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Chair

Mr. Barry Devolin

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•(1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC)): Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to meeting number 26 of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Today we are doing something a little different. As members know, we were dealing with Bill C-30 before the break, and we'll continue later this week with our clause-by-clause deliberations. But today we're taking the time to hear from some folks regarding the National Aboriginal Women's Summit.

As some of you will remember, last fall we decided we wanted to get a report and to hear some information on what had taken place at that meeting. I'm therefore delighted to have a number of witnesses here today.

First we'll be hearing from the Native Women's Association of Canada, followed by the Métis National Council, followed by the Assembly of First Nations, and last but not least, the National Association of Friendship Centres.

To our witnesses here today, I will ask you to make an introductory presentation of five to ten minutes. Following that, we will have questions from members of the committee.

First I'd like to welcome Claudette Dumont-Smith, acting executive director of the Native Women's Association of Canada. You have five to ten minutes.

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith (Acting Executive Director, Native Women's Association of Canada): Thank you. *Kwekwe*. Hello, bonjour.

As Mr. Devolin said, my name is Claudette Dumont-Smith. I'm Algonquin from the Kitigan Zibi community, a community that is located 90 miles directly north of here.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this committee on this important topic. Unfortunately, Beverley Jacobs, our president, could not be here today to give this presentation. She's out of the country, attending another meeting.

I'd like to begin by telling you about the Native Women's Association of Canada. It is a nationally representative political organization made up of 13 provincial-territorial member associations, which we identify as PTMAs. Our collective goal is to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of aboriginal women within first nations, Métis, and Canadian societies. The aim of NWAC is to ensure that the

unique needs of aboriginal women are addressed throughout all processes at the national level. Empowering aboriginal women by facilitating their participation in legislative and policy reforms promotes equal opportunity, and ensures that the use of culturally relevant gender-based approaches results in a more balanced, holistic approach to the issues under consideration.

From June 20 to 22, 2007, the first National Aboriginal Women's Summit, NAWS 1, was held in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador. From NWAC's perspective, this was an historic event, one that directly resulted from NWAC's earlier efforts at the first ministers meeting in Kelowna in 2005. At the FMM, NWAC's goal was to close the gap that then existed in terms of the lack of attention to aboriginal women's issues on the part of all levels of government. While NWAC was not able to achieve the full inclusion at the FMM that was hoped for and expected, we are pleased that such events as NAWS show how we are making progress—however slow and incremental—toward our goals of achieving recognition and inclusion of aboriginal women in these national processes.

NWAC was honoured and pleased to co-host NAWS 1. NWAC believes in promoting and facilitating unity among aboriginal women, which is why we ensured the participation of all national aboriginal organizations and other relevant parties such as the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence and the National Association of Friendship Centres.

As a result, the summit was attended by more than 300 individuals, including aboriginal women from across Canada who represented a variety of aboriginal and women's organizations, as well as political leaders and government staff from the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, and aboriginal representative organizations and nations.

This first summit presented the opportunity for aboriginal women to explore issues together and make recommendations to move these issues forward. The title for NAWS 1 was “Strong Women, Strong Communities”. The agenda was divided into three sub-themes: health, safety, and wellness; equality and empowerment; and strength, balance, and honour.

There were several key outcomes of the summit. The first key outcome was the consensus on necessary actions and the recommendations that were developed over the three days by the participants. These recommendations ranged from broad principles that should underpin all future action to specific actions to be taken to improve the participation and inclusion of aboriginal women in policy and decision-making processes and to improve the social, economic, political, cultural, and personal well-being of aboriginal women.

The participants clearly endorsed their organizations and leadership. They reminded us that the term “aboriginal” includes Métis, Inuit, first nations, status, and non-status individuals, inclusively and equally, as well as other organizations that represent them. In all three thematic areas, participants clearly recommended that aboriginal women must be engaged and actively participating in leadership and at all decision-making tables so that they are well served in all legislative, policy, and programming initiatives. They recommended that culturally relevant gender-based analysis be consistently and constantly used when making these decisions.

Other recommendations addressed economic development, education, addressing the special needs of youth and elders, improved health care, the elimination of violence against women, the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the revitalization and ongoing maintenance of aboriginal languages and cultures.

In addition to the recommendations resulting from this summit, a second key outcome was the clear building of momentum over the three days of the summit. On the final day, several provinces and territories indicated their willingness to host a subsequent National Aboriginal Women's Summit. This has resulted in the planning currently under way for NAWS 2, which will be held July 29 to 31, 2008, in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. NWAC and the Northwest Territorial government are currently co-chairing the committees that are organizing and planning NAWS 2. NAWS 3 will be held in Manitoba in 2009.

A third outcome of the summit was the organization of conferences or summits at the provincial and territorial level. In some provinces and territories, aboriginal women held meetings in advance of NAWS 1 to discuss issues and develop local and regional positions to take forward to the summit. Following NAWS 1, aboriginal women have met to review the recommendations and action plans developed at NAWS in order to prepare local and provincial-territorial approaches to implementing these measures. For example, the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Summit was held in Watson Lake and Whitehorse in November 2007. Yukon women who attended the summit reviewed the outcomes of NAWS 1 and developed recommendations and action plans specifically for their territory, the Yukon.

Why has NAWS 1 been so successful? From the perspective of aboriginal women, NAWS 1 provided an opportunity to view issues on a broad and national scale and to come to agreement on next steps. It enabled aboriginal women from across Canada to get on the same page in terms of information, approaches, understanding, and plans for the future. It provided aboriginal women with the opportunity to respond to a common set of issues and challenges, and to develop an approach that each can use when dealing with the

same partners—that is, the various departments of the federal government.

The discussions at the summit reminded aboriginal women that they are not working in isolation on these sometimes overwhelming problems and that there are commonalities to the experiences and issues they face every day. Although there are some regional differences that were identified, the women were reminded that they face common issues, common difficulties, and can find strength, understanding, and assistance from one another to deal with them.

NAWS 1 provided an opportunity for aboriginal women to remind the leadership, both the political and organizational leadership, in government at all levels that women are important, that they must be a part of all processes and decisions, and that their views, issues, needs, and concerns must be taken into account.

NAWS 1 provided the participating governments with a clear indication of current thinking, issues, problems, and preferred approaches of aboriginal women in all parts of the country. To the extent that aboriginal women are able to develop common goals, priorities, and approaches, this will benefit the federal, provincial, territorial, and aboriginal governments who must respond to these needs.

What do we need to build on the success of this first summit?

In terms of lessons learned, we need to ensure that subsequent summits are relevant and continue to build on the work done at the first NAWS. This has already been undertaken, as the organizers for NAWS 2 work to ensure that the agenda moves forward from recommendations to action and reporting on results.

We need to ensure that there is sufficient funding to keep future NAWS active and relevant. We need to ensure that there is adequate support so that inadequate resources do not cause them to fail.

The costs that need to be covered include: the costs associated with attending future summits for the delegates and representatives from women's and aboriginal organizations; the costs associated with developing and organizing NAWS for NWAC and other national aboriginal organizations that participate in this work; the costs associated with co-chairing NAWS for NWAC; and the costs associated with implementing and advancing the NAWS agenda in between sessions for NWAC and other NAOs and women's organizations. This is an area that is particularly lacking at the moment, especially as women's and aboriginal organizations see their core funding cut and their project funding restricted.

• (1540)

NWAC has been consistently urging that all policy and program changes must respect the distinct cultures, traditions, and languages of aboriginal peoples. These traditions include equal respect for women.

It is not enough to consider or analyze the implications of policy decisions on aboriginal women without our direct participation. We must include the voices of aboriginal women and their representatives in these processes as we move forward and target this segment of the aboriginal population for positive change. It is our firm belief that when aboriginal women are safe and healthy, their children, families, communities, and nations will also be healthy. This message was confirmed and validated at the National Aboriginal Women's Summit in Corner Brook last year.

We look forward to the advances that NAWS 2 will bring. We believe that the measures contained in the recommendations developed at the first NAWS, which will be further refined and implemented as a result of subsequent summits, are an important step toward our goal of empowering and advancing the equality of aboriginal women.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*. Merci.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we will hear from Rosemarie McPherson, spokesperson for Women of the Métis Nation.

