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Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

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•(1610)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Okay. Can I let...?

Do you have in front of you the list of witnesses the clerk tells me has been circulated, and a revised work plan on the economic security of women? Does every one of you have it in your possession?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): We're missing some names.

[English]

The Chair: No? If you don't have it, we have copies here.

Yes, Ms. Guergis.

Hon. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Could we go back in camera for a moment, please?

[Proceedings continue in camera]

- _____ (Pause) _____
- _____

[Public proceedings resume]

•(1615)

The Chair: Order.

We now have before us a revised work plan on the economic security of women, and a list of witnesses. I would entertain any discussion on the matter.

Just to update you on some information, some witnesses that Madame Demers had suggested are not on this list. They'll be updated accordingly.

There's a list of 32-plus witnesses, and one of the areas.... If you look at the list of witnesses, those from numbers 10 to 16 deal with the pension issue. As part of our economic security study, keeping in mind the timeframe within which we want to do it, do you wish to keep pension splitting as part of this study, deadline June? If you do, we keep the witnesses. If you don't, we remove the witnesses.

Yes...?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Pension splitting is on.

Yes, Ms. Smith...or Ms. Minna. I'm calling everybody Ms. Smith today.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): That's okay.

Just to clarify, KAIROS is on the list twice, as is the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. It appears under OCASI and then as Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants.

The Chair: Okay.

And a few of the witnesses we've already heard from—we know who they are—but there's still quite a large list.

Yes, Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I don't have specific recommendations, but what I don't see on the list, and what I think we have to follow up on, is a rural component that's significant. Certainly we don't have an aboriginal component. I know we have the Native Women's Association, but there are other organizations that deal with economic opportunities for aboriginal women.

As well, number 26 on the list is the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women—

The Chair: They have declined.

Hon. Anita Neville: They have?

The Chair: Yes. They have declined.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: What about OCASI, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants?

The Chair: They're number 18—

Hon. Maria Minna: Madam Chair, I know it's very important to have immigrant women represented. Would you give me a bit of leeway to either talk to NOIVMWC or find one or two other organizations? I know that OCASI is one umbrella...but there are a couple of others.

I just think it's a perspective we need to hear, so if you wouldn't mind....

Thanks.

The Chair: Ms. Neville, Ms. Mathysen, Ms. Smith, and then Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: You know what? Pass over me for a minute. I'll come back.

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Women with disabilities: I would like to see that included on the list, Madam Chair.

• (1620)

The Chair: So it's the rural component, the aboriginal component, women with disabilities, and immigrant women that we need.

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): I just wonder how we're going to get the single mom represented. We have talked a little bit about single moms raising families and the challenges they have, and I don't see that reflected in this list. Am I missing something here?

We had said that we needed to have that aspect to it—not just senior women, not just immigrant women, but the single mom from any ethnic background raising children, facing challenges—and I don't see that reflected here.

The Chair: Ms. Smith, if you have an agency that represents that, we would love to have that information. Send it to the clerk, please.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I had sent a list of pension organizations, and unfortunately, I didn't get a chance today, or even now, to go through the list to confirm that all those I had forwarded to the clerk are still on this list. I forwarded a number of pension organizations that I wanted to come forward to talk about this issue.

The Chair: There are six on this list. Are these six not...?

Hon. Helena Guergis: I believe that there were more than that, so I'm going to need some time to double check the ones I had sent.

The Chair: Fair enough.

When we are calling witnesses, we had better remember the timeframe within which we want this report and work backwards to the number of witnesses so we give witnesses enough time and respect their time. We want a cohesive and comprehensive report and we don't want to duplicate the same thing over and over again. If these six organizations are not sufficient, for example, to address the pension issue, then the other six may not add value. Let's remember that we're adding value to the report, and let's work backwards, as well.

Hon. Helena Guergis: They do assure me that they all have something valuable to bring and that they're not going to be duplicating each other.

Thank you.

The Chair: The National Council of Welfare—

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm not sure if it's on here.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Neville first, and then to Ms. Mathysen.

