the things we need to do as government. Quite clearly, we are not providing the core funding you need to do it. In fact, the core funding for things such as advocacy and research, which you pointed out were so essential, has been removed from Status of Women Canada.

Nonetheless, you're here, and I do have some questions. I want to backtrack a bit. As I'm sure you remember, the last time we met we looked at the matrimonial property rights of first nations women. There has been some concern about the process. I wonder if you could update us about that process. Are you happy with what has taken place? We've heard it was too quick and that it wasn't as thorough as it should have been. I wonder if you could tell us about that and what we need to do to address that.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: The Native Women's Association has been presenting at Senate committees and standing committees regarding matrimonial real property. In the last standing committee, one of the recommendations we made was to have a full year of consultations, to have a full year to be able to develop. We knew there was also an education and awareness piece of this in the communities and with the women, and a lot of them weren't even aware that this was an issue. That became quite obvious in the three months of consultations we did have.

In those consultations, the women who did come forward took a risk. We had asked the women who were directly affected by this issue of matrimonial real property to come into a safe environment so they could come up with solutions.

When they did come forward, in many cases it was the first time they had even had the opportunity to talk about it, so it was opening up old wounds. There were some women who had been separated and divorced for 15 or 20 years, and the first time they came together to talk about it, it was still a very emotional, raw issue to talk about. Most instances involved violence and abusive relationships. Most times they lost their homes; they had to force themselves to leave their homes and take their children with them. They had to find places to live. A lot of times that is what happened.

We had to go through that process, and it was the Department of Indian Affairs that said they wanted to get this done by today, by February, so there ended up being only three months of consultations. We were constantly told that it wasn't enough time, and we were criticized throughout the whole process, when we knew that was the case right from the beginning.

We went ahead with it because we knew it was needed, and it was also an opportunity for the women to voice their solutions.

So right now we're in this consensus-building stage. Again, it's going quickly. We have two weeks for INAC, AFN, and NWAC to come up with a solution, or with a consensus of all the positions we're bringing forward. We're supposed to have that done by this Friday.

Again, I had to leave my office. We were having a conference call with our board. Again, it comes back to capacity, because we're trying to advise our board at the last minute that this is what's been happening all along. We need the board to approve whether we can give them information, whether we can provide the draft legislation that we are drafting ourselves, based on the consultations and on what we heard from the women. We have to go through the whole process again and try to create something or to implement something very quickly.

Although we had said we wanted something done quickly, right from the beginning, again, we didn't mean we wanted it done without the voices of the women in the communities. So there's a real frustration right now, and I'm feeling the frustration myself in trying to come up with this consensus they're asking for.

• (1615)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: What will happen? I understand the difference between moving quickly and being shortchanged. If you can't come up with this draft legislation, what do you see happening in regard to this issue?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: I think what was missing was the actual community consultations within first nations communities. The Assembly of First Nations had their consultations.

The Chair: That'll be it for you.

Sorry, go ahead. Finish your sentence. I'm just letting the members know that their time is up.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Their consultations were with the chiefs.

The Chair: We will now go to the second round, for five minutes.

We have Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you for coming.

I know you said the elders wouldn't say they're poor, but sometimes the government gives grants to people for various things and they'll make them tax-exempt. We have a problem where some of our first nations want to give their elders an extra bit of money. But when they do, what happens is it becomes taxable income and they lose some of their guaranteed income supplement, which is a pension from the Government of Canada for the poorest of the poor. I'm hoping to make that provision so that the money the first nation gives its elders would be tax-free. Would you be supportive of that?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Of course.

I will tell you that my elders would say, "We're supposed to be tax-free anyway."

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay.

One other question. The government has cancelled or put on hold a number of programs. I'm just going to list them. Could you tell me if any of these are useful or helpful to your members, or that we shouldn't have cut? They are: the aboriginal procurement program; the Indian and Inuit non-smoking strategy; the aboriginal justice strategy; the Kelowna accord; the aboriginal language initiative; literacy programs; Status of Women inequity; the Law Commission of Canada; and the court challenges program.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: How long do I have to answer?

