



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 015 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, February 7, 2008

—
Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thursday, February 7, 2008

• (0905)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Welcome, Ministers. Welcome to all.

Thank you for being with us. It has been a long time, and we really wanted to tackle this issue of human trafficking with the three of you present, because it does concern immigration, security, and justice, and justice is one of our critical areas. Of course, it does affect Indian Affairs, so we hope Minister Strahl will be able to attend at a later meeting.

I understand you have presentations, and I understand the committee is very keen on engaging in a dialogue with the three of you, so if you could keep your remarks as brief as possible, it would be really appreciated. I know we've given you ten minutes. If you take the full ten minutes, I guess we will have to let you take them, because that's your privilege. We have put the speaking order in alphabetical order, but if you want to change the order and you want to start, Minister Nicholson, that will be fine.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice): Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to appear before this committee. I'm pleased to be here with my colleagues, the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

[Translation]

Let me start by saying that we share the committee's concern with trafficking in persons and the harm it causes to its victims, their families and our communities.

[English]

As you know, the safety of our community and the quality of life of our citizens is a key priority for the government. This committee's study of the trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation in Canada reflects a shared commitment towards this same goal.

The committee's study, in the 12th report on trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation in Canada, contributes to greater understanding of the nature and scope of this crime. It also provides useful guidance for all levels of government as well as for civil society as we look to strengthen our individual and collective responses against human trafficking in all its forms.

It's timely that we are appearing before you today on this issue. Next week in Vienna the United Nations will host the Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking, which will bring together an estimated 1,000 participants representing member states from around the world as well as academia and civil society. The Vienna forum is part of the

larger UN global initiative to fight human trafficking, which, guided by the UN trafficking protocol, is intended to galvanize international attention and action on this issue.

I am pleased to note that Canada will be an active participant in the Vienna forum, with numerous federal departments participating and working with their colleagues around the world to share experiences, build partnerships, and continue to contribute to the development of international best practices in the fight against human trafficking.

For our part, Canada can take pride in the many measures we have taken to date in combatting trafficking in persons. As we highlighted in the government's response to this committee's report, these measures have been grounded in a clear appreciation of the importance of addressing this issue through a multi-disciplinary strategy.

Our approach focuses on what can be referred to as the four Ps: the prevention of trafficking, the protection of victims, the prosecution of offenders, and partnerships within government and beyond. Since tabling the government response last June, we have taken and will continue to take additional measures to fight human trafficking.

I can tell you that within the Department of Justice, my officials, amongst others, continue to co-chair the interdepartmental working group, the focal point for federal policy development on these issues. In addition, my officials are continuing to work with domestic and international partners to improve our criminal justice response to human trafficking.

For example, over the past year we have been working closely with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to develop advanced training manuals for law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges. This manual is now in its final stage of production and has already been used on a pilot basis for training in Vietnam.

In addition, we are working with the UNODC to develop model anti-trafficking legislation. This project is also near completion and will provide a template for those countries seeking to create their own anti-trafficking legislation. It's clear that the successful implementation of these laws is just as important, of course, as the laws themselves.

Accordingly, my officials continue to work closely with their federal counterparts, including the RCMP, in the delivery of multi-disciplinary training on human trafficking to front-line law enforcement, immigration officials, and victims' services from provincial governments. This training includes a specific component on criminal and prosecutorial responses. Further training will continue to be delivered in Canada throughout 2008.

Our federal partners continue to take steps to improve our responses. For example, as part of the UN global initiative to fight human trafficking, the Department of Foreign Affairs provided financial support for the UN conference on trafficking in children, which was held in Côte d'Ivoire in November 2007.

Madam Chair, we're working to strengthen our responses to this crime through prevention and awareness, through enhancing the ability of law enforcement to investigate and prosecute these crimes, and by better protecting the victims.

We have told you previously about research that we supported to better understand the needs of victims of human trafficking and about awareness pamphlets and posters for potential victims. We will continue to work with our provincial counterparts to strengthen our responses.

In addition, I should point out to you that over the next four years, \$52 million will be allocated to support the needs of victims of crime.

• (0910)

Before ending, I want to note that the approach I have outlined above will form the foundation of our continued work on this issue, which will take into account human trafficking and the 2010 Olympics.

[Translation]

In closing, Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you again.

[English]

We'll continue to gain strength and confidence in our approach as we build on our experiences.

I thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Nicholson. You did very well—six minutes left.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: I cut it down a bit, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I hope whoever follows you can do better.

Minister Day, you are next.

[Translation]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety): Madam Chair, thank you for that bit of advice. I understand that committee members would like to have a lot of time. That is what I want too.

My comments will reflect the importance that we attach to the subject matter of today's meeting. I also want to congratulate committee members on their work. When we realize the terrible effect these crimes have on victims, we understand how very important your study is.

[English]

I'll just give you a brief overview of how we look at this from a policing point of view and from a security point of view.

The 33 recommendations that came from your study and from your report have served in a number of ways to guide us in terms of how we conduct various operations that are within the agencies and the purview of public safety. A lot of those recommendations were discussed today, and if there's more information you need, I can forward it to you, but you'll find they are kind of woven into the work that we have done.