Hon. Anita Neville: I have just a quick question. When you say that an organization has declined to come, I am curious to know why. Is it because they're too busy, they don't like what we're doing, or they don't have the capacity to prepare a brief? I'm just curious to know, because we heard from NWAC that they didn't have either the time or the capacity to prepare a brief.

Ms. Michelle Tittley (Procedural Clerk): For each group that has declined it is for a different reason. Some have said that they don't have any studies or information or research that would provide any insight to committee members. Some have said that on the issue on which they were previously lobbying they no longer feel they have to lobby. I've had a witness decline, specifically for this study, due to scheduling conflicts. When a witness declines because of time, that's another thing.

It's for various reasons. If members are interested to know specifically which groups, you can always contact the clerk's office and I'd be happy to relay that information to you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Madam Chair, I wonder if it would be possible for committee members to submit the names of the groups, perhaps half a dozen, that they would see as priorities.

The Chair: That's a wonderful idea, because we need to prioritize. I cannot overemphasize that you need to prioritize the number of witnesses, because we cannot keep hearing the same story and not get our end result, which is a report that is a comprehensive report.

Committee members, I think Ms. Mathysen has come up with a good idea. Let us look at the list of witnesses and star, if you want, the six top witnesses that you think are critical, from your perspective. And then let's put them all in a bag and move forward with it.

Yes, Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Are we going to do that with the current list in front of us, or are we going to wait until we get the additions? Ms. Minna had a couple, and we've talked about the single mom representation.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Davidson. That's a good question.

Could members send the list, if it's possible, by tomorrow? Are we pushing you too much if we ask you to send it? Do you not have time?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Give us a couple of days. There's a lot on our—

The Chair: By the end of the week, if you could, send to the clerk a list of witnesses. Then we can collectively group them, because you know who it is you have sent.

There are three conversations going on at once, so I will tell you what I heard.

By the end of this week, if you could, submit your lists; that's number one. Number two is, prioritize, because you are sending your list, and the list, I guess, is a collective of members' inputs as well.

Ms. Michelle Tittley: This is only members' inputs.

The Chair: Okay, members, you know who you are. You take this list that's in front of you, plus the additional list that you will give to the clerk, who will send you a revised list. Please prioritize, and then we can go forward from there.

I need to pick your brains now. When we come back, we will need witnesses here, so if members can agree what six witnesses we want to call.... The clerk is seeking direction for getting six witnesses.

This is the horse before the cart here.

Ms. Tittley will speak to this.

Ms. Michelle Tittley: In the interest of pleasing the committee.... As clerk I don't have the authority to call witnesses without the direction of the committee. So I will do my best to have the updated list to you sometime during the two break weeks, based on the feedback that I'll receive by the end of this week, Friday.

However, that leaves me without any direction for the week that we return, the week of March 18. If the committee is willing to wait until we get back to review witness lists and call witnesses from that point on.... I just might advise that the longer we wait, the less notice witnesses have, and so the harder it is to confirm them.

So my seeking of direction is simply to help the committee be efficient, so that when it returns we would at least have a week's worth of meetings and I would have feedback from the committee to be able to call witnesses subsequent to that.

It's at the committee's discretion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathyseen, Ms. Neville, and Ms. Stronach.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Madame Chair, I might suggest that the clerk be in touch with our offices in regard to the witness list—many of us will have contact with our offices over those times that we're away—to perhaps provide that kind of direction.

The Chair: Ms. Mathyssen, what will happen is that once the clerk submits to you a revised list after you have given her the information and prioritized it, if every office were to tell her “these are the six witnesses”, then there would be a confusion as well. I would like to ensure that we have a streamlined process.

Can we agree that we will submit to the clerk additional names, the clerk will submit to us the revised list, we will propose six, but then will leave it to my discretion to choose six? I'll go through priorities. You know I'm balanced; I was the one who brought in REAL Women, so I am very balanced. You have to trust my judgment in saying here are the six we have chosen for the first week we're back. There will be two days that we'll have them.