Ms. McPherson, you have five to ten minutes.

Ms. Rosemarie McPherson (Spokesperson for Women of the Métis Nation, Métis National Council): [*Witness speaks in her native language*]

I will repeat what I said. I said, "Thank you very much for inviting me."

My name is Rosemarie McPherson. I am the spokesperson for Women of the Métis Nation. I reside in Dauphin and live in Dauphin. My real job is as an aboriginal court worker. This is my volunteer position, and today I sure didn't mind taking two days off from my paying job to be here for this important occasion.

I am honoured to have this opportunity to present on behalf of the Women of the Métis Nation of Canada—Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak du Canada—and to bring forward the perspective of Métis women in relation to the outcomes of the National Aboriginal Women's Summit in Corner Brook, Newfoundland.

If some people are wondering what Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak means, it means, "We, the Métis women, are in control of our destiny". That's what it means.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Government of Canada for inviting Métis women to participate as witnesses in these important proceedings. In fact, we believe it is one of the examples of the important outcomes that we bring from the National Aboriginal Women's Summit. Women of the Métis Nation believe it is important that all aboriginal women from Canada come together to work with all governments provincially and federally and work together in partnership to address the ongoing priorities and issues for aboriginal women across Canada.

We also believe that an important element that came from the National Aboriginal Women's Summit is for Women of the Métis Nation to speak on behalf of Métis women from across the Métis homeland, because some of the priorities and issues that concern

Métis women are unique to their circumstances and differ from the issues facing other aboriginal women in Canada. We were able to identify that there are issues that we work collectively with and that are of common interest to all aboriginal women in Canada, but acknowledging our uniqueness would help us to support each other in addressing and overcoming issues of our past.

I wish to briefly provide the committee with an overview of the National Aboriginal Women's Summit from the perspective of Women of the Métis Nation of Canada, but before I do that, I wish to share with you who we are—we, the Women of the Métis Nation, Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak du Canada.

The Women of the Métis Nation is made up of representatives from each province within the Métis homeland. Specifically, Métis women from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario elect 50 Métis women to represent and advocate for their needs and move forward their agenda at a national level.

A national spokesperson is elected, along with five Métis women from each of the five provinces, to make up the national board to monitor the day-to-day operations of our agency and meet the directives set forth by the assembly and then report back to an annual general assembly. Métis women representatives from the five regions attend Women of the Métis Nation's annual general assembly in order to ensure a sound reflection from the grassroots community level.

There are various levels of development within each of the Métis women's provincial organizations. Each organization works to develop capacity and continues to bring forward the priorities and issues facing Métis women from the community and provincial perspective.

Women of the Métis Nation work collectively with the Métis National Council, and they are directly accountable to the grassroots community. To further support and continue accountability, we have included tasks and priorities within our operations ensuring the continuance of making sure that every Métis woman from across the homeland can access and understand the role of Women of the Métis Nation and how it impacts them directly at the community and individual level.

The National Aboriginal Women's Summit was a unique and historic meeting. It brought together the three constitutionally recognized nations to work together with all levels of government in Canada, with the National Aboriginal Organization in the driver's seat.

Preparation of this important event brought the brightest minds and ideas from our communities together to share success stories and problems that affect us as individual women, as families, and as an entire community. The Women of the Métis Nation at the 2006 annual assembly worked together to identify several issues of importance to them.

They are as follows: holistic health and wellness approaches for Métis women; developing Métis women's economy and investment strategies; improvising life-long learning supports; early learning and childhood initiatives, including supports during kindergarten to grade 12 schooling; support for post-secondary education; workplace education and training supports; supporting Métis traditional knowledge and the traditional role of Métis women as the keepers of the culture; and addressing issues of violence within our communities.

The National Aboriginal Women's Summit confirmed Métis women's intuitions and set a path towards restoring Métis women's lives as leaders of equality and honour. The summit presented the opportunity to narrow and fine-tune these ideas into a cohesive and collective approach, with a momentum stemming from the energies of indigenous women of Canada.

In anticipation of the summit, the Women of the Métis Nation created four policy papers: a policy paper on violence against Métis women; a health policy paper; an education policy paper; and a traditional knowledge policy paper.

• (1550)

These policy papers were the starting point and provided a snapshot of critical concerns set forth by the planning committee that allowed for discussions at the summit. The nation-specific papers created understanding of the issues of each of the three nations, with an understanding and commitment to move forward towards a path of peace, health, safety, and prosperity for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

The greatest promise of success is the continuance of this summit. At the summit I stated that the national aboriginal women's organizations meet annually to share success stories, and that in five years we've come together with the various levels of government to share a report card on what we have achieved. We believe that continuing to build this relationship will benefit aboriginal women for generations to come.

As the "first ladies" in Canada, Métis women want to be included at the table for the discussions and work that directly impact them. We also are working to build the capacity to work on the data collection necessary to continue to measure the success of the work that we do—as an organization and collectively with our partners that are created through the National Aboriginal Women's Summit.

The National Aboriginal Women's Summit is one of many important opportunities to underscore and highlight the many issues and concerns important to us. The Métis culture is as colourful as its beadwork, and for it to stay that way, we need a voice.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and close with final words in my language.

[Witness speaks in her native language]

Merci, thank you. *Meegwetch.*

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. McPherson.

Next we will hear from Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald, the Ontario regional representative of the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council.

Ms. Archibald.

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald (Ontario Regional Representative, AFN Women's Council, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Assembly of First Nations): *[Witness speaks in her native language]*

I am a deputy grand chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation and am representing the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council today.

First of all, I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me here today on behalf of the Assembly of First Nations Women's Council. The role of the AFN Women's Council is to ensure that first nations women's perspectives are included in all AFN policy directives and that the AFN is an effective advocate on behalf of all first nations women, on and off reserve, regardless of their status.

I am pleased to update your committee on the outcomes of the first National Aboriginal Women's Summit, or NAWS. I will also speak about plans for the second summit, which will be held in July 2008 in Yellowknife. As I have limited time to present today, I will focus on two key themes for NAWS: respect and safety for our first nations women, and the need for a culturally relevant gender-balanced analysis, or as we call it at the AFN, GBA.

The AFN is asking that the federal government provide sustainable funding and resources to be adequately engaged in the NAWS planning process, including sustainable funding to continue to address the summit's priorities and actions on the recommendations, such as gender mainstreaming and family healing.

On the issue of family healing, in our NAWS 1 report the AFN recommended the establishment of a family law legal aid fund, as well as video court for remote communities. These mechanisms can help our women access justice in a timely fashion. We are also recommending community-based prevention and treatment programs and the expansion of first nations women's shelters and healing lodges.

Last year the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women announced a one-time investment of \$6 million to help meet the needs of existing shelters and to help first nation communities improve family healing programs. We applaud this announcement; however, additional investment is needed. There are only 35 shelters to serve 633 first nations across Canada. In addition, we have many citizens who live off-reserve.

We have heard from too many families who need and want help. Women and children are still turned away from shelters because more space is required. Healing services for our brothers, our men, which can promote respect for women and family healing, are also needed.

Our research on family healing shows that women's access to jobs, prosperity, and independence are often key issues to promoting self-respect and family healing. Training, education, and employment programs that specifically target first nations women can mutually benefit Canada and first nations. The programs would help Canada fill its gap in skilled labour and would increase women's independence, and women would not only have the means to seek help but would also have an increased sense of their value and self-worth.

A gender lens should be applied to employment programs to identify, facilitate, and improve access for first nations women to enter the workforce. A first step in identifying and improving access leads me to my second topic, the need for a culturally relevant gender-balanced analysis, or GBA.

It is true that in 1995 the federal plan for gender equality committed all federal departments and agencies to implement gender-based analysis in all policies and legislation. However, it has become clear to first nations women that we need and want a first nations-specific approach to analyzing laws and policies.

First nations women face unique circumstances when addressing family healing: remoteness, a desire and need for safe housing, and securing viable child care. We're also concerned about the continued inequity under the Indian Act, specifically from the 1985 amendment known as Bill C-31, whose intent was to restore women's and children's citizenship, but which in actual fact has prevented them from accessing much-needed services.