When you look at the importance of the issue, how we have looked at it over the last two years since forming a government has paralleled that. For instance, we've increased by \$6 million the amount of money to go to the RCMP National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre. If committee members would like to view that centre, Madam Chair, I make that opportunity available. You would be quite impressed with what goes on there, with the high-tech nature of it, and also the high level of dedication of the officers who work in incredibly demanding and sometimes excruciating situations. There's also the Human Trafficking National Coordination Centre within the RCMP for the purpose of coordinating the various activities.

As my colleague has just said, we've also tried to categorize the issues of safety and security into four areas: protection, prevention, prosecution, and the fourth, one that the RCMP and various areas of my department are charged with, the whole area of partnerships. We try to work in a coordinated way with about 18 different departments. You can imagine that that would be a challenge, but on an issue like this, I think people are motivated to put aside the issues that are related to silos and really work together.

In terms of the border itself, we've increased the number of border officers across the country, and we are in the process of hiring 400 more. All of the new hires and the existing ones get specific training related to the issue of human trafficking. In the last year, we've increased funding by \$24 million for the integrated border enforcement teams, IBETs. Through these, our officers work in conjunction with officers on the other side of the border. They are also specifically trained and geared towards being attentive and attuned to what to look for as signs of possible human trafficking. There is much increased activity focusing on the issues you're concerned with here today.

Around the world, through CBSA, we have 44 migration integrity officers in 39 different locations. They are specifically trained and sensitized to the area of human trafficking to be able to prevent it, or, if there is going to be a prosecution, to be careful and fully informed of the protocols to make sure that prevention would take place or that those prosecutions would be successful.

In your report, you talk about the importance of national awareness in a number of different places. The RCMP is working with Crime Stoppers to develop, specifically for the area of human trafficking, education and awareness programs to provide the capability to have people call in for information if they are threatened, at risk, or aware that others may be at risk.

There's a high degree of cooperation going on there with local agencies across the country. This is the type of thing that, as you know from your study, can't be done just from a tower in Ottawa if we're going to combat it successfully. We have to be energizing and funding local groups and local organizations who know what's going on, on the street, and who can communicate back and forth to the various agencies.

As my colleague has indicated—and we'll also hear more about the IRPA from my colleague—there have been some modifications made to the Criminal Code to directly address the area related to human trafficking. That equips our officers to be able to move in, in an effective way, in this particular field.

You are right to be concerned about the 2010 Olympics. I can tell you that the amount of work that's obviously going into security in general for the Olympics is very extensive and detailed. This also involves our international partners, and it has involved some careful study of other international events in the past years. There's always the potential of problems related to human trafficking at a globally attractive event like the Olympics.

• (0915)

If there's a positive to this, we find, in looking at the events themselves and in doing significant criminal studies of past events—Olympics, G-8 meetings, large events like World Cup soccer—that in fact, because there is so much focus on security and because there is a higher level of scrutiny of people coming into the country, such as passports, visas, and other things, there's not a giant blip upwards in the particular activity of human trafficking related to a specific event. The possibilities are there. The concerns are there. There are related activities that have to be watched out for. But because there is such a focus on security itself, it has a deterring effect.

Having said that, our officers in the security, planning, and prevention process are very vigorous and very robust in relation to the Olympics. That's a message we're sending out to our partners, but we're also sending it out to those who might be thinking about being engaged in that type of activity.

I want to thank you again for your work and give you all the time you need to ask us the questions and give us the advice we need to make sure we're doing all we can to protect Canadians, especially in the particular area of your study here.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We now go to Minister Finley.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you. I would like to thank the committee for inviting us here today to address the very important issue of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Our government is taking real action to combat human trafficking while assisting its victims.

And that is why we continue to examine ways to further improve our actions in this regard. Let me begin by sharing with you some of the initiatives of my own department, Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

• (0920)

[*English*]

My department's initiatives to target human trafficking aim, first of all, to protect the victims of the crime. To build on our ongoing anti-trafficking efforts, we've taken several important steps to increase protection of victims of human trafficking.

In May 2006, for example, my predecessor, the Honourable Monte Solberg, introduced a fee-exempt, 120-day temporary resident permit for individuals who've been preliminarily assessed to be victims of human trafficking.

The intent of this initial temporary resident permit, TRP for short, was to allow victims of trafficking in Canada to escape their traffickers and feel secure in the knowledge that they have legal status in Canada. Although this was an important improvement with respect to what we had before, we recognized that more needed to be done.

That's why last June, in response to concerns raised by stakeholders and by the standing committee, I was pleased to extend the fee-exempt temporary resident permit from 120 to 180 days. This was an important change, and it allowed victims to apply for a work permit, an option that wasn't available to them under the 120-day permit.

A valid work permit, of course, gives the victims the opportunity to earn a living in Canada while they consider their options. During that time, the victims can access health care services, including trauma counselling, under the interim federal health program. Similar to the initial TRP, the initial work permit is fee-exempt.

The TRP also allows victims time to reflect and consider, for example, whether they want to return home or apply to stay in Canada and whether they want to assist officials in investigating and prosecuting the traffickers. Victims can also apply for extensions of the permit.

[*Translation*]

Madam Chair, it is important to note that, through all of these procedures, immigration officers are instructed to treat the individuals that come forward as victims, not as criminals.

Victims are not required to participate in a criminal investigation or testify against accused traffickers in order to receive the Temporary Resident Permit.