The Chair: You've got three and a half minutes.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Well, I'll just tell you every one of those affects aboriginal communities, and us as a native women's association specifically.

I talked about Kelowna already.

The language issue, that's a huge one. I'll tell you right now that the language programs at home are already struggling, and for that program to be totally cut is totally wrong because it affects our future generations. The language programs were empowering our young people and empowering our elders to be able to do their job, because that's part of our culture and our tradition and our education system, for our elders to teach our youth and our young people. And that's what was happening in our communities, our elders were teaching our young people the language. I am hearing it in my own community that with this language cut, that's going to end in March, and they're struggling to figure out how it's going to continue. A lot of them are saying, "Well, we're going to go ahead with it anyway", but the poverty issue is coming up again.

With respect to literacy, we have the statistics already about literacy issues and the effects it has.

With respect to the Status of Women, there are a lot of questions, a lot of issues with respect to the issue of advocacy. I mean, that's the whole purpose of the Native Women's Association, to advocate for aboriginal women across the country, and the research we do, and to provide policy development and policy advice.

We were just starting to work on an MOU with the Law Commission of Canada, to begin work on indigenous legal traditions

with aboriginal women involvement, and with the leadership of aboriginal women in the community.

With respect to the court challenges program, we were using court challenges on a daily basis to argue and present section 15 arguments on equality rights for aboriginal women. So with that cut, again, it affects the impact we have to advocate for aboriginal women in the communities.

• (1620)

The Chair: You've got 30 seconds, if you want to have any closing remarks.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: You didn't talk about the non-smoking strategy or the justice strategy.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Well, the justice strategy, again, goes along with specific areas of women's decision-making and aboriginal justice, because there are very specific issues that needed to be addressed with respect to healing and wellness. And that's a whole part of what aboriginal justice is.

The non-smoking strategy was a huge strategy that was being implemented within our first nations communities, and it was working.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go over to Mr. Stanton for five minutes.

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

Thank you to our witness this afternoon.

I actually heard you as a witness for the first time when I was filling in on, I believe, the human resources committee. We were talking about education as it related to first nations. It's good to see you back.

In your opening comments, and in some of the background notes that we studied in preparation for today, I noticed an interesting piece of information that suggested that aboriginal women are in fact outpacing aboriginal men in terms of their educational attainment. I hope that has a lot to do with what your organization is doing for aboriginal women. Do you have any comments on why that's happening?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: I don't know whether it's the organization, but I think it has a lot to do with the advocacy that has been out there for a long time. I think aboriginal women and young women are starting to address the issues of oppression and healing and wellness, and a lot of those empowerment role models that are out there for young people I think have been a huge—

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I don't mean to cut you off, but since I have five minutes, I'm going to try to move it along.

It's certainly a very encouraging trend, because all the information that we have seen would suggest that, as we move forward, issues of economic security and poverty all have a direct link back to educational attainment. In fact, even in our last weeks' presentations we heard this. And it's very compelling.

In fact, I'm reminded that our government has recently made arrangements with the Province of British Columbia with respect to a new educational regime that will in fact bring a higher level educational format to on-reserve education in British Columbia.

I know it's early at this point, and that MOU or that new understanding or that new regime for education on reserve in British Columbia is new. But do you have any thoughts so far on what kind of promise that might bring for continuing education for your people?

• (1625)

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: I think one of the things I have seen recently is that for those kinds of initiatives that are developed for aboriginal people in the communities, there's never a gender analysis done with respect to who is gaining the services. If it is aboriginal women who are the majority, then at some instance I would be worried in the future for our men. That's part of our culture, creating a balance between our men and our women.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: It's a good point, although first things first, when we consider that it would appear that aboriginal women, from the standpoint of the kinds of circumstances they're faced with... Being a woman is one thing, but then also being an aboriginal woman, as referred to in our background notes, is almost a kind of double jeopardy. So they are really coming from behind. I would say that, agreeably, we want equity in education, but it would appear that there is starting to be some good progress made.