Is that okay?

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I have no problem with that, Madam Chair, but I was going to suggest that there are groups on this list, including departmental officials, who could be called in that first week back, as well as some established organizations that no one should take offence with, such as the Conference Board of Canada and one or two other national organizations.

• (1630)

The Chair: That's a good suggestion.

Is the committee in agreement with that? If we come back and the department is there and the Conference Board of Canada is there, we would have a good balance.

It is agreed.

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): That's fine. My point has been covered off.

The Chair: Your points have been covered?

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Yes, I'm fine with the process adopted.

The Chair: Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, when witnesses appear — we often have a number of them, three, four, five, six witnesses, and the evidence of each is very important — I'd like us to be able to group them together by category or field of interest. In that way, we could ask all the witnesses questions, without forgetting any of them. Sometimes we would like to ask three or four witnesses questions, but they concern various aspects and we can't do it. If we could do it that way, that would be very good. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Demers.

That's what the work plan is trying to accomplish. You have a very good suggestion, and I think it's important, because then your questions are targeted accordingly.

Committee members, are we in agreement? The only thing is the Status of Women witnesses. We want them, but they're not available until April. So we will get departmental witnesses and some long-standing organizations, and then move forward from there. Okay? But don't forget to provide your feedback.

At Thursday's meeting, we're having five deputy ministers, and I'll need your attention because I'm not going to be here. It's a televised meeting, and five deputy ministers have agreed to come.

I understand, Madame Demers, you won't be here, Madame Neville will not be here, and I will not be here. They're going to be discussing GBA.

I want directions from this committee. Shall we postpone it until we come back, so that you have full participation of everyone, or do you want to move forward with it? I am fine with whichever direction you wish to go.

Yes, Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Madam Chair, in my view, we should all be here. It's a shame when people are away and have to be away. Perhaps it would be most prudent to postpone it until all our committee members are back.

The trouble is with scheduling them. If it's going to be a big problem, we'll have to continue. I will be here.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I wish I would be here to hear them, but Ms. Demers and I are going to New York.

I would suggest that we go ahead. I have somebody who has agreed to come in for me, but the challenge of scheduling five deputy ministers is beyond...

A voice: Comprehension.

Hon. Anita Neville: Yes. So I would say go ahead.

The Chair: Madame Demers, you're okay with that, right?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Ms. Deschamps will be here. She's very much aware of—

[English]

The Chair: And your replacement.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: there's no problem.

[English]

The Chair: Fair enough.

I'm fine. I have somebody else replacing me, not as the chair but here on the committee.

We will proceed, because the gathering of the deputy ministers is a problem. So here we go.

With that, if there's no other business...

A voice: There is a motion.

The Chair: Sorry, you're right, there's a notice of motion by Madame Deschamps.

Everyone has received notice of the motion.

Madame Deschamps, would you read it into the record, please?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Chair, the motion reads as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommend that the government make the necessary changes to the employment insurance program to eliminate its discrimination against women and that the Chair present the adoption of this motion to the House of Commons as soon as possible.

[English]

The Chair: Does anybody want to speak to it?

Is it agreed that we adopt this motion?

I will have to take a vote.

Madame Deschamps, do you want a show of hands, or a recorded vote?

•(1635)

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I request a recorded vote.

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: I would say this motion is not appropriate at this time, simply because we haven't had a study on the employment insurance program and we don't know what changes are the best to put forward. Certainly it would be very helpful to have this on the status of women, because of course employment insurance is extremely important to a big sector of our community and our nation. I think it would be very appropriate to have that put on here. Right now, we need some study on this before we can support this motion.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen and then Madame Deschamps, you can respond to both.

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There has been extensive work done with regard to this. In fact, this very committee did an extensive report. Of course, now that we don't have research with Status of Women Canada, it's very hard to come up with additional research. I think it's important to discuss this.