This Government believes that these guidelines provide us with the necessary flexibility to respond in a timely fashion to evolving issues surrounding trafficking in persons.

[English]

Madam Chair, our approach to confronting human trafficking doesn't stop with protecting victims. Prevention is also key. One way to prevent trafficking is to use the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, or IRPA, as we call it, as a basis for refusing entry to foreign nationals who are destined for such situations. That's exactly what we did by introducing Bill C-17. If it becomes law, Bill C-17 will help prevent vulnerable temporary foreign workers, including exotic dancers, from being abused, exploited, or possibly even becoming victims of human trafficking. This legislation will give me the authority, as the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, to instruct immigration officers to deny work permits to vulnerable foreign workers who could be subjected to humiliating and degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation, in Canada.

[Translation]

This legislation will help ensure that Canada's immigration system is not used by criminals to victimize people.

For those people applying to enter our country, Canada represents hope, safety and a new start. This is one more measure that helps ensure that this hope is not shattered through exploitation, and that the expectation of safety within Canada is preserved.

[English]

Without this legislation, immigration officers cannot deny a work permit to someone who meets all the requirements to enter Canada, even if the officers believe there is a strong possibility of exploitation or abuse. Strengthening the minister's authority would provide the Government of Canada with a tool to respond to situations in which a permanent applicant could be at risk. Essentially, the current rules allow officers to refuse work permits based principally on present status or past record—for example, cases in which the applicant has a communicable disease or criminal convictions.

The proposed amendments will allow an officer, according to instructions issued by the minister, to refuse a work permit based on reasonable concern for what will happen, namely, that the person could be in danger of being trafficked, exploited, or degraded once in Canada. Immigration officers would make their decisions on a case-by-case basis, and each application for a permit would be assessed on its own merit.

The proposed changes could be used to prevent abuse in a number of possible scenarios, which could include low-skilled labourers and exotic dancers as well as other potential victims of human trafficking. For example, some applicants for work permits may be inexperienced, without a support network, or overly dependent upon their employer. In many situations, this would not be a problem. In some situations, however, this could lead to humiliating and degrading treatment, including sexual exploitation. Where there's evidence that these concerns are serious and well founded, ministerial instructions would provide the government with a mechanism to protect applicants from the abuse and exploitation they might otherwise experience.

In short, Bill C-17 would give us another tool to help stop trafficking at our borders and prevent foreign nationals from becoming victims of this heinous crime. It would seem to me that in Bill C-17 we have a real opportunity to ensure that additional

protections are provided for vulnerable women and children subject to sexual exploitation and abuse. I urge all individuals and stakeholders concerned with fighting human trafficking to encourage the opposition to support the swift passage of Bill C-17.

• (0925)

[Translation]

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, our government is committed to taking real action to combat human trafficking, while assisting its victims.

[English]

While we're working hard to continue our efforts to combat human trafficking, we recognize that more can, and indeed must, be done. In this regard, I look forward to hearing from stakeholders and concerned citizens about how best to proceed.

[Translation]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. Now we begin the first round of questioning.

Ms. Minna.

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

Thank you, Ministers, for coming today. This is an area that has been very important for us, so we appreciate the time you're giving us.

To Minister Finley first, I appreciate the changes you've already made with respect to the 120 days to 180 days and the support services to victims and the ability for them to apply for landed status during that process so that they can choose to stay in the country, which is one of the things we had recommended.

One of the things, though, that you just mentioned with respect to Bill C-17 was the stopping at the border. My question is twofold. Have there been any changes with respect to the criteria for immigration? A lot of these women should be able to come in here as legitimate immigrants. The problem is, in many cases the criteria and skills training criteria prevent them. They don't fit any of the criteria we have, and it's very hard for them to come in. We need to look at the immigration structure to make sure it's more sensitive.

The other question is, of course, about the live-in caregivers, who to some degree face a lot of abuse as well. It goes unnoticed and unreported most of the time because women are very vulnerable. Again, it's women. One of the things we were looking at was that the immigration criteria keep out women who are in desperate need, financially, to immigrate, as men do, to be able to come to this country legitimately rather than having to figure out ways around that and come in, in other ways.

Hon. Diane Finley: Those are two very important issues that you raise.

Naturally, all of our immigration laws are gender neutral, so anyone applying to come here, whether they are male or female, is evaluated on the same criteria. If they are coming here to work, the same criteria are applied. There are criminal security issues, health issues—because, after all, our number one job is to protect those who are already here.

That being said, all of the other avenues that are available, are available to women who might be subject to human trafficking, things such as humanitarian and compassionate grounds, refugee status—if that applies to them—and they're free to apply through those streams. As well, we have the temporary foreign workers program and a wide range of other programs that we've put in place to help people come to this country and succeed here.

One of the important things with the changes we made is that by extending to 180 days the TRP that's issued to people who are deemed to be at risk of human trafficking, we allow them to work here, and once they're allowed to work with a work permit, it helps them settle in. It helps them become self-reliant. It helps them to create ties here. One of the challenges that many of these women have, however, is that they don't have much money when they get here.

● (0930)

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm sorry, Minister, I don't want to be rude, but I have so much time and I have a few more questions. Some of that information we know about, because we've studied it. No offence to you, but I just need to get to some questions.