Finally, I don't know if we have time for this or not, but we currently have a bill before the House regarding the repeal—I guess it's a repeal, but I don't have a legal background—of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act with respect to removing the clause as it relates to limiting human rights for aboriginal peoples. Do you have any thoughts on that initiative that is currently under way in the House of Commons?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: I'm actually glad you asked that question.

The Native Women's Association created a plan back in May of 2006. We had developed a proposal, and it was the proposal we had with the Law Commission of Canada, the Department of Justice, and Indian Affairs. We were having these discussions because we'd created a plan on how to implement something within the communities that would address human rights violations in the communities.

Unfortunately, we're not agreeing to an immediate repeal. We're agreeing to a repeal, but there has to be an implementation plan in place. There are issues that have not been addressed in the community, such as Bill C-31, and there's already a conflict in the community. It would open the floodgates for human rights.

It is a positive thing for women to be able to have access to it, but there are a lot of issues women are talking about in the communities. They want to be able to address this in a healthy way rather than in an adversarial way. What can we implement in the community before it's done?

The Chair: Thank you.

We said we would end this meeting at 4:30, and we have some committee business to do. If it's the will of the committee, I'll give three minutes to the Bloc member and three minutes to the NDP, and

we'll wrap up with Ms. Jacobs. We'll then go to committee business, as we have some things to discuss.

Madam Demers, for three minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Jacobs, I attended a little luncheon last week hosted by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and it was explained to us there that several of these 145 projects that are now under way will come to a halt because of a lack of funding. The funding for these projects will go from 300 million to 125 million dollars.

It has been said that women have a head start on men in the area of education. Will the cuts we discussed earlier and those made to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's projects threaten the advancement that women have accomplished over the past few years?

What can we, as members of Parliament, do in order to help move you towards greater autonomy?

• (1630)

[*English*]

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: I think the specific cuts are going to have a major impact on aboriginal women specifically. All of those are very empowering issues and strategies, not only for aboriginal women but for aboriginal people in general.

We can talk about the issues, the education system, and positiveness with respect to how aboriginal women have been able to gain what's needed. I really don't think it's going to end in the sense of women healing.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation had many programs and services within aboriginal communities, and there were a lot of people who took advantage of those. Again, they were for specific purposes in the legacy of the residential school system.

I think aboriginal women wanting to better themselves is indicative of where we're at in today's society. They're saying it's enough. It's enough of anything. It's enough violence and it's enough control that you have over their lives. I think aboriginal women are moving forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen for three minutes.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We're talking about the security of people and the security of aboriginal women. This is a two-part question. I'm wondering if aboriginal women have difficulties or face challenges in accessing health care. Secondly, would a national housing strategy, a real strategy that encompasses all of the country, help aboriginal women in terms of access to shelter and proper housing, so that they can be secure?

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: Health and housing are actually very specific issues that we were supposed to address after Kelowna. Housing, with respect to a national housing strategy, was something we also addressed in our position paper on matrimonial real property.

The issue of poverty and housing was a consistent message about the housing crisis on reserve. Even if a woman left her community or went out to find somewhere to live in the community, there was nowhere to go. And it's not only not having a house. Affordable housing and safe housing are also priority issues, I believe.

With respect to first nations and Inuit and health, when it comes to health services for first nations people, the health issues themselves have become bureaucratic ones. In a sense, what was provided in what a lot of our people have said about treaty rights—the treaty right to health—was the idea that I have a right to have the services I need. Now when we get prescriptions, they're telling us that prescriptions have to be paid for. If a doctor provides a prescription for a certain medication, when we go to the pharmacy, they tell us the Department of Indian Affairs won't cover it. They end up giving us a secondary, generic brand of medication.

That again goes back to our elders. This is something my elders have told me just recently. Why are they paying for this? This is something they were told was never supposed to happen. That's a real issue right now with respect to prescriptions.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Jacobs, if you have some closing remarks to make, what I'd like to do is give you two minutes. Sorry, but you have been through this, and we need to maintain time.

Ms. Beverley Jacobs: That's okay.