• (1600)

First nations want to restore the traditional balance that existed between our men and women before the Indian Act, before colonialization, so that the many devastating changes we have been forced to undertake can be undone. We are in fact still in the process of reversing those devastating changes.

For these reasons, the AFN Women's Council developed a culturally relevant GBA that was endorsed by the chiefs and assembly in May 2007. Developing and implementing culturally relevant GBAs will be a key issue at NAWS. We want all government departments and parliamentary committees to ensure our GBA is applied to work affecting first nations people. We have started working with departments like Health Canada to implement our GBA framework and we are hoping that NAWS 2 will lead to a detailed implementation plan. We are asking that your committee take a lead in implementing our GBA. We need and want Parliament to begin seriously examining its laws with a cultural and gender lens to ensure that the work you do truly advances the rights of first nations women and makes positive changes in our daily lives.

I have spoken briefly about Bill C-31, and that's just one example of how our women and children continue to pay a high price for past mistakes. We're also concerned about recent steps to correct some of the historic injustices imposed by the Indian Act—and I'm speaking specifically about matrimonial real property, the bill, or as we call it, MRP.

First nation women chiefs and councillors from all across Canada gathered in unity at the AFN forum for first nation women chiefs in Vancouver, B.C., on February 12 to 14, 2007. At that time we

identified a number of problems with the bill. We are aware that it has been redrafted since then, yet it is still very much a made-in-Ottawa bill. We're not convinced that the bill, as it stands, is going to help first nations women access justice.

As part of our work at NAWS 2 we will be applying our GBA to the MRP bill in hopes that it can help Parliament better understand how to fix the bill and gain the support of first nations women. It is not too late to do the right thing. Applying a GBA should never replace consultation, but it's one tool we can use to ensure first nations women's rights are respected and upheld. At the February meeting of women chiefs and councillors, as I mentioned earlier, women leaders also expressed their overwhelming concern with the current situation facing first nation communities, families, and children. A consensus statement was made that represents the unanimous voice of women chiefs and councillors present at the forum to address critical issues affecting our first nations, our families, and our future. We want to compel change and make progress.

I wish to reiterate some of the highlights of their statement.

First nation women chiefs and councillors honour the spirit and intent of the original relationship between first nations and the British crown to live in peaceful co-existence without interference and to uphold the unceded inherent authorities given to us by the Creator. We maintain our authority to be the lawmakers and caretakers of our nations, our families, and our lands. First nation holistic laws will continue to guide our decision-making in the face of any and all federal, provincial, and territorial legislation. Our collective inherent and treaty rights must be respected in the development of federal, provincial, and territorial law and policy. First nation women chiefs and councillors will stand with first nations governments to advance a comprehensive plan for accountability of all governments and the protection of collective rights.

First nation women chiefs and councillors will ensure that our lands, families, and children are cared for. We will ensure that our rights are respected and upheld and we will be responsible for the decisions that affect our lives. Solutions can be achieved locally, regionally, and nationally by working collectively. First nation women chiefs and councillors call upon the Government of Canada to work together with first nation governments to co-create a new future for all our people. We will accomplish this through collective efforts that support systemic change.

• (1605)

Kitchi megwetch for your time. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Deputy Grand Chief Archibald.

Next we'll hear from Peter Dinsdale, executive director of the National Association of Friendship Centres.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale (Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, Chair, honourable members, fellow witnesses, and guests.

First I want to apologize for our president Vera Pawis Tabobondung, who is unable to be with you today. She wanted me to send her regrets for not being able to make it. We're on our way to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. We've been provided a remarkable opportunity to address the assembly during their half-day session on urban migration issues. Internationally it's a great opportunity for us to highlight the work that friendship centres do. We're in transit, so I'm here in her place. I hope we'll be able to serve her well in that regard.

The National Association of Friendship Centres welcomes the opportunity to provide our comments, our recommendations, and our reflections on NAWS in relation to the National Aboriginal Women's Summit held in June 2007, and we certainly look forward to suggesting action for NAWS 2008.

During the summit in 2007 we made some recommendations, and those recommendations still hold true today.

We recommended that an action plan be articulated in the summit specific to aboriginal women, which addresses legislation, policy, programs, services, and clarifies federal, provincial, and territorial responsibilities.

We recommended that gender-specific services be made readily available and accessible, regardless of where aboriginal women live.

Furthermore, we recommended that friendship centres require a commitment to capacity-building in order to address the challenges that we're seeing.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we recommended that a strategy addressing poverty be developed that includes, broadly speaking, literacy, lifelong learning, early childhood development, and post-secondary education, income, and employment.

Aboriginal women living in urban centres in Canada are at risk for experiencing increased health disparities. I'm sure you're all aware of this. Socio-economic indicators continually reflect the disparities in health status and well-being for urban-dwelling aboriginal women, including lower life expectancies, higher incidence of victimization and violence, lower rates of employment and income, and increased likelihood for living in inadequate housing and having improper health services.

Friendship centres across Canada continue to provide culturally relevant programs and services to aboriginal peoples living in urban centres. As a result, we believe friendship centres are in a unique position to ensure that programs and services are designed to meet the existing needs of aboriginal women and to develop strategies and costing looking forward.

In many centres friendship centres are not only the first point of contact for aboriginal women, they're the only point of contact for aboriginal women. There may be no other federal government service or no other aboriginal service available at all. We play a crucial role in facilitating the transition for aboriginal peoples from

rural and remote community life into an urban standard of living. As a result, our role continues to be focused on programs and service coordination. We are clearly not a representative body. I'm not going to tell you I represent any segment of the aboriginal population. We simply aim to provide services to all of them who come through our doors. We play a key role as the only organization providing urban aboriginal service-delivery infrastructure on a national basis.

Publicly in this forum we want to take this opportunity to commend the Native Women's Association of Canada for the tireless efforts in leading and hosting the National Aboriginal Women's Summit in such a difficult political environment.

The NAFC welcomed the strong commitment and support shown by Premier Danny Williams of Newfoundland; Premier Gordon Campbell, from British Columbia; and Premier Paul Okalik, from the Government of Nunavut. Despite the federal government's lack of commitment to the Kelowna process, this commitment was kept, and no doubt as a result of NWAC's efforts.

The NAFC was pleased with the respectful and courteous treatment received by our entire delegation while in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Our president Vera was shown and afforded respect, including equal opportunity to be fully engaged, as was the other aboriginal leadership. While we were disappointed that the federal, provincial, and territorial governments did not come forward with significant investments, as was originally conceived, we understand that the political climate changed and a dampening of expectations happened as a result.

It will be critical that the National Aboriginal Women's Summit 2008 have some concrete deliverables attached to it or the process risks losing its legitimacy. We value our working relationship with NWAC and the relationship we have with and our involvement in NAWS. It's our hope, through these efforts, that we'll see a positive change in urban aboriginal communities across Canada.

We have read the final report of the summit of the first NAWS and we note the absence of any significant measures directed to the urban aboriginal community. Although there were references to "inclusion", "off-reserve", and "urban" buried within the text, it has been our experience that if we don't specifically say "off-reserve", "urban", and "friendship centres".... It must clearly stand as markers for significant change or little will happen.

• (1610)

We are clearly disappointed in the absence of any specific friendship centre direction and will certainly be looking for that to be remedied in future NAW summits.

All among us are keenly aware that nothing happens in the absence of specific and clear direction. This is the reason we provide reasoned and balanced recommendations that reflect the friendship centres approach. Specifically, leading forward, we recommend the following:

First, secure a commitment from federal, provincial, and territorial governments for deliverables at the meeting. This wasn't achieved in the first NAW summit, and we believe some of the outcomes could have been stronger had it been.

Second, provide policy support for the national aboriginal organizations that are engaged in the process, to prepare in equal measure.

And third, provide a final report in a timely manner to ensure that targets, timetables, and costing can be clearly articulated.

We certainly welcome the opportunity to present to this committee and we certainly encourage its deliberations. We again congratulate the Native Women's Association of Canada for their excellent work in the NAW summit and the governments for supporting it, and we hope to expand and continue that work moving forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dinsdale.

We will begin our first round of questioning with seven minutes per person, starting with Mr. Roger Valley from the Liberal Party.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the presenters for coming and giving us an update on what was a very successful summit.