The Chair: Michelle, do you want to add anything else?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Mathysen gave part of the answer.

As you know, I work very closely with my colleague Yves Lessard, who is the critic on the Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. I went on a tour with him during the last session, and we met a number of groups, associations and women from various regions across Quebec.

The finding is the same. The evidence is consistent, that of the women we've met here and who are coming to talk about the economic situation of women, and that of the women we met in the field.

It's increasingly clear that women are often victims of the present employment insurance program. They have trouble entering it because of stricter rules. Most women today are in the labour market and, in large part, occupy part-time jobs, both short-term and seasonal.

We could give them a bit of a hand, in view of all the cuts they're currently facing, and ask the Standing Committee on Human Resources to provide a solution within the employment insurance system to increase fairness for women.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Madam Chair, the study on unemployment insurance has been done. When EI was overhauled in 1996, I think it was, and the new act was put in place, there was provision within the act that it would be reviewed. I think it was five years or so. And the review done by HRDC at the time showed there was a discrepancy and a bias against women—that women were being more negatively affected by the new regulations than men.

So the study is there; they are there; they're part of the record. Some actions were taken to change. Parental leave and a number of things were put in, but I think more improvement can be made.

The Chair: Ms. Davidson first, and then Ms. Smith

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Yes, thanks.

The Chair: I am so sorry. I'm not watching my list.

Madame Demers, then Ms. Davidson, and then Ms. Smith.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I think this motion is very important because one of our roles, as members of the Committee on the Status of Women, is without any doubt to bring pressure so that the current government, regardless of which party forms it, without partisanship, eliminates all forms of discrimination against women.

This is one of the most distressing forms of discrimination, because, once again, it strikes the most disadvantaged women. Earlier we were talking about women heads of single-parent families. Most of the time, these are women suffering from employment insurance discrimination. Only 33 percent of women who have worked are entitled to employment insurance benefits.

So this is an important motion. We're not telling the government how to resolve the situation; we're telling it to look at the situation and to make the necessary changes. It isn't our role to tell the government how to solve the problem, but we're asking it at least to look at the program as a whole and to make the necessary changes so that the program is aimed at all women, not just a segment of the population.

• (1640)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you.

I found the conversation interesting. Being new at Parliament, I haven't seen all of those studies. I was just wondering if in fact what I'm hearing is that there were studies done eleven years ago and updates done six years ago, and still everything isn't in place. So is that....?

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: What I'm saying is I think it's an issue that appears to be ongoing, and it sounds as though all parties have been trying to make strides towards it. When we talked about the security of women, those were some of the issues for single moms and for part-time workers in the workforce, that EI was perhaps one of the things we needed to be looking at, I think.

So I'm wondering if we're putting the cart before the horse by putting a motion forward that says "recommend that the government make the necessary changes". It doesn't say to recommend that we look into it, or that we discuss it. So I think the motion's a bit premature. I thought that was going to be part of what we were going to be looking at, for economic security.

The Chair: Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Yes. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), it states very clearly here that there must be a study before a report, and there have been some studies.

Ms. Minna, of course, related roughly around 1996, when the study was done. It's been over a decade now since that has happened. And I would agree with Ms. Davidson that it's putting the cart before the horse. Really, it's a very important issue; it's critical to the economic security of women. And I think in all seriousness that we, as the status of women committee, need to approach things in a very thorough manner and know that when we are making a request, that request is attached to recommendations that can be very clear.

So pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), I would like to recommend that this is out of order. We haven't studied it.

The Chair: Ms. Minna, and then I'll give Madame Deschamps the last word, and then we'll go to the vote.

Hon. Maria Minna: I have a couple of comments. Firstly, the study was not done in 1996. That's when the unemployment insurance was overhauled and the changes were made and the new act was introduced. Within the act it said there would have to be an analysis five years later, I think it was, to see how it was working and which groups it was affecting most, negatively or not, how it affected people differently.

There was, in fact, a study. I think there has been more than one, actually, from HRDC, but I think it was 2000, 2001, so it was not that long ago. And it showed some of the things we've discussed.