I just want to again thank you for the opportunity to be able to present today. I wasn't thinking that I was going to be presenting as much as I did.

With respect to all of these issues that we're talking about, there's what I said earlier about levels of poverty. Whose definition of poverty are we talking about?

Economic security for future generations also goes to the issues we talk about when we talk about the holistic thinking on economic development. A lot of issues with respect to economic development are also impacting future generations.

If we don't start thinking about how the natural world is preserved for all of us, it affects who we are as human beings and how we live on this earth. We need to start thinking about those things, because they do have a huge impact on future generations.

The Chair: Thank you so much for being with us and sharing your knowledge.

I know you have been here before; this is the first time that I have been present to listen to you, and I was really impressed. Thank you for those words of wisdom.

Committee members, I have about four things on which I need direction.

You have received in your packages briefs presented by various groups on the potential impact of funding cuts to Status of Women Canada. They were sent to you.

Next Tuesday the analyst would like to get your feedback as to how to prepare that report and what recommendations you wish to

get into it. I would recommend that committee members please get up to speed on whatever has happened so far.

Madam, do you want to speak?

Ms. Julie Cool (Committee Researcher): I just wanted to let you know that we have prepared a summary document that summarizes the evidence received in the briefs. It will be sent to your offices. You will have it by Monday, if not Friday.

The Chair: Do you mean you're going to spoil them like that? Okay, fair enough.

That Tuesday meeting could be a very intense meeting. That's what we need, right?

Number two is the report on trafficking, I was going to call it, but it's not called trafficking. What is the name we gave this report?

Here it is. I'll read it out. The title is "Turning Outrage into Action to Address Trafficking for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation in Canada". You guys chose that title. It should be ready by Monday or Tuesday.

Ms. Smith was suggesting that we all be there when the report is being presented. All of you will be in the House on Tuesday, so we will do it Tuesday.

I have read a draft press release and I find it perfectly okay. If you wish to have a copy of it, I am willing to pass it around. It's not translated at the moment; it's just in English.

● (1640)

Mrs. Joy Smith: Could we have that draft press release sent to our offices to have it for our records? At our next meeting on Tuesday, could we all comment on it briefly? I'm sure it's perfectly fine.

The Chair: Why don't we do that? The report is going to be released in the House on Tuesday. Please send your comments. We will send it ASAP, and then you can send in your comments to the clerk of the committee. That way we are not holding anything up.

I'll let the analyst, Julie, speak to the fourth thing we need to do, because we're getting a little confused about the title of what we're discussing. Is it economic security of senior women, etc.? We looked at the motion from Ms. Mathyssen in May 2006:

That, whereas senior women have the right to a fulfilling life with dignity, respect and security; and whereas, poverty levels are alarmingly high among single seniors and especially single senior women; pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on the Status of Women undertake the study of the economic security of senior women, including an exploration of income splitting and care giving, and call forward as witnesses representatives from the Department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, officials from the Department of Finance, and the National Advisory Council on Aging.

After that you had a meeting to discuss it. I think, Ms. Mathyssen, you chaired the meeting. I was absent.

I will first let Julie explain what she understands, and then she'll take direction on where the committee wants to go with it.

Please go ahead, Julie.

Ms. Julie Cool: What we are sending out to potential witnesses is.... If you look at the briefing note that was prepared for today's meeting, there is a little blurb that outlines the context for this study. It's very short; it's two paragraphs. It talks about the economic security of senior women, but it's taking into consideration the economic costs incurred by women who decrease their labour force attachment to take on a greater role in unpaid caregiving, women's disproportionate share of non-standard work, and the lack of education and awareness of the long-term implications of work-family decisions among younger women.

It would be helpful to ensure that this is the question you would like the witnesses to focus on, because the title of the study currently stands as "The Economic Security of Senior Women". With this context, that could be changed.

I just put this before you, because it does seem to lead to confusion.

• (1645)

The Chair: Before Ms. Smith speaks, do you have the work plan that you showed me, please?

Let me just look at the work plan. Then perhaps we can get some clarity.