First, I'd like to clear up one thing. I think you all thanked the government. I believe it's this committee that brought you here. It's 12 members of Parliament who sit around this table trying to do as much non-partisan work as they can to make sure that the message is heard. Occasionally I get a chance to substitute in, and I'm very happy to do that today.

My questions are going to be for Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald.

Welcome again to Ottawa. I saw you a couple of months ago.

She serves in the same great area that I do, although not in my riding. I guess she represents part of it, being the deputy grand chief.

I would like to ask a question. We heard over and over again about some of the costs that are involved and how to get people at the grassroots. I think all presenters touched on the point that if it's not from the bottom, if it's not from the grassroots, it's not going to be successful.

We've had one summit on the east coast, the next one will be up in Yellowknife, and after that it will be in the centre of Canada.

How do we make sure that the people on the street in some of the very communities you serve—I believe you serve 49 communities, some of the most remote sites in Canada, probably—the women on the streets of North Spirit, or North Caribou, or Muskrat Dam, are part of the process, and how do they bring their ideas to you, with the challenge of funding that they're under?

• (1615)

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Thank you for your question.

As we all know, NAWS is a strategic kind of forum, so it doesn't really involve those kinds of processes. But in terms of recommendations, I think we talked about a further investment in this process. For us, we have to really make those connections to women's councils that are regional and local. That does take

resources, and I do ask the committee to consider that, because that's a key part of actually getting grassroots kinds of views at that larger level. We have to look at the mechanisms of how we build that system so that we actually know that the NAWS is more than just a series of meetings where leaders gather to look at strategic issues.

So I don't have a specific plan, but an investment from government would be very helpful.

Mr. Roger Valley: When you have to report back to the AFN for Ontario, you also have to go back to your communities. And was I right? Is it 49 communities you represent?

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Yes, 49 communities.

Mr. Roger Valley: I have the honour of serving 41 communities, and there are some different treaties involved: Treaty 5 and Treaty 3.

I'm going to go to the fact that has been talked about, that women on reserve have issues, and women who go off reserve have issues. You mentioned the shelter situation. I can clearly relate to Red Lake. They're out of their communities due to complications. They have to make sure they're safe. They go to Red Lake. They're in the shelter, which doesn't have second-stage housing. It happens in many places across Canada. They're forced back into a difficult situation.

At NAWS, how is that issue talked about? Give us some idea of the scenario that's laid out. How do we deal with issues on reserve and off reserve, and how do we make sure it serves the clients you represent?

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: I'm sorry, Roger, I'm not clear on the first part of your question.

Mr. Roger Valley: You mentioned the challenges we face serving women on reserve when they go off reserve from a remote site when they're used to a very small community. We have communities that number over 2,000 and communities that number 200 that both you and I represent. How do they deal with the issue when they're used to the life on reserve? How do we make recommendations when NAWS has that information in your first summit?

You're going into your second summit pretty soon. How do you make it work so that this clientele is represented? Is NAWS broken down into different committees? Tell us what happens at the meetings.

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: In terms of how you address the women, I don't know if NAWS is that kind of forum for us. In terms of looking at the issue of shelters, for example, those shelters and that \$6 million, we have one in our area, out of 49.

Ultimately my recommendation is that instead of this committee asking us to come and address you as NAWS, you look at a subcommittee process on women's issues and first nations women's issues, because we've always said in the NAN territory that women are the agents of positive social change in their communities. When government invests in women, there may be a different kind of payback than if the government invests in housing. We can actually begin to see social change. Women are the ones who really demand those kinds of additional resources and programs and can identify at their level what the solutions are. So that would be my recommendation, outside of NAWS.

Mr. Roger Valley: Thank you.

Mr. Dinsdale, you talked about the first point of contact in many communities being the friendship centres, and more so nowadays than it was even a few short years ago. The friendship centres are the only front line. It's exactly the case in my riding and I'm sure in many ridings throughout Canada.

You mentioned that you want to see some—and I forget the term you used—concrete, actionable results out of NAWS 2. Do you want to elaborate a little more? Do you want to actually use an example?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: Absolutely.

At the risk of taking an organizational approach, because that really wasn't our intention here today, to talk about broader outcomes, one of our frustrations with the outcomes of the first NAWS summit is that there hasn't been a specific action plan developed. We had some target areas of work around some of the areas we articulated here, but we haven't really got to the time where we can start developing specific steps in terms of knocking things down, that we've done work in this area and now we're going to turn and work on this area. In part, it's the many jurisdictions at the table, but in part it's a mindset coming in at the outset to say this is how we intend to approach it.

The kind of coordination function we think is critical speaks directly to your riding. I was employed at the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres when we developed the only shelter in Red Lake. There were none at the time. They were staying in an abandoned train car right by the lake. They actually brought it up, developed a shelter, and had supports there.

The challenge is that was a federal government program. We need provincial governments to be engaged in terms of the other programs that are going to take place in that and where those people who come to that shelter are going to go; and secondly, that municipalities pick up the per diem contracts to pay for those beds to keep the shelters going. It's a multi-jurisdictional approach that needs to occur. Summits like NAWS can help achieve that only if people, at the outset, address some of those jurisdictional challenges and get an action plan to break some of those barriers down.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Valley and Mr. Dinsdale.

[Translation]

You have seven minutes, Mr. Lemay.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have to admit, ladies and gentlemen, that I am very skeptical about so-called national summits. I attended one such summit in Quebec, specifically in Mashteuiatsh near Roberval a year and a half ago. Not much happened at this gathering, which cost \$100,000. I am not the least bit interested in finding out how much your summit is costing. I have a much more specific question for you.

I want all of the witnesses who are here today to know that I have a tremendous amount of respect for the work they do in defending the rights of women in and outside the community, in cities and so forth. However, what steps do you take to ensure that your recommendations are acted upon? Putting it another way, how do you ensure that a recommendation made in Corner Brook translates into dollars, programs and aid for women? That is my first question.

I also have a second question and then I will let you have the four minutes remaining to respond. How do you make sure that you are consulted? I am not talking here about someone seeking your advice, like in the case of a Supreme Court ruling, but about having meetings and discussions with other parties.

The best example I can give you is Bill C-47, An Act respecting family homes situated on First Nation reserves and matrimonial interests or rights in or to structures and lands situated on those reserves. How can women be assured of having their voice heard when such important pieces of legislation are tabled? Are you informed of these initiatives and consulted, and if so, in what way? Are chiefs misogynists? How does the process work? I want to know what problems you encountered so that we can help you.

I will turn the floor over to you for the time remaining. Good luck.

[English]

The Chair: I'll begin with Ms. Dumont-Smith.

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: Speaking for the Native Women's Association of Canada, we did present to the Senate on Bill C-47. We spoke to the Senate a couple of weeks ago. So yes, we were heard. Our views were heard at that level, anyway.

Your first question was about how we ensure that action is taken when we make recommendations at this summit. Well, I'll tell you that there was not too much action taken after NAWS 1. However, NWAC met with Health Canada, and we'll be meeting with other departments, as well. Before we embark upon addressing additional issues at NAWS 2, we want to make sure that some type of action will be taken on the issues brought up at NAWS 1, because we didn't address them all at NAWS 1. That's where we're at.

I can give you a better example. There were 137 recommendations brought up by the women at NAWS 1. That's a lot of recommendations. It was sifted down to 59. Again it was too many, so they came up with 29 recommendations under the three themes. They broke them up. For example, under health, there are six. Of the six, they talk a lot about violence. Violence against women has been brought up. Yes, what we need are resources for more family violence initiatives. Has that happened? I don't think so. I'm hoping that at NAWS 2 we'll be able to see what has been happening at the provincial-territorial level and with aboriginal organizations. So to totally respond to that question, I can't.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. McPherson, did you have something to say?

Ms. Rosemarie McPherson: For Women of the Métis Nation, I guess it's a little different. Most of us who belong to our organization are all volunteers. When we put our weekends together, giving up our weekends so that we can prepare policy papers and stuff like that, we don't do it lightly. We do it from here, where it counts.