In our study on the women's economic security, Madam Chair, of course we will be dealing with this issue very directly, and there's no question that Madam Smith is right about that. However, as with the report on trafficking, we did put forward a motion that pre-empted the report that Madam Smith put forward, so this really follows in the same steps. If we don't want to go down that road, then we shouldn't start. So I'm quite happy to accommodate Madam Mathysen, since this will.... We will deal with it more fulsomely as we do the study, but nonetheless I don't have a problem with this, since we've done it before.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before Madame Deschamps has the last word, just to let you know, Ms. Smith, I checked with the clerk, and this motion is not out of order. A study is not defined, and many committees are doing it. It's just a recommendation to the House. Therefore it is not out of order.

Madame Deschamps with the last word, and then we have to go for a vote.

•(1645)

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you, Madam Chair. I still say that—

[English]

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Respectfully, I have just cited Standing Order 108(2), and I would like to question the ruling of the chair and to let you know that we will be putting a dissenting report in if this continues. I do think very strongly that we need to be studying this. In the year 2007 things are a lot.... There are more changes.

Standing Order 108(2) requires a study. There's no study by this committee during this time, so we can't talk about seven years ago. We can't talk about eleven years ago. Standing Order 108(2) clearly says.... The language of the standing order is obligatory that there has to be a study in advance, and we have not done that.

The Chair: Ms. Smith, we need clarification. Are you appealing my decision? What are you talking about, a dissenting opinion?

Mrs. Joy Smith: If we're going to do this report, then we have to do a dissenting report. I'm sorry; we have to challenge this motion, because it is out of order. It is clearly out of order according to the Standing Orders. It clearly says in the Standing Orders that a study must be done prior to a report. Well, that doesn't mean that you take a study from years ago; you take a study from right now. This committee this year has not studied this—has not put it forward—nor did it do it last year, to my knowledge.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, what we're seeking is a motion, not a report. Come on!

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: I'm sorry; I misspoke.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Smith, I have just been given by the clerk page 857, chapter 20, on committees: "While the chair's rulings are not subject to debate, they may be appealed to the committee. A member appeals a ruling by requesting that the committee vote on the motion...". I have ruled that this motion is not out of order, so if you want to rule that my ruling is out of order, let's vote on it and let's finish it, and then we'll rule on the motion itself.

Ms. Smith, what is it that you're really trying to do?

Mrs. Joy Smith: I'm sorry; maybe I wasn't clear. I'm talking about the motion. I feel the motion is out of order. I did not agree that we should continue with this, because we have not done the study. Let's have the vote, and then following that I will go through that procedure.

The Chair: I ruled that the motion was not out of order and that there was no debate on my ruling, but if you are challenging the chair's ruling that this is not out of order, then let's take a vote that the chair is right in her ruling or wrong in her ruling. If that's not what the issue is, then let's move with the motion.

Madame Deschamps, I want you to have the last word on the motion.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Do I have it, Madam Chair? Thank you very much. Before we request a vote, I'd like to point out that this is a motion that, in my view and that of my colleague, should be considered by the Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This is a factor that has been submitted to us on a number of occasions, and it's mostly women who are dealing with this problem. We're giving no directions. We're asking the members of this committee to propose the necessary changes, and it will be up to them to determine them. In my view, this motion is a response to women's expectations, of which we have been informed through this committee. I request a vote.

•(1650)

[English]

The Chair: Madame Deschamps, you have written "that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommend that the government...". You can't recommend to another committee. What do you want, the government or the human resources committee? You can't recommend to another committee.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: No, no, that's the way it is. I'm sorry.

[English]

The Chair: Then your motion is as you have read it. You requested a recorded vote, Madame Deschamps.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We do support you in doing this. I'm tired today, and I misspoke. I understood what I said, but I didn't get a chance to clarify it. It was the motion that we feel is definitely out of order. I would like to get permission from this committee to have a dissenting report on this motion.