Ms. Smith is first. Go ahead.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I want to go back to the work plan, because I believe in the work plan, looking at this one. In our previous conversations, we had decided there are other avenues we want to look at as well. We said we would start off with the senior women, but I think we need to have some discussion around this today, because there seems to be some confusion.

We said initially that we wanted to look at migrant workers, at the single moms, at people like that. I don't think we have consolidated that with everything we have done since. Madam Chair, you are not aware of that conversation as much as.... Perhaps we could have that discussion today.

The Chair: Sure. What is the will of the...?

Yes, Ms. Minna?

I'm sorry, Ms. Davidson, did you have your hand up?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): I was just going to say that migrant workers and single moms were the other two things that we decided as a committee we wanted to look at.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you.

I guess I go back to the very last discussion we had. We've had several discussions on these issues, and we've gone at different places. In the very last discussion, we decided we would then move on with economic security for women.

My understanding is that there was consensus on understanding that yes, we would be looking, as part of the study, at senior women, but from the lens that what happens to women who are in the labour force during those producing years directly impacts on the level of

poverty they have when they are seniors. That was something we would be looking at.

My understanding was—and I think I missed the meeting—that we were supposed to have one session discussing what determinants we wanted to look at, so that we could help the researchers as to what things we thought we needed to look at that cause or contribute to economic issues: things like part-time work, self-employment, child rearing, compassionate leave, "time poverty", as defined by the welfare council—identifying the indicators, if you like, looking at them, and having the witnesses add to them.

The question that would go to the witness would be broader, and we would study all of those determinants, but we could see the natural progression of what happens to women when they are seniors, given the fact that their ability to....

That's what I thought we were going to be doing. I don't know that we actually had that meeting to discuss.... Maybe not. I think we had agreed that we would do it, because it was the only way to actually give direction and be able to move forward.

The Chair: As I look at the work plan and the theme, "How does unpaid caregiving affect the income of women throughout their lives?"—

Hon. Maria Minna: That's part of what we were discussing.

The Chair: Okay.

It goes on, "Will upcoming cohorts be different from the current cohorts of seniors?"

Then the second theme was, "What are women looking for in the work-family balance?" The third was, "International best practices in work-family balance". The fourth one was, "Barriers to spending time in unpaid caregiving and possible solutions", and then "Income Splitting".

Hon. Maria Minna: Fair enough. What you're reading is essentially on the witnesses who deal with what we're just talking about. The only concern is the question to the witnesses. Today's witnesses think we're only focusing on seniors. The title says "seniors", which is where the misunderstanding is coming in, I think.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, you were chairing that meeting. Do you have any additional...?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes, it was my understanding that we would go beyond just the issue of senior women and we would indeed take into account the impact on women in the workforce in their younger years so that we could have a full discussion. In terms of the issues to address, there was a list, and it included immigrant women in addition to migrant women, single moms, disabled women, I think, and of course those working part-time or in a casual setting. I did envision a much broader discussion so that we could talk about all these issues.

• (1650)

The Chair: Fair enough. Since the meeting was in camera, I guess there were no minutes on it, and therefore the memory.... There will be minutes, but I guess we do not have them here. We can go and get them.

What I wanted to know was this. The committee had decided they wanted a report by June. So did you guys work backwards to see when the study should be finished and whether you could do justice to that subject?

Yes, Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Yes, we did.

I think it was something like 22 days were available. There would be 15 required in order to produce a report and to make sure there was timeliness in getting the report to the House. So it seemed to me that—

Hon. Maria Minna: There were 13 meetings for preparation, or something like that. So we did discuss quite a bit. That's why I was a bit surprised today.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Ms. Julie Cool: Do you want to keep the title that says, "... Economic Security of Senior Women", because that is the study that was started? It's the title that's—

Hon. Maria Minna: It doesn't reflect what we're trying to do, though.

Ms. Julie Cool: So that's not what you're wanting to do. Okay.

The Chair: When we call the next group of witnesses, we will say they should talk about the economic security of women, whatever group they represent, because we're calling different groups. Is that good?