Just to move on, the Immigration Act should be looked at a bit more with respect to facilitating more women to apply legitimately.

The other thing, just to go to another minister now, is with respect to the motion with the Olympics and trafficking, which was made, by the way, by the Liberal committee on this side. I want to ask a question. I'm not sure, but I think this has to do with the issue of charging.

The core recommendation, probably the strongest of this committee, had to do with decriminalizing the women in prostitution and charging the users. That's recommendation 6 in our report. I didn't see that anywhere in your response, and I'm wondering whether or not you're even considering going in that direction. That's really fundamental to how we deal with the exploitation of women and the exploiters, or the purchasers. We criminalize the victims right now in our system.

Trafficking isn't just women coming from outside of Canada. There is trafficking of women from within Canada, aboriginal

women and others, in and out of the country and within the country. That's a big issue.

Could you address that, please? I think probably Minister Nicholson or Minister Day....

Hon. Stockwell Day: I'll let my colleague address the issue of your suggested changes to section 213 of the Criminal Code. In recommendation 6 and recommendation 7, you also talk about the purchase of sexual services. From a policing point of view, I'll let Minister Nicholson comment on changing the law itself.

There would need to be some pretty broad discussion. In looking at that recommendation, I appreciated that the focus should not be on the women who are in a bawdy house, to use the criminal justice term you referred to, but the people who are actually running and profiting from the place.

Then you want to move it away from those who are being victimized, and I think that's appropriate and valid. From a policing point of view, that's where the guidelines need to be really clear, if police are to do investigations, make decisions on who is to be charged, or if they want to follow through and pass that on to the prosecutorial arm.

In terms of the intent in breaking the law, as I've looked at different documentation and seen documentaries on the problem of the selling of sexual services, it would seem to me there are two groupings of individuals. There are those who have truly been victimized; these would be people who have been forced or extorted to do this, out of fear, by some of the most malicious things imaginable, or they are drug addicts who have been forced because of their addictions. Then I've seen interviews with those who are almost indignant to be accused of being victims and who are quite happy with their work.

So I'm just saying this is where our officers would need guidance.

Hon. Maria Minna: I understand, Minister.

From what we discussed here quite extensively, and with other jurisdictions outside Canada, the bottom line is that the vast majority of women are victimized. This is not an industry that doesn't victimize women.

What this committee was asking for was to change the legislation to charge the user.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Exactly, and that's where my colleague would have to comment on changing the legislation.

We would want the police services to be as fortified and strengthened as possible to move in and help the victims and those who are being victimized, and I think these would be some positive changes to help those who are truly being victimized.

● (0935)

The Chair: Minister Nicholson, could you keep that at the back of your mind, because I have to go to another questioner? Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Demers, for seven minutes.

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

Thank you, ministers, for joining us this morning.

I am concerned more specifically about one component of Bill C-17. Earlier, we talked about measures taken to assist persons already in the country, that is those who have crossed the border and are found to be victims of abuse or human trafficking. Persons turned away at the border would likely be sent to other countries where no legislation is in place to govern human trafficking.

Have measures been taken to prevent a situation where these persons end up in a country where they are even worse off and where they would still be victimized? Just because they are refused entry into Canada does not mean that they will be sent back to their country of origin and resume their lives there. Have any agreements been concluded with other countries?

Mr. Nicholson, you stated that you have been working with the United Nations.

Mr. Day, you said that you are working with different groups.

Will measures been taken to help these persons?

Hon. Diane Finley: This Government introduced Bill C-17 to address these specific issues. We do not want to turn away the women who show up at our border. For that reason, we introduced the Temporary Resident Permit, thus extending the length of time they can stay from 120 to 180 days. It would be easy to send them elsewhere, but we want to welcome them to this country, to give them the opportunity to succeed and the time to decide what they want to do, whether it be remain here or go elsewhere.

Ms. Nicole Demers: I must have misunderstood then. Earlier in your statement, you said that Bill C-17 would prevent persons from entering the country and being victimized.

Hon. Diane Finley: That is not exactly what I said.

[English]

It would allow the officers not to issue a work permit to these people. If you combine that with the TRP process, they could be allowed into the country under that program and be allowed to work, but not under the original work permit for which they had applied. So they would have alternatives.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I see.

Mr. Day, you stated earlier that you are working with various groups who work with street people. As a rule, most of the groups are headed by women, because they do the bulk of the social work.

Who subsidizes the operations of these groups? The government? In your opinion, should the government be involved in funding these groups?

Hon. Stockwell Day: I believe all levels of government — federal, provincial and municipal— have a responsibility in this area. For that reason, the government provides funding to local groups to operate prevention programs. Over the past year, I have allocated substantial sums of money to groups across the country that work with street people and youth, particularly high-risk, vulnerable young people.

This year, the government is earmarking \$21 million for this effort. I have advised our financial officers that we can continue funding local groups. I addressed this issue with my international counterparts at the G8 meeting of safety ministers, as well as with Interpol and Europol officials. I informed them that Canada takes this problem seriously, that it wants to prevent activities of this nature and to protect its young people, especially young women at risk.

• (0940)

Ms. Nicole Demers: I was also on hand recently for a presentation by a group of RCMP officials on assistance centres for children living in aboriginal and northern communities. Apparently, data is not available as to whether these centres are proving successful or not.