Most of us speak to our people in our communities. One of the things that kind of disturb me—I'm glad you raised this question—is with regard to a lot of the work we did in those policy papers, and the recommendations. When I look at the report we got back, I'm disheartened a little bit. I'm hoping that NAWS 2 will make a difference. Most of the recommendations are all geared to first nations. No offence, but we're here. The Métis are not going to go away. We're here.

To me, NAWS also allows the Métis to be present, be known, be visible, to make a presentation. That's what NAWS is doing for us at this time. That's what it did, NAWS 1, and with NAWS 2, hopefully now they will know we are here. We're hoping that our recommendations will be looked at a little bit harder. If we had six recommendations and even one were taken, we'd be so honoured.

We're not asking for much. We're just saying we're here. We're not going to go away, so one of these days we're going to be listened to.

You also asked about Bill C-47. The only information the Métis have on stuff like that comes through our first nations relatives, our cousins. We're hoping that the standing committee will pass the bill to ensure that women are being looked after and that they don't lose any marital property rights any more. I think that's what the bill is about. But as far as the bill affecting Métis women, it really doesn't. We only know about it because we come from the best of both worlds, as we all know; we come from the European side and we also come from our first nations cousins. We find out because our cousins tell us. But as far as the bill really affecting Métis women, it really doesn't.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Deputy Grand Chief Archibald or Mr. Dinsdale, do you have any short comments you wanted to make on this?

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Yes.

First of all, how do we ensure that action is taken from NAWS? For our part at the AFN, we're going to continue to push the federal government to provide sustainable funding and resources to adequately engage in that planning process. What is key is an investment of sustainable funding. We can make recommendations, but without the investment, those priorities and actions sit on the shelf. So it's really key for us that we look at sustainable funding.

In terms of Bill C-47, how do we make sure our voice is heard, or how do we follow up? I've been before this committee on another bill, which was human rights. I made a recommendation there and I make the same recommendation here. I find that the processes of Parliament are not conducive to true partnership. We come and we make our presentations and hope to goodness that those things are taken into account. I really believe we have to start to examine a new way of conducting relations between first nations and the Government of Canada, one of true partnership. That is something we would have to build together.

Thank you.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dinsdale.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: The action plan you speak of is key. As we said in our remarks, if there is not specific action out of this, we believe the issue is going to start to lose legitimacy.

But let me tell you, what's important about it is that every province, territory, and the federal government has known this was coming. If a region comes without talking about plans and actions, or thinking about how they coordinate themselves, they aren't doing their work, frankly. It has a lot of value in terms of setting up markers for opportunities for announceables, for policy work to be done internally, and to engage that kind of thinking.

Frankly, you are all going to be dealing with these issues whether it's in a summit or not. There are still going to be single aboriginal parents raising young children, not graduating from school, living in poverty and in sub-standard housing, in all of our communities. You will be dealing with those issues one way or another.

This is an excellent opportunity to try to coordinate effort around a serious national issue. Whether or not you get the recipe just right, Mr. Lemay, to address those issues properly has yet to be seen. But you are going to be dealing with these issues regardless: Quebec will be, the Government of Canada will be, and every other jurisdiction will be.

While we come together, it's best to coordinate our efforts as best we can, instead of working at cross purposes.

I think it has tremendous value.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dinsdale.

Next is Ms. Crowder from the NDP. You have seven minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming forward today. I think it was important.

I brought the motion forward, with the support of my colleagues on the committee, to have representatives from the summit come, because it seemed to me it was an important event that happened, at which there was a gathering of women from coast to coast to coast, and of men as well, that worked on some really important issues that are facing first nations, Métis, and Inuit across the country today.

There are a couple of things I wanted you to comment on. One is GBA, gender-based analysis.

I was fortunate enough to be on the status of women committee back in 2005 when we did the original report on gender-based analysis. Of course, what we discovered to our horror was that, by and large, most pieces of legislation are not subjected to any kind of gender-based analysis—or policy, for that matter. There is sometimes a pro forma checking of a box to say we more or less considered it, but we know from seeing legislation that comes before us.... Matrimonial real property is a really good example of one that has been developed largely in the absence of women's voices at the table, despite the very good work that Wendy Grant-John did.

I would like you to comment on what immediate things you need to see happen on gender-based analysis in a culturally appropriate way.

The second piece is that I want to get back to Mr. Dinsdale's remarks around concrete deliverables. My understanding is that there were a couple of provincial and territorial political representatives there, but by and large the federal government was absent from the process. What is it that you need to see in order to have concrete deliverables from the next summit? What specifically do you need out of the federal government?

Could you take on those two?

The Chair: Ms. Dumont-Smith.

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: I'm very happy to say that the Native Women's Association of Canada has 95% completed the development of a culturally relevant GBA. We'll be speaking about that with our government partners, we'll be presenting it in full form at NAWS 2, and we will be applying it to programs, policies, and initiatives. We're going to use it. It's more or less a tool to measure

whether they are indeed considering gender-based analysis from our perspective when they put something forward.

I could tell you that for us it's going to highlight a lot of the shortcomings that exist and have existed. I believe that if government departments, whether they be provincial or territorial or whatever, use this recommended CR GBA, it will meet our needs, because it's built on our world view, our culture, and on a holistic perspective, as you can well imagine, so I'm happy about that.

In your second question, you were asking what the federal government can do. I think we have to work in partnership with the provincial and territorial governments as well on aboriginal women-specific issues. I think that's really not happening at the moment; everybody is working on different topics and at a different pace.

We have to get together to really address the issues, and not all the issues—we can't, because there are too many—but those in some of our specific priority areas, to work together, and to try to develop some kind of report card mechanism, so that at every subsequent NAWS event we can report on what's being done.

That's the only way I can see, because everybody is on a different page: they know a little bit of what's happening here, a little bit of what's happening there, and the federal government is not involved there, but some provinces are doing things. It's a mishmash of information. There has to be some way we can bring it all together to really know that we are moving forward on the issues we brought up; otherwise, everybody is working in a silo, as they have been doing for x number of years.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dumont-Smith.

Ms. McPherson, do you have something to add?

Ms. Rosemarie McPherson: First of all, Women of the Métis Nation attended one of the first gender-based meetings. We were invited by Status of Women Canada and we really appreciated the fact that we were invited.

We didn't really know what it was all about. When we attended the meeting, it became clear to us that it is a good tool to use to get women to start speaking up and really know who they are and what they want. We women decided that we would like to tackle that on our own, but we would like to incorporate the language in there, because we really need to have our language so that we can truly understand the culture. We would like to explore and have the opportunity to do gender-based analysis within our provinces.

The other concrete deliverables are a biggie. They're a biggie, but for the Métis women, as long as we are participants and as long as the Métis women are acknowledged and as long as it is acknowledged that we're not going to go away, it is a good start for us, because—trust me—we've never had that. We're just starting to get it, and that is a big deliverable in our books.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Deputy Grand Chief Archibald, did you have something to add?

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Thank you very much.

We call it the gender balance analysis. What needs to be done, in our view, is that government has to make it a priority in terms of investing in first nations women. At least for the last couple of decades, those of us who have been around have seen progress and we've seen that when we begin to invest in women, even in small amounts, the social payoff is quite phenomenal.

For example, in my territory right now 27.44% of our leaders are women. Either they're a chief or they're a councillor. In those communities in which women on the council are the majority or make up half the council, we see a progressive social agenda. We see improvement in those communities because of the balance between how men view the world and how together they begin to solve problems.

In terms of specific recommendations, I would first say that making investment in first nations women should be a priority. Then a process should be established through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Status of Women Canada to perhaps look at an allocation of resources, the development of a process to deal with first nations women's concerns, and how to go about investing in women so that we can begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I think we already do see it; I just think that the more we invest in women, the closer we can get to that light.

That would be my specific recommendation in terms of the GBA, because that GBA would be part of that process as well—the development of it and the implementation of it within government and within ourselves as first nations, and moving forward on that level.

In terms of concrete deliverables, you were talking about NAWS. It leads back to Mr. Roger Valley's question on how to take the NAWS process and begin to infuse it and make those connections with women at the community level. If we can look at specific recommendations that come out of NAWS—look at investments in the form of pilot projects or special processes for beginning to implement those particular recommendations, and look at deliverables we can actually achieve on the ground in communities—then I think we will begin to move from talking about it to actually doing it.