The Chair: Is the committee agreeable?

Ms. Smith, yes.

Before we go, on the dissenting report, a dissenting opinion, a committee report reflects the opinion of the committee and not that of individual members. Members of the committee who disagree with the decision of the majority may not present a separate report. There is no provision in the Standing Orders or the practices of the House for presenting minority reports.

Where one or several members of a standing committee are in disagreement with the committee's report or wish to make supplementary comments, the committee may decide to append such opinions to the report, after the signature of the Chair. Dissenting or supplementary opinions may be presented by any member of a committee. Although committees have the power to append these opinions to their reports, they are not obliged to do so. In agreeing to append a dissenting or supplementary opinion, the committee will often specify the maximum length of the text, the deadline for submission to the clerk and whether it is to be submitted in one or both official languages.

Members of the committee, both official languages is normal. On maximum length?

This is just for you to know, and when we come back with the draft report of the motion then you proceed with your dissenting page.

Agreed?

The motion has to be turned into a draft report and it has to be done by Thursday. Then you will have the opportunity to get the length and the delivery time.

Thank you, committee members.

Sorry, Ms. Mathyssen.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: There is one thing I wanted to bring to the attention of the committee today before we adjourn. On February 21 I had a meeting with Minister Oda, and part of the discussion was about the loss of the policy research fund. I had spoken to a number of women who had done extensive work, the work was almost to the point where it was to be published, and they received notification that the work could not go ahead. I spoke to the minister about it, and she assured me that all work currently in process would indeed come to fruition and be completed and released. I've heard back from at least two of these women that they received letters from Status of Women Canada that their work will not proceed.

I think it's very important, (a), to get clarification, and the minister assured me this was not the case; and, (b), obviously a great investment has gone into the report, the research in terms of what the women themselves have done, and also the investment by SWC.

I'm very concerned about this and I'm not sure how to proceed. Perhaps we need to have the minister come back and explain. This is important research that is almost ready to go. It's being thwarted, and I think we need to know why.

• (1655)

The Chair: Ms. Mathyssen, did the minister speak to you? Was it verbal or was it written?

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: It was verbal, but her assistant was there. It was in the government lobby and she was very clear that work would be supported. I think it's important that that word be respected.

The Chair: The women's groups have told you they've been advised by Status of Women Canada that they are not getting the funding?

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: That the work will terminate and that they will not be published.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Neville and then Mr. Stanton.

Hon. Anita Neville: I have a suggestion, Madam Chair.

Would it be possible for the committee to agree for you to write a letter to the minister asking for clarification?

The Chair: That seems like a good option.

Mr. Stanton.

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

With the greatest of respect to my colleague, it sounds like this was a meeting between her and Minister Oda. She's received additional supplementary interventions by the people concerned. It seems to me this is a matter she is well within her abilities to take up with the minister directly. I don't see it as a direct issue for this committee per se. These were specific interventions she made to the minister directly. Similarly, she's heard back directly from the parties. We've had Minister Oda here twice in the last two or three months now. I see no reason why the honourable member couldn't continue and proceed from that basis.

The Chair: Ms. Mathyssen, would you wish to proceed with writing a letter to the minister, and then, if you don't get satisfactory information or clarification, bring it to the committee?

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Yes, absolutely, I will do that. But I think it's very important that the committee know about this, since the business of safeguarding the rights of women is the business of this committee, and I wanted them to be apprised of this concern.

The Chair: Ms. Minna, and then Ms. Guergis.

Hon. Maria Minna: I was just going to say, Madam Chair, that while I understand Mr. Stanton's position, it is the committee's job. We are in essence the only advocates left, to some degree, for women, as I think Ms. Smith said at one of the previous meetings.

Also, I think that when the minister was here last time, she indicated that research into other materials—all that work—was continuing. Well, if that's not the case now, I think obviously we need to follow up. While that information has only been given to one of our members, certainly that member has the right to bring it to this table. Maybe we ought to write a letter from the chair. It's not a public document, it's a letter asking for the minister to clarify.