You also mentioned that the RCMP was going to take steps to directly address the problem of human trafficking. How do you plan to support the RCMP in this regard? According to reports, there is already a shortage of personnel assigned to border duty. How many additional officers will be assigned to this work? Will these same officers be in charge of putting people in quarantine? Health Canada is also supposed to assign some officers to handle quarantine orders. All of this to say that many people will be assigned to border duty to deal with every single person entering Canada.

Hon. Stockwell Day: I agree. Two years ago, we thought we needed to have more border officers. We therefore hired an additional 400 Canada Border Services Agency officers. We also launched a plan to recruit an additional 1,000 RCMP officers across the country. Based on the region and the activities, officers can be assigned to deal with the types of crime that we are talking about here today.

We also created the position of ombudsman for victims of crime, including the crimes begin discussed here today. This year alone, a total of \$52 million is being allocated to victims assistance efforts.

We have also stepped up our training of border officers, since it is important for them to be on the lookout for potential young victims. When they arrive at the border, these young victims may signal in some way that they need help, even though they may be afraid. Border officers receive extensive training to increase their awareness of such situations.

[English]

The Chair: We go to Madame Boucher.

I have to stick to my seven-minute schedule; otherwise we won't get turns.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoulu, CPC): Thank you, ministers, for coming here. The issue of human trafficking is very important to us.

My first question is for Ms. Finley. Education and awareness play a fundamental role in ensuring that temporary foreign workers who are at risk are aware of their rights while in Canada. What steps are government officials taking to inform immigrants to Canada of their rights both prior to entering the country and once they have arrived?

Hon. Diane Finley: That is a good question. To stop traffickers and others from committing crimes, information must be disseminated. People arriving in the country receive several pamphlets. For example,

[English]

for live-in caregivers, we have a pamphlet that we give them concerning the program and their rights under it, and there's information available on our website, and we have information that's distributed at our Canadian missions overseas.

For exotic dancers we provide materials that outline their rights as workers and the obligations of their employers, because many times they're not aware of them. We make sure these are distributed by visa officers at the point of entry.

In the case of all temporary foreign workers, we send them a letter when we give them their permit that explains their rights to them.

We have numerous brochures and posters to raise awareness, not just for the victims as they enter the country but also for the law enforcement officers, such as the immigration officers and the RCMP, to remind them and make them aware of the importance of this. We even have a booklet called *Don't Become a Victim of the Illegal Trade in People*. It's available in 14 languages and is distributed around the world. There are many others.

• (0945)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

My other question is for Mr. Nicholson. Earlier, you mentioned the work of the interdepartmental task force on human trafficking. What exactly is the role of this task force?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Thank you very much, colleague.

The interdepartmental task force is a coordinating agency for 16 federal departments that in one way or another touch upon the problem of human trafficking. It's a way of helping to coordinate our response and to make sure there isn't overlap, or that everyone understands what everyone else is doing. I think it's good to have one group that helps to coordinate our response.

So we have a wide response, and as you can tell just by your invitation to have three different ministers here, this isn't confined to one particular department; it affects a lot of different departments, and within departments, different sections.

Again, we felt this was an expeditious way of handling this. It's purely for purposes of efficiency in coordinating our response. That's the reason for it, Madame.

The Chair: Mr. Stanton, would you like to carry on?

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

Thank you to our ministers here for joining us.

Through our report we've talked about the three Ps of protection, prevention, and prosecution related to human trafficking. It's good to see we have the front line in every one of those departments here.

I really like the way you've bridged the gap there, though, with the fourth P. We recognize bringing all these elements together as being critical.

My first question is to Minister Day. We talked about some of the resources in place here in Canada to assist in identifying and protecting some of the victims of crime. Are any measures being undertaken abroad in the same way to try to screen out or prevent the situation whereby victims are literally arriving at our borders, which complicates our ability to address the issue and move forward? Is there something happening abroad that would be useful?

Hon. Stockwell Day: At the G-8 meeting of public safety and security ministers, we made this a priority. We've done this for the last two years, first in Moscow and then in Munich. There's been agreement among these countries. We are also vitally tied in with the United Nations and their protocols regarding human trafficking. That's why we've increased our own capabilities.

In Canada, we've increased not only the number of officers but also the training programs. We can't tell another country how much funding they should commit, but it is helpful when we point out that our funding is increasing. It encourages our partners to do the same. We contribute, as do many other nations, to Interpol, and we work closely with Europol.

I can tell you that the level of concern about this problem is genuinely shared. It's not something that we needed to alert people to. But there are countries that could be more aggressive in letting it be known, through sanctions, that they take this seriously.

That's why I appreciate some of the recommendations having to do with sanctions and assistance to victims. This should be reflected in our legislation, our training, and our funding. We communicate this freely and share information with other policing agencies, and this high level of cooperation is helping to push back this area of trade. In certain parts of the world, it's fair to say that it exploits young people to a degree that makes it almost epidemic.

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Ministers, for being here today.

The Canadian Council for Refugees alerted me to a situation that occurred late last summer. It involved a woman who was apprehended at the U.S.-Canada border. Despite being identified by Canadian officials as a trafficked person, she was held in detention and deported. She was never offered a temporary resident permit. She was simply sent back.