Thank you.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dinsdale, do you have a quick comment?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: With respect to how to go about gender-based analysis at the outset, we're not involved in a lot of the policy development, frankly. Rarely do we get brought in on a consultative basis or a program development basis and have an opportunity to be engaged, but I'll tell you that nearly 80% of our executive directors and presidents in leadership across the friendship centre movement are women, so we're almost the inverse of the situation just described. I think there are only two males who are executive directors or presidents of provincial or national bodies across the country, so we certainly have a strong aboriginal women leadership. I think that's a reflection of their role in the community, which is the other aspect of it.

I think friendship centres really try to provide expression for aboriginal women to fulfill those roles as providers for their families,

keepers of the culture, and those types of things. I think that clearly needs to be top of mind in developing and moving forward.

Your second question was around what we need to see now in terms of concrete actions. Too often we're afraid to say that we can't do everything and we can only do this or that, or that we have 137 recommendations, but we can look at these two seriously and deeply. Maybe in two years we'll be at NAWS 3, or whenever we're going to do it, and say we had all these recommendations but we focused on these two. The federal government agreed on these two—perhaps it's employment and training—because of the programs we have. The feds could do employment and the provinces could do training. Find a role and actually commit each of the regions to specific action, because in the absence of that commitment we're all going to be doing our small projects here or there and we won't see that bar moved any more by the time we come together again.

Frankly, if I had my druthers, I would certainly ask for commitments on the areas you are willing to work on, and if you're not, let's stop the charade; let's be honest about it and let's work on those areas in which we all can agree that we could actually move some agendas. That would be my recommendation: let's have an honest conversation about what we're willing to work on and drop the rest.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dinsdale.

Next we'll go to the Conservative Party and Mr. Bruinooge. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming today. I especially appreciate hearing your testimony, as this event was a fantastic opportunity for me to hear first-hand many of the issues that face our aboriginal women throughout the country. I thought one of the best parts of the conference that really came out was how the various aboriginal groups worked together. We had Métis, first nations, and Inuit ladies working collectively. I thought that was very nice to see. I haven't seen that at too many other aboriginal conferences, so it was a fantastic event.

One line of questioning that Madam Crowder brought up suggested that the federal government wasn't well represented there. Well, I know her opinions of me, but I should suggest that the Minister of Canadian Heritage at the time and also of the Status of Women, the Honourable Bev Oda, was also present at the event and made a major contribution to the proceedings.

Perhaps I could ask a question to Claudette. Would you suggest that the Government of Canada has been supportive of this conference as a full partner, or were we, as Ms. Crowder put it, perhaps not well represented?

• (1645)

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: Are you asking if the federal government was supportive, or if it is supportive right now?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Yes. Based on your experiences in dealing with the federal government, would you suggest we've been a full partner on this?

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: I would say a limited partner, yes.

Of course we have to develop proposals to get funds to address, for example, Health Canada, with which I'm most familiar. We have to develop proposals and make sure that we're addressing health issues.

There were a lot of difficulties with that, and I'll tell you why. We're very appreciative of the money we got from them, but we got it at the end of May. Our process to prepare for NAWS 1 was that we would reach out to our constituents across Canada to get their ideas on what we would present at NAWS, so we had to really work. The way we worked was not even humane. We had to cross the country. We went to four regional workshops, bringing in women to tell us what issues they wanted identified there.

Yes, they did give us that money, but it was in circumstances that were very difficult. If there had been more collaboration, maybe this thing could have evolved over a six-month period, and we could have been better prepared. It was rush, rush, rush. I'm the senior health advisor at the Native Women's Association of Canada, and speaking only about the health, I feel we could have presented and prepared better issue papers. It was too fast. We got the money; we had to go across the country, develop our issue papers, and go and present.

From that point of view, I think we can expect more from the federal government, and I'm hoping that will happen this year. I'm hoping we'll have a bit more time to be better prepared, because we do want to present the views of our women in a proper way and a proper fashion. We don't want to work in this hurried state. I don't think it's good for us, and it's not good for the federal government, because the end product is not the quality that we want to present—so my answer to you would be yes and no.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Ms. McPherson, the women of the Métis Nation were well represented in Corner Brook, which I must admit, with my colleague across the way from Newfoundland and Labrador, is a beautiful place. It was a fantastic location. I'm sure the Northwest Territories will also be quite nice for the next location.

Rosemarie, you work a lot on the protection of aboriginal languages, specifically Michif. We all know that the term "mother tongue" is well chosen. It is the mothers who tend to pass along language.

Could you tell us a bit about the work that you're doing to protect the Michif language?

Ms. Rosemarie McPherson: If you don't mind, I'd like to touch on the NAWS a little bit. I'm proud to say that we received \$30,000 from your government to send ten women to Corner Brook. It took a lot of that money to go to Corner Brook. We're proud of the work we did.

I worked weekends and so did everybody else. We did a really good paper. I have to agree: if we had only had a few more dollars, we would have done more of a bang-up job. From the Métis perspective, it's not always about how much money we receive. It's

also about what we want to do, what we give to get in return. I want to leave that with you.

The preservation of the Michif language is very important to me. It is my mother tongue. I speak Michif. We're trying to revitalize the program by making CDs and doing dictionaries. We're going across Manitoba. I have to speak on Manitoba, because that's where we're doing this.

We go to the little communities. It doesn't take much money. I go to the casino and I get four decks of cards for a buck. Then I go to a little community, gather the people, and we play Barouche. We don't speak anything but the language.

We go to another community. If there are six women, we throw our few dollars together, buy wool, and make knitted slippers. We go to different communities. It's always something different.

We have to do it in the community. We never discourage little ones, because they are our future. They hold our language in their hands. We have to allow them to open it wide, so that they can continue with our language.

I get excited with I speak about language. It's important to put in a proposal for our elders to be the authenticators of our language. With the Michif language, there are a couple of linguists out there who have come to our community, and we've taught them the language. They received a large amount of money to do a dictionary. To preserve a dying language in Manitoba we receive 125....

We would like to put in a proposal for elders to authenticate the work that these linguists do. How can they be telling us how they're going to write our language, when we're the ones who taught them to begin with?

It disturbs me, and I'm glad you asked that question, because now I can tell you. We need to make sure that our elders can authenticate what these linguists are writing. This proposal, by the way, is going to be coming forward. As we speak, it's being written.

Every time we have a meeting, we do a prayer in Michif. Every time we go somewhere in public, we talk in Michif. The Métis are very versatile in their languages. You have to be careful where you go. Maybe it's not Michif in some places; it could be Saulteaux.

The dying language for the Métis is the Michif language.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Russell.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): First of all, I would like to say to my colleague Mr. Rod Bruinooge that when you have to go fishing for compliments you really haven't done a hell of a lot. You do a good job of fishing for them, but I'm not sure how much you're catching.

Let me also say that I commend all of you for getting together at NAWS 1. I was involved in aboriginal politics—I'm still involved—for 12 or 13 years. There are certain dynamics within the aboriginal community, if I can use those words. There are some tensions; there are jurisdictional issues within the aboriginal community.

So I commend you for getting together. It's not always easy to share that space, to share that time, and sometimes to share stories. I think that's a remarkable achievement in itself.

I would also like to say to you that we should be careful of some of the signs out there. The challenges facing aboriginal women have come with their own cultural nuances and things of that nature, but there are also challenges for women within Canada generally.

We are looking at a government that does away with the court challenges program, that imposes cuts on programs for the status of women, that doesn't sign onto the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This was one of the specific recommendations that you guys made at NAWS 1. With respect to Bill C-21, the repeal of section 67, which in principle we all agree with, there was no listening to the voices of aboriginal women. That was the presentation we heard. As for matrimonial real property, the first voice of the women in the aboriginal community was one of condemnation, because they weren't listened to.

The unity you display is important, because of the signs out there and the actions on the part of this government. We should always be cognizant of that. The signs are prevalent not only around the issues that affect women, but also around issues that affect aboriginal people generally.

My question has to do with the need for unity and one voice. Do you feel that it is necessary now in light of these signs? Is the need for unity sometimes overcoming the tensions within the aboriginal community? Do you feel that? Did you feel it at NAWS 1? Do you think it's present now? Are you communicating between the NAWS about these pressing matters?