Hon. Maria Minna: They should talk about, in their view, the indicators that contribute to it.

The Chair: Fair enough. On the communication so far, and what I'm looking at is stuff I have received, it says, "Study on the Economic Security of Senior Women", and it appears that the witnesses—you're right, Ms. Minna—have been told that it is senior women. So we will please ensure that the next round of witnesses are going to be addressing issues from their perspective.

Yes, Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: In all fairness to you, Madam Chair, a lot of this discussion happened prior to your arrival here. We never really had a thorough consolidation of what we're talking about. We had a general discussion. Right now I think we've captured what we mean to do.

The Chair: Are we now satisfied on the direction we're going?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Yes, but we need to be aware of migrant workers, the disabled, and also single moms in that category.

The Chair: On the witness list, we have the Women Elders In Action, WE*ACT, and the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. So I guess you are going to get a whole mixed bag of stuff.

Madam Demers, did you want to say something on protection of witnesses?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, I would like to say something else before we move on. This has nothing to do with what has just been discussed.

I have been sitting on this committee for several weeks and I feel for our witnesses who come to meet with us. I wish to express my views now, while there are no witnesses present.

The committee pays for the witnesses. I believe that we should show them respect by listening to them and by being attentive to what they tell us. These last few weeks, I have seen several members use their BlackBerry in the presence of witnesses, and there really was abuse.

When there are no witnesses here, if we do not wish to listen to each other, then that does not bother me. For my part, I listen to what we say to each other. However, in the presence of witnesses, could we not at least refrain from using BlackBerrys? I find this very disrespectful towards our witnesses. It shows a lack of professionalism on our part when we do not listen to our witnesses and instead use our BlackBerry while they are talking to us.

That is what I wanted to say, but I do not want to make a big do about it. I am simply explaining how I felt.

[English]

The Chair: I will let Ms. Guergis speak, and then we'll see what the will of the committee is.

Every committee has different ways of doing things, and there are people who urgently need to go somewhere. We'll hear some viewpoints and come to a conclusion.

Ms. Guergis.

Hon. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you very much.

I know many of us around the table can multi-task. I know we do it on a regular basis. Since coming here in 2004, I followed the lead of other members when I first got here, recognizing the busy schedules we have.

As a Secretary of State, it would now be completely impossible for me to not look to my BlackBerry at some point. Unfortunately, I'm going to continue to have to do that because I have other responsibilities. I can assure you I can multi-task. I listen very intently and understand the conversation going on around the table. But I really don't think anyone around here should be policing any other MPs as to what they do with their BlackBerrys.

Thank you.

●(1655)

The Chair: Ms. Smith, and then Madam Deschamps.

After Madam Deschamps, it's Ms. Mathysen, and then Ms. Minna.

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Yes, I understand what Madam Demers is saying. We need to be respectful. But on being members of Parliament and not being able to take messages or deal with things, we can multi-task. I agree with Ms. Guergis that we're not here to please other MPs.

I think we always have to be very mindful of the witnesses and very courteous to the witnesses. But I'm sure the witnesses understand the responsibilities we have as members of Parliament.

The Chair: I don't think anybody is suggesting that you listen to another MP. I guess the general thrust is how we should behave so that the witness realizes we are respectful.

If we're going to be on BlackBerrys for 90% of the time, we should be mindful of that. But if we're not going to be on BlackBerrys 90% of the time and we have to check suddenly, I'm sure we can leave to do so.

Oui.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, I did not want to make a big to-do about this. When witnesses are here and they realize what is going on, they are embarrassed, and when they talk to us about it afterwards, it is embarrassing for us. If people do this discreetly — and some do —, then that does not bother me. And if people are doing this now, then that does not bother me either, because we are just amongst ourselves.

That is the only thing I wanted to say. It is simply out of respect for those who come to appear before us and who see our behaviour here as MPs. After all, we are their representatives in the House.