We have discussed the three Ps: prevention, prosecution... We know the current legislation favours that. I'm wondering, is the government planning any amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act or the Criminal Code that would protect victims of trafficking and keep them from being arbitrarily sent back to their countries of origin?

Hon. Diane Finley: Minister Day and I will both address that because we're both involved.

We set up the TRP program to remedy exactly the kinds of situations you describe. It was meant to give women the opportunity to take some time and figure out what they want to do—with some safety, with some security, with health benefits. This would put them in a better position to decide where they want to go.

We're trying to get Bill C-17 through Parliament as a means to prevent trafficking and keep these women out of situations in which they could be abused. Right now it's being stalled. The committee is not addressing it. We were due to hear from several groups, including the Stop the Trafficking Coalition, the Salvation Army, and the Future Group. This week, they were mysteriously de-invited from attending, and the issue was dropped from the agenda.

We'd like to see the legislation put through as quickly as possible, not just for the Olympics. We need it now, for the situations you're describing. These women—and in some cases men—need protection now, and we'd like to see the opposition move forward with it.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: In addition to what you've told me about protection and health care, I'm concerned about a missing piece of government action—the provision of housing. A Justice Canada research paper notes three or four times that housing is a key part of allowing trafficking victims to secure services and feel protected. This is missing.

Can you tell me whether there are plans in place to provide this key missing piece?

Hon. Diane Finley: There are a number of aspects to the program. I mentioned that under the federal program these women and men on the temporary resident permit have medical services made available to them.

We have arrangements with the provinces whereby they provide social services such as housing and other support mechanisms to people like these individuals, as well as to refugees who come into the various provinces. There's funding in the Canada social transfer, the CST, to each province to assist with exactly those kinds of programs.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Do you know how much funding, how many accommodations have been made available? We know that in Canada housing is in a crisis—not just for people seeking refuge but also for our own citizens. Do you have any idea how well the provinces are doing? What money is available?

Hon. Diane Finley: No, I'm sorry, I wouldn't have any of that information. It would vary from province to province. But every year we allocate billions of dollars to each province for provision of services, and housing for these individuals would certainly be one of the services they'd provide.

• (0955)

Hon. Stockwell Day: There's a component under Minister Solberg for young people who are homeless. It's \$293 million for this year, just for that component of housing for homeless youth.

In north Vancouver, we recently gave some funds, and they deliberately looked for youth at risk, especially those who could be exploited for various reasons. So there are funds for this. We'll get

you more information, but there is an envelope under the homeless category for youth at risk.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: The government created the interdepartmental working group on trafficking in persons. The purpose was to develop a national strategy. There's been some concern from the Future Group in particular that this strategy, or national plan, is not in place

I wonder, is it in the works? When will it be announced, and how much funding will be available to make sure the plan has teeth and substance?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: As you pointed out, we have an interdepartmental working group. It covers a number of areas and comes with a number of initiatives. I indicated our support for the victims of crime, and the \$50 million that we are prepared to put into it.

Indeed, part of our approach was revealed last spring with the appointment of a federal ombudsman for the victims of crime. Now there is a single office that actually looks at the issues as they relate to the victims of crime, a sort of central coordinating agency.

I can tell you as well that the interests of the interdepartmental group are not confined to issues within Canada. This problem is an international one. It goes beyond Canada's borders. In the few minutes the chair allowed me, I touched on our cooperation with the United Nations agencies and the development of manuals that will assist people in other countries.

One of the initiatives that I'm particularly interested in is designed to help other countries to develop trafficking legislation. I've always said that Canada has been the beneficiary of two of the world's great legal systems, and that we now have an obligation to help others, just as we have been helped in the past. So this is one of the initiatives.

Again, we have this interdepartmental group that helps to coordinate our response across all government departments, and indeed throughout the world. As you can tell, I'm quite excited about some of the things we are doing to address this.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

For five minutes now, Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

Ministers, thank you very much for coming here this morning. The fact that three of you are here for two hours underscores the importance of this topic, and I think all members of the committee certainly appreciate it.

We all know human trafficking is really a modern-day global slave trade, and it's estimated, I understand, to be a \$12 million industry annually. I want to take a slightly different tack and I want to talk about trafficking in Canada.

But before I do that, I want to get some clarification from Minister Day. I'm not sure whether I heard you correctly when you said that international sporting events are not magnets for human trafficking, because if that's the case, it's contrary to all the evidence we had before the committee and all the preparations we know are going on in other jurisdictions when there are soccer tournaments, formula racing events.... So I'll give you a minute to answer.

I want to talk about the trafficking of women internally in Canada and I want to focus particularly on aboriginal women. When I looked at the response to the report that we put in—we identified issues of poverty for aboriginal peoples as a priority—I didn't see an adequate response from the government on that issue. The response referred to the Status of Women research that's been done on trafficking, and some of it is specific to aboriginal women, but we know that funding is no longer available. So I'm curious to know whether there's any makeup on it.

We know there is a substantial amount of trafficking of aboriginal women in this country. I know it emanates from my community of Winnipeg. I know that women are held hostage by those who are trafficking them. I've met with women's groups in British Columbia frequently, and I know the issues there.