• (1655)

The Chair: Ms. Dumont-Smith.

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: There is unity among the women of the various organizations. NAWS 2 is being planned with ITK, with AFN, and with other women, so there is unity. There's no disunity, so to speak. I think the issues you've raised, like the cutting back of funding from Status of Women Canada, all affect women, so we have to have the same opinion on that, because these issues touch us, as women, in our hearts.

I think somebody mentioned earlier that, yes, we do work together, because it's women, it's issues of the heart, of the family, of the community. You won't see the same breaks when you have a bunch of men together, so to speak. I just have to say that it's positive when it comes to women, and I'm very proud of that. We all speak the same language, so to speak. We all are addressing these issues that are so dear to our heart, and I don't think you'll ever see any deviation from that for NAWS 2.

And, yes, we do speak to each other between the NAWS events. The co-chair for NAWS 2 is a member of our group, with somebody from NWT, and they meet, I think, every two weeks or something

and they talk about the progress of NAWS 1, what they want to see moving forward.

Yes, it is a positive thing, from my point of view.

Mr. Todd Russell: Any other witness want to add to that?

The Chair: Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Rosemarie McPherson: I think that women across the country, whether they're first nations, Inuit, or Métis, when there is a common goal tend to work together. I get into a lot of trouble because I call a spade a spade. I have to say I hope NAWS 2 will recognize the Métis women a little bit more than they did in NAWS 1. I hope we do play a better and stronger role. I know we will in Manitoba when it comes there.

We do sit on committees, but most of us have other jobs. The Métis women are unique. Not one of us gets paid for sitting as Women of the Métis Nation. So when they have meetings in Ottawa, it's very difficult to attend. We don't have any money. And when we go on a conference call—the girl who sits on the committee that was meeting this morning had to be on a conference call at seven o'clock this morning. So it's a little different when we talk about unity and being one voice. That's a whole different ball of wax in my playground. But one of the things NAWS does is definitely open the doors for the Métis, and I think that NAWS 3 will be an exciting one.

The other ones about the bill and the matrimonial property rights and what not, as I said, don't really affect the Métis. It's best that we don't even try to go there with that one.

Thank you.

• (1700)

The Chair: Just to go in order, Deputy Grand Chief Archibald, you had a comment to make first, and then Mr. Dinsdale.

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Thank you very much. I have a couple of comments on the issue of unity and whether we talk in between NAWS summits.

The AFN has an MOU with friendship centres, and as a part of our "Make Poverty History" campaign we're able to work with the Canadian Auto Workers Union, which made some repairs to a friendship centre in Toronto. So we are doing some urban work. We have also been working closely with NWAC on both NAWS summits, and we're deeply grateful for the work they're doing on raising the level of awareness on the "Sisters in Spirit" campaign. We discuss issues like the MRP with them on a regular basis. So there are bridges being built, for certain.

I think it's important to note that there's a difference between a first nation government and a friendship centre, for example. We have to be cognizant to not take a pan-aboriginal approach and say you are all lumped into this one little box, because first nations women off reserve are allowed, under law, to vote in their community elections, and our off-reserve members also vote in elections. So we do have that connection with people off the reserve. First nations are nevertheless governments, and we look at our relationship with Canada as being a nation-to-nation relationship, with the signing of our treaties.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dinsdale.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: To echo some of the comments—absolutely. I think most recently the level of that unity has been deepening a little. There was a recent Gull Bay decision around the election of a councillor who lived off reserve at the time. The Department of Indian Affairs tried to nullify the election. They lost, of course, in the Supreme Court.

AFN received funding for 30 people across the country to come together and think about a response. They gave friendship centres five of those delegates in an internal meeting to talk about election, citizenship, and leadership. So it was probably the first real significant demonstration of our MOU and how we're starting to work together. We were really encouraged by that moving forward. We've extended relationships with both NWAC and MNC, and we certainly talk to them on an ongoing basis about the collaboration.

We were surprised at the political discipline that was shown in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. We had some experience in the Kelowna process and others, where we brought forward recommendations that were specific to this type of thing and they came out at the other end of the sausage grinder looking quite different. All of a sudden there was a distinction-based approach that was different, and all the kinds of things we wanted to talk about were completely wiped out.

The kind of accommodation that was provided at NAWS was fantastic. I think it was because of the reasonable women you had there, as opposed to the sometimes unreasonable men in some of the other sessions. So it was a remarkable process, and I think the political discipline really helped facilitate that.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dinsdale.

Before I go to Mr. Albrecht, some of the committee members have noted that I'm being a little liberal with the clock today and not cutting things off. My colleagues have learned that they ought to have a long preamble, ask two questions, and lay it before the entire panel, which inevitably means we go over their time limit. I won't tighten the reins too much today. We seem to have a little bit of extra time.

I'll continue in the same management style for Mr. Albrecht. You have five minutes.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Speaking of unreasonable men, maybe you should correct a statement that was made a little earlier by Mr. Russell. He referred to the reduction in Status of Women funding, when in fact the amount of funding to local groups was actually increased.

Thank you to each of the witnesses for being here today. Looking at your 137 recommendations, which were then whittled down to 59, with 29 highlighted by theme, I'd like to move to the third theme that deals with strength, balance, and honour. In that section you have 11 recommendations, and you frequently—as well as in your testimony today—use the term “culturally relevant gender-based analysis”, or in some cases “gender-balanced analysis”. How do we define culturally relevant gender-based analysis? Is this something that can be done in a uniform way for all aboriginal groups across Canada, considering the rich diversity among aboriginal groups? What kind of method are we using to identify that?

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: Right now we're calling ours “culturally relevant gender-based analysis”. It may change, but right now that's what it is. It's built on principles.

To respond to your question, it's in compliance with the laws of the Creator. Our CRGBA will capture the diversity and different circumstances of aboriginal women, so it responds to the different nations—the Métis, the 52 different first nations, and the Inuit. It will be a tool that can be used by these different groups to respond to their specific cultures.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Just to follow that up, has this tool been tested by the various aboriginal groups? Has it been validated by a number of aboriginal groups, or is it still in the early planning stages?

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: As I was telling you earlier, it's about 85% or 95% complete. We are going to be presenting it to Health Canada, and we will be using it on their programs. But we will be fanning it out to our provincial-territorial member associations that are found right across Canada, and they'll be using it with their provincial-territorial governments.

No, it hasn't been tested. It's new. We just received funding for it in the last fiscal year. That's what we want this tool to do, and we're confident it will do that. We're hoping the governments will use it when they present initiatives or develop programs and services for aboriginal women, because that's what it's all about.

Thanks.

Ms. Rosemarie McPherson: We just found out about this gender-based information. We attended a meeting. We're in the process right now of trying to go into the regions in each province to start doing some work on it. We haven't done anything so far, but the plans are out there.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Chair, I'm satisfied on that question. Perhaps I'll add a second question to my time.

In relation to the statement that possibly not too much follow-up or response has been initiated on the part of the government, I would just observe that there may not be direct response to specific recommendations, but our government has in fact started a number of initiatives as they relate to, for example, tackling violent crime. It's more of an umbrella approach—it's not just for aboriginal peoples—but I think it will be very effective.

Also, Bill C-31, dealing with human rights, Bill C-30, and Bill C-47 actually address a number of the issues that are in this. For example, under your section on economic development—and I'd like your response—will Bill C-30, as it deals with specific land claims and getting rid of that huge backlog, create economic opportunities for all aboriginal people, and specifically aboriginal women? Will that be a positive step?

That's recommendation six under your second theme.

• (1710)

The Chair: Deputy Grand Chief Archibald, do you want to go first?

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Yes. I want to address the first part of your question, which is on the gender-balanced analysis and what it means to be culturally relevant.

In terms of relevancy, we're also talking about the realities of first nations women. Remoteness is a reality. The economic status of the community is a reality. Take for example Bill C-47, which is MRP. When we talk about housing, for example, the property rights are of little value if your home is not safe for your children, if it doesn't have safe drinking water. And approximately 100 first nations communities are under "boil water" advisories today.

To me, that is relevant when you're looking at the development of legislation. How can the government go ahead and say it's going to deal with matrimonial real property, yet not deal with the core issue of what's happening to housing in communities? Increasing the housing and increasing the quality of that housing are the underlying issues that we really want to have addressed first, before we look at the value of those assets.