That is all I had to say, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Deschamps, do you want to add anything?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I would like to add a comment with regard to the technology we use. When these BlackBerrys go off or signal that there is a message, the interpreters often tell us that they are unable to do their work because of the interference caused. It therefore often happens that I miss out on information.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think Madam Demers' point on the respect we show to witnesses is very important. I would suggest we maintain that balance.

If something is so urgent that it requires undivided attention, perhaps members should feel free to leave so as not to undermine the importance of the witness testimony. I wouldn't want an MP to be so engaged in his or her BlackBerry that he or she missed a vote or didn't know what was going on. It would be clearly disrespectful.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: I understand Ms. Demers' concern with respect to when witnesses are here and what it looks like. We could certainly try to be a little less active about it.

There are discreet ways of using it, if you have to check to see if it buzzes in case there's an emergency or anything, and maybe we

could be aware of that. I think we're all professional people and we should be able to deal with it.

The only other thing I wanted to say, Madam Chair, goes back for a second to what Madam Smith said earlier with respect to the study, the broader economic study. I think she said migrant workers and the disabled.

The subject of migrant workers is a huge study on its own. I'm not sure I'd want to put it with women's economic security because it's Canadian women and the economic security of Canadian women. The subject of migrant workers is an altogether different bailiwick. I'm not talking about Canadian citizens who are here and who are affected by ongoing day-to-day Canadian lives. It's completely different, and I think it might be a different study.

The Chair: Could I have Ms. Neville and then Ms. Smith?

Go ahead, Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I'm repeating what's been said, Madam Chair. I'm guilty. I've used the BlackBerry, and when I think of what I've done, probably some of it could have waited until after the meeting.

I think there is a level, and I've certainly heard witnesses say that we didn't even listen to them, that we were on our BlackBerrys. I think we have to be mindful of it and try to maintain some kind of balance.

• (1700)

The Chair: On the issue of BlackBerrys, we are all adults, we are professionals, and we know when to draw the line. I would ask all members to respect and keep a balance. We won't bring the subject up again.

Thank you.

On the issue of the economic security of women and the addition of migrant workers and the disabled, Ms. Minna is concerned about migrant workers taking a whole chunk out and being totally different; it's like comparing apples to pears.

We'll hear your viewpoint, Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: All these were listed as things we should look at. Now we're having a discussion as to the timeframe we have and what we can cover during that timeframe. Migrant workers were a huge part of the discussion, initially.

Madam Chair, could I please have your attention?

The Chair: I'm listening to you, but I'm multi-tasking.

Mrs. Joy Smith: You're multi-tasking. I knew that.

This certainly is open for discussion. I know the topic of migrant workers is a huge discussion we had at the beginning. It's something we wanted to look at in the textile industry and in all these kinds of things. But we have I think 13 weeks. Maybe what we need to do is narrow it down. I do not want to miss the single moms.

Hon. Maria Minna: Everything stays—the disabled, single moms, any permanent Canadian resident—that the issue affects. It's just that the migrant worker is in and out and a bit different.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I can understand that, and I agree. I would agree to that.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Guergis.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I just want to support Ms. Minna and her comments. That was my understanding. We had decided on two courses of study and had decided to go with human trafficking and to pick up the other we had already identified. That was how we wanted it to look. That's my preferred choice.

The Chair: Fair enough.

The minutes will reflect that we are putting migrant women aside, but we're including the disabled, single moms, and so on.

Is there any other business?

Oui, Madame.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Since the women who would be appearing would not have the benefit of anonymity, we could at least hear them in private. Some employees of Parliament have working conditions that will not even afford them financial security in their older years. These women sometimes come to me to talk. Two of them would

very much like to appear before the committee, but they are obviously afraid of losing their job. Indeed, if a person appears before a committee, he or she has no assurance that his or her job will still be there afterwards, especially when one's working conditions are unstable.

I wanted to ask the committee to have these people appear in camera.

[*English*]

The Chair: What is the will of the committee?

We are here to protect women in whatever aspect of the workforce they are in.

I am willing to find out the will of the committee. Can we hear witnesses in camera if by not being in camera it jeopardizes their jobs?

Okay, fine. It's agreeable.

The meeting is adjourned.

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