The committee heard from Sergeant Lori Lowe that the RCMP's national aboriginal policing service had an interest in examining the trafficking of aboriginal women for the purposes of sexual exploitation, but the RCMP lacked both the funding and the human resources to be able to carry out such research. So what's being done to address the needs of research, specifically with the victimization of aboriginal women? I'm interested in knowing from you, Minister Nicholson, what particular initiatives are under way.

I'm familiar with the Sisters in Spirit program, so don't refer to that. But what initiatives are under way to identify the lost women and to assist aboriginal groups to prevent the trafficking of aboriginal women? We heard unequivocally, whether it's international or national, the overriding catalyst for women to be trafficked is poverty.

I'm a little over the map, but I would welcome some response on the domestic trafficking of women.

• (1000)

Hon. Stockwell Day: Thank you, Chairman.

On the policing and security side, I've also met with Sergeant Lowe and discussed these issues. She's very focused and attuned to the challenges.

It does happen to the degree that it happens, and the aim on the policing side is to try to investigate, find out, expose, and bring to justice those who would perpetrate this activity. Recently there was a case of six individuals that the Peel police were investigating, and there were four others in the Toronto area.

In our view, and I know the view is shared by committee members, I can't think of something much more despicable than a

human being enslaving another one, literally, through drugs, fear, extortion, or whatever it might be to get them to perform certain services. That's why we show, and want to show, no sympathy whatsoever to the perpetrators and those who are involved in this.

A component of the funding that, in terms of the increase, has gone to the RCMP over this last year is directed to the challenges with aboriginals. It can be broken out in different departments and different packages. I could ask officials to send those to the committee in terms of exact amounts.

I can tell you that with the national crime prevention strategy, which deals with youth at risk, I have personally overseen the direction of considerable dollars on a specific basis to specific areas, again to groups, sometimes women's groups, reaching out to youth at risk, especially those who have been exposed to the drug trade for the purpose of being enslaved. There are funds directed to that, and that is one example.

I can give you a further breakdown. It covers a number of different areas. Those dollars are directed—

• (1005)

The Chair: What I'd like to do, Minister Day, is give Minister Nicholson one minute to respond, because I've been cutting him off. Thank you.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Neville, in conjunction with that and the program that you indicated we are involved with, between the aboriginal justice strategy and in terms of...that is one of the focuses we have at the justice department with respect to aboriginals and making sure they get sensitive treatment within the criminal justice system. It's a program that I very much support.

We know that the drug trade is very much involved. Addiction is a particular problem in this. I'm a big supporter of our drug court system, which involves most of the major cities in this country, to provide an alternative to get help to these individuals so they can break this cycle of exploitation.

In addition—just before I'm cut off—I want you to know that there is a federal-provincial-territorial working group on missing persons that is studying this particular subject. They will be reporting back to us shortly.

Thanks.

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

We go now to Mr. Stanton for five minutes.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister Finley, I want to get back to this issue of Bill C-17, which is currently in committee. I just want to get your sentiments or thoughts on why this bill is being held up. You mentioned that there were some witnesses who were denied access to the committee or who were turned away.

Could you give us a bit more information on your understanding of this predicament?

Hon. Diane Finley: Well, I'd very much like to be able to answer those questions. Unfortunately, as I mentioned earlier, there were no reasons given.

What happened was that key groups that have a very strong interest in preventing human trafficking—for example, Future Group, Salvation Army, Stop the Trafficking Coalition—had all been invited to appear before committee to present their views. That was supposed to have happened this past Monday. They received notice on Friday that they were no longer invited to attend on Monday, and that in fact no date had been set for them to return at all. The committee dealt with other business.

I think it's most unfortunate that these views.... These obviously are people who have a lot of expertise in this field, who have a very strong interest and have been very active in combatting human trafficking. I think their views need to be heard by the committee. I think the issue is an important one, and the committee should be addressing it.

The bill is at the stage where it is officially before committee. I'd very much like to see the committee honour that and deal with the bill, move it forward, listen to the key stakeholders, and pass it on so that we can get it through the Senate and we can enact this piece of legislation that will help protect vulnerable foreign workers and children.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I wholeheartedly agree.

I'll give the rest of my time to Madame Grewal.

The Chair: Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ministers, for your time and your presentations. We truly appreciate that.

My question goes to Minister Finley. Last week the citizenship and immigration committee, of which I am a member, considered Bill C-17. During the meeting, Liberal member Mr. Jim Karygiannis scoffed at the small number of women being protected by this bill. He seemed to think that passing a bill that in his mind only concerned a "very minimal number of people" would be wrong. He implied that such a very minimal number of women, regardless of their vulnerability to trafficking or exploitation, was unworthy of protection under Bill C-17.

Could you please respond to Mr. Karygiannis' criticism?

Hon. Diane Finley: I firmly believe—and I suspect and certainly hope this committee feels the same way—that if even one woman is trafficked, that's one too many. Absolutely. That's why we need laws that will help to protect them. We don't have that many right now, so we're trying to put forward Bill C-17 and maintain flexibility in the legislation we do have.

There is a private member's bill before the Senate, as we speak, that would reduce the flexibility we have to address human trafficking. I mentioned earlier how we extended the TRPs from 120 days to 180 days. If the Senate bill that's before the House now had passed, we would not have been allowed to do that. We would not have had the flexibility through ministerial powers to extend that protection period.