In terms of cultural relevancy, when you're a non-native woman living in Toronto and you're looking at how a piece of legislation affects you, you look through a different lens from the lens that you have to look through as an aboriginal woman living in Wunnummin Lake in northern Ontario.

So that's what we're talking about—that lens. How do we begin to look at these particular pieces of legislation through that particular lens? That's what we mean by cultural relevancy.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I think that was the basis of my question, that with the multiple number of different aboriginal situations there will be culturally sensitive approaches that differ from point A to point B to point C, all across Canada. That was really my point.

How do we identify and deal with the large diversity of what might be considered culturally relevant in one community and not necessarily culturally relevant in another aboriginal community? That was the basis of my question.

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: I think you're ultimately looking for uniformity in first nations, and you won't find it.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: No, I'm not.

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: If your question is whether we can find one lens to look through, the answer is no. We have to respect the different realities of first nations, the realities of urban first nation people, the realities of the Métis.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Right.

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: That's how I interpreted your question.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I think, Mr. Chair, the point has been made clear that there needs to be a tool developed, tested, and validated by multiple groups of aboriginal people across Canada. If this is just defined today on paper, the job is far from done; in fact, it's just started.

That was really the basis of my question.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Albrecht.

Next we go to the Bloc.

[Translation]

Mr. Lévesque, for five minutes.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome.

Ms. Archibald touched on an important point earlier when she spoke of the government's duty to recognize native women's associations. Her comment called to mind Bill C-44. The Assembly of First Nations gave its opinion of this bill and of native women, while the Native Women's Council of the AFN issued a different opinion of the bill. We also saw how opinions differed in the course of the debate on the sharing of matrimonial interests. We also hear talk of aboriginal gender equality.

Do you not get the sense that we are stuck in the mud, spinning our wheels? Canada has not even acknowledged the equality of first nations and non-natives. How do you expect it to recognize gender equality? It defies logic, to my way of thinking. I think first nations have to start by recognizing gender equality in the context of self-government. If Canada is incapable of recognizing that first nations have the same rights as non-natives, then how do you expect to make any headway at all?

I will turn the floor over to you for a response.

• (1715)

[English]

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: I thank you for your question, Monsieur Lévesque.

In terms of the heart of the issue of gender equality, I want to bring it back to my earlier comment about what colonization has done to our communities.

I'm not really qualified to speak of this, but I've heard many speeches on Mohawk women and their place in their society as being a big part of the original governance of communities. I can only speak to our issues in the north and the real desire to restore that balance between men and women, and that it come from a culturally relevant place. I do agree that self-government is a key to actually having that internalized and then taking it forth out into the world.

I think the heart of the issue really has to do with the different cultural views that western society has of their women, and how that has been forced upon our communities and how we have accepted it. What's important is that it's time for us to take the responsibility and to begin to make those changes within ourselves, so that we can restore that sense of balance. That is our responsibility. Ultimately, though, we have to look at the past and make sure that the mistakes of imposing non-native values on our first nation communities stop, and that we begin to honour ourselves, our spirits, and the laws we were given by the Creator.

Meegwetch.

The Chair: Is there anyone else?

Go ahead, Mr. Dinsdale.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: It is a little bit different for us. As you know, the last census showed that 54% of all aboriginal peoples reside in urban areas. The vast majority of our clients are aboriginal women and their children. For us, it is making sure that we have the appropriate programs and services available so they can fulfill their roles and take care of their families, their communities, and things of that nature.

As RoseAnne referenced, we are guests on first nations land. All of us are, frankly, including friendship centres. We are guests on first nations territories, and it is important that we honour and respect the culture of the communities in which we reside.

So it is all about respect. There won't be one gender-based analysis framework with a cultural component that everyone across the country agrees is the gold standard. In fact, it is about respect. It is respect for the local communities you're in, respect for those cultures, and accommodation in the work we do to address those things in programs and services.

So I think the most critical way of addressing that more broadly is to have fundamental respect for people and their communities, to provide the roles as the creator has provided them, and to acknowledge that we are guests in the traditional territories in which we operate.

The Chair: Is there anyone else?

Mr. Clarke, you have five minutes.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinipi—Churchill River, CPC): This question is to Deputy Grand Chief Archibald.

Being first nations myself, I am kind of curious. You brought up the MRP, matrimonial real property. In my riding, 62% of my riding is first nations or aboriginal. I met with some chiefs and councils, and we were discussing the positives and negatives of the MRP. Being a new member of Parliament, I am kind of curious about whether you have been in consultation with the Assembly of First Nations, and more specifically for my constituency, with the FSIN with regard to the MRP. If so, what types of recommendations would you suggest?

• (1720)

Mr. Roger Valley: Mr. Chair, a point of order. Are we talking about the agenda? Here is the topic. Did you want me to read it? I could help here. This is a briefing on the National Aboriginal Women's Summit. I am not sure that it entails that question.

The Chair: Order, please.

It is the practice in our committee to focus on the topic at hand. Having said that, I am in the habit of giving significant latitude, particularly if issues have been raised before.

I will caution you, Mr. Clarke, as a new member of the committee, that we want to stay on or close to the topic on our agenda. If there's something that has come up in the testimony today that you want to ask about, that's certainly fine. But to go beyond that into another topic area is not appropriate.

If you would like to rephrase your question....

Mr. Rob Clarke: She brought up the MRP, and I was just wanting some clarification there.

The Chair: All right.

Deputy Grand Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Your question is.... I can't comment about FSIN because I'm not aware of what's happening in your province, sir. However, we know the bill has been redrafted, and we are actually waiting on a legal analysis at the AFN, with the AFN Women's Council. I think I can comment on only the four things that are important to us.

One is that the bill will ultimately force first nations women to seek remedies in provincial courts. It's neither timely nor financially viable for many first nations women in remote communities, because there just aren't courts in some communities and sometimes courts come only twice a year. So that's one of the key issues we have with the MRP.

Next, when you consulted with first nations women, we actually recommended that we look at the first nations perspective. What are relevant traditional laws that promote equality when it comes to a marital breakdown? That perspective wasn't taken into account, because the bill as it stands has it almost as a subnote, a footnote if you will. When it comes to the division of assets on the reserve, the majority of the bill has to do with provincial and federal rules. So really, rather than recognizing first nations authority, the bill constrains how first nation rules can be made in this complicated very bureaucratic method. And there's no support and consideration for implementation.

I mentioned earlier about the state of homes in communities. There's a community called Pikangikum. I know many people around this table have heard of it. Some of the houses have no running water, no washroom facilities. So what is the value of that? How do you begin to divide up something that's so decrepit? There are a lot of issues around MRP. I could just go on and on.

But in terms of recommendations, we want to apply the gender-balanced analysis to this particular bill, and we feel that it will be helpful to look at it from that first-nation-specific lens, and that's what the AFN Women's Council is recommending.

Thank you.

The Chair: That concludes our questioning for today.

I have a couple of general comments, and I want to follow up on my comments a minute ago in response to Mr. Valley. Because we're done with these witnesses today, it won't be for your benefit but for all committee members.

As you know, when we have witnesses before us, we do have an agenda. Your questions and comments should be related to that agenda, and as I said, I am certainly in the habit—as I think most committee chairs are—of giving a fairly wide latitude to members in terms of how they interpret the topic on the agenda.

Second, if in the course of previous questions one of the witnesses has raised another issue and a committee member wants to pursue that further for clarification, that is acceptable.

The final point, which I did not make a few minutes ago, is that witnesses who appear before the committee have been asked to speak on a specific subject that is on our agenda, and they are neither obliged nor committed to answer questions that go beyond that.

So as I said, this is the end of our meeting for today, but I think that's just a little reminder for all of us in terms of going forward.

Mr. Albrecht, did you have a comment?

• (1725)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Chair, your point is well taken, but priority in section 3 of the report clearly did address MRP, so it's part of the report. So I think, in fairness, it was appropriate for that question to be raised today. But I take your comments.

The Chair: Thank you.

And to all the witnesses, thank you very much for being here today. Your input was greatly appreciated. Thank you very much.

We're adjourned.

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