The Chair: Ms. Guergis.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I have a little bit—actually a great deal—of trouble with this; that if any member around this table has a conversation with the minister and wants to clarify what the conversation was, all of a sudden they can run into any committee, and all of a sudden the committee is going to demand that the minister clarify what happened in my colleague's conversation with the minister.

That's what we're proposing to do for Ms. Mathyssen. She had a conversation outside of this committee room, outside of the committee's being convened, with a minister. She's saying it's her word against what the minister may have said in the conversation, or perhaps there's another witness there, and she wants to take that conversation in here and ask the committee to ask the minister to clarify what happened in that conversation.

I'm not in favour of that.

The Chair: Ms. Mathyssen.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I can assure you of my veracity. I'm not given to fantasy. I think it's very important that the minister clarify, because she was very clear to me, and I think it's important. If I did not think it were important.... I don't bring anything that is trivial here. I think it is very important that the committee be apprised of what is happening to the women in our community who have embarked on research in good faith. I don't understand why that would be objectionable.

•(1700)

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, we're going back and forth; let's resolve this issue.

If you have a private conversation with the minister and you hear groups telling you something else, since it was a conversation between you and the minister, I think the first step in due process would be for you to clarify with the minister. If that does not result in any action, and you feel that the groups are being marginalized, that the minister is not giving you the right response that you are probably seeking, then perhaps you can bring it back to the committee. Let's review it, take it under advisement.

I'd like to take it under advisement. I think I understand the collective wisdom here, that when you have conversations with ministers.... I was not involved in that conversation; the chair has no idea what happened. The chair can intervene when we have done the due process. I think the second round would be for you to send a letter to the minister to clarify. Perhaps there is a misunderstanding; I don't know—perhaps. I'm always giving the benefit of the doubt to the parties involved.

I will take one intervention.

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I agree with you and applaud you for making that statement, Madam Chair. We have many conversations with ministers and many private meetings. We can't bring everything to the status of women committee; we have to stay focused.

The Chair: Ms. Guergis.

Hon. Helena Guergis: I want to again clarify that a chair writes to a minister on behalf of the committee. You can't write to the minister to clarify a conversation that happened with just an individual member off-line. I appreciate that you've recognized that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Neville, did you have anything?

Hon. Anita Neville: No, I'm fine, thank you.

The Chair: Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, I believe there is a little confusion. I'm having a little trouble with the unease there appears to

be here. I don't think Ms. Mathysen wants to clarify what the minister told her; I think she wants the minister to clarify the position of Status of Women Canada with regard to the contracts that were started by the researchers. I think that's her position. I don't think it relates to the conversation she had. She had a conversation. During that conversation, things were said. I think she just wants to clarify the position of Status of Women Canada with regard to the researchers who have already begun their..

I don't understand what problem there would be in asking the minister whether or not they are continuing their work. I don't understand.

[*English*]

The Chair: The question here, Madame Demers, is Ms. Mathysen had a conversation with the minister.

The chair's responsibility is to take committee issues forward. The committee has not had this discussion with the minister. Yes, she came here in front of the committee as a witness and we've been through that process. But once you have a conversation with a minister and you need clarification, due process demands that you get the clarification yourself first. And if you feel that the response is not helping the cause of women, then perhaps bring it over and then we will have a look at it. That's what's I'm saying.

The first step is for Ms. Mathysen to follow the process, and then, if she's not satisfied, bring it forward and then the chair and the committee can discuss this issue. And I'll take it under advisement at that time.

Ms. Guergis. Agreed?

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: That's fine, Madam Chair. I recognize that the time of the committee is limited and that the minister coming here to clarify might not necessarily be possible, but I do most definitely want clarification on this. And if I can't get it through a letter, I will most certainly be bringing it back and requesting the minister to come here to provide that clarity.

The Chair: Fair enough. Thank you.

Is there any other business?

Hearing none, the meeting is adjourned.

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