We need to be flexible in our response, because we're still learning, as is the world. We want to be able to be responsive to the needs as we identify them. So I think we have to make sure we protect these women and children. They are vulnerable individuals. It doesn't matter how many or how few, they all deserve our protection in this country.

• (1010)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: My next questions are for Mr. Nicholson.

How big is the problem of trafficking in persons worldwide? To what extent does this crime occur in Canada? How exactly do Canada's laws protect against trafficking in persons?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Thank you very much for those questions.

They are certainly clandestine operations, so we can only estimate. We know it's a particular problem in a number of Asian countries, such as Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. There are well-documented cases of human trafficking in eastern Europe, and to a certain extent of course in Africa.

On who these victims are, the International Labour Organization estimated that 98% of the people who are victims of this crime are women and girls. That's not too surprising. But as Madam Neville said, it's not just confined to the trafficking of individuals in this country. We know there are many instances of aboriginal women being exploited as well.

Canada, as you may know, has a comprehensive set of criminal laws that deal with just about every aspect of this. They're complemented by other sections, not just the trafficking sections alone. Certainly the assault and victimization provisions within the Criminal Code complement our approach to this.

So it's a major problem that's been identified by this committee and others. As I indicated to one of your colleagues, recognition that this is not just a Canadian problem but a worldwide problem will help in combatting this. It's a major problem throughout the world and we are addressing it. I believe there's a comprehensive set of laws within the Criminal Code to deal with it.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I didn't cut you off this time.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Good day, ministers. Thank you very much for responding to the many questions of concern to this committee.

Each time a major event takes place, like the Olympic Games, the World Cup or an automobile race, statistics show that the incidence of prostitution increases. As the countdown to the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games continues, we have learned that the Vancouver authorities and certain groups in favour of legalized prostitution are already floating an idea to establish a legal brothel that would be run by female prostitutes.

Proponents of the idea argue that a legal brothel would help to ensure the safety of female prostitutes. These groups would dearly like to convince the current government to skirt existing laws on a trial basis and allow a legal brothel to operate.

Is the government aware of these plans? Have your departments already been contacted by the proponents of this project? If they have, I would be curious to know where you stand on this matter, or how you plan to deal with this suggestion.

• (1015)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Yes, we are aware of suggestions of that. There was a subcommittee that produced a report in the spring of last year on solicitation. In addition, Ms. Minna raised the matter with me. I was outside the seven minutes then and couldn't reply, so I would like to address it now.

To be very clear, Madame Deschamps, the government has no intention of legalizing brothels in this country. We have no intention of legalizing the other aspects of prostitution. I can tell you that the constitutionality, among other things, of a number of the laws relating to prostitution in this country is before the courts of both British Columbia and Ontario. Government lawyers are vigorously defending the constitutionality and validity of those pieces of legislation. I hope I'm clear on that.

I have a very large crime-fighting agenda. You've seen it in Parliament. I often say to my colleagues that if we can get through the legislation we've introduced that's presently before this Parliament, we will be just getting started fighting crime. I can indicate to you very clearly that legitimizing or legalizing street soliciting or brothels is not part of our agenda.

At the same time, I agree with those individuals about vigorous prosecution of the individuals who exploit other individuals, or who are the customers—sometimes referred to in English as johns. I don't know what they're called *en français*. I agree with all laws and all efforts made to get those individuals who are in the position of exploiting other individuals. I hope that has cleared it.

Thank you.

Hon. Stockwell Day: If I could address the part of the question about an increase in prostitution, it seems to be a fact around major events like this. Whether in Germany or at various Olympic events, in terms of the actual act of illegally transporting people to the events—we're talking here about the international human trafficking itself—we don't see a significant uptake there. I think people are worried because they know, quite rightly, there's a huge focus against that.

As far as the activities themselves, they can increase. We've heard about domestic trafficking, and organized crime groups will stake out their territory. That gives us an opportunity, because the organizers and the exploiters come out of the woodwork a bit and can be pursued. That's why I appreciate the emphasis in the legislation on going after those who are exploiting.

So we see it on the domestic side, just like you see crimes like pickpocketing going up, and break-ins of automobiles. There are certain crimes that go up during those times.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you.

The committee's report on human trafficking contained one recommendation calling on the government to create the position of

national rapporteur. The government's response to the report makes no mention of creating such a position.

Can we expect the government to follow through on this recommendation?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Working through the RCMP, we have set up an office to deal with the issue of human trafficking. Recommendation 18 of your report calls for the creation of the position of rapporteur. We have an office and staff who are responsible for communicating with other departments and for coordinating their efforts in this area.

• (1020)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Is this office in touch with the many different departments working to combat the problem of human trafficking?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Yes. The communication aspect is very important. The office has forged ties with 18 or 19 departments in so far as training and the dissemination of information is concerned.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I have a question about temporary workers and live-in caregivers. We've heard that this government is very concerned about fighting crime and wrongdoers, but the truth is that these temporary foreign workers and live-in caregivers are often the most exploited workers in Canada. That happens under the current rules; there's simply not enough protection there. I'm wondering if the government is planning to make the necessary changes to these programs to both recognize the importance of the work and also ensure the rights of the workers so they cannot be exploited and, in some cases, brutalized and made victims of trafficking.

Hon. Diane Finley: There are a number of aspects to this issue. It is a very serious one. Often people—the temporary foreign workers, the live-in caregivers—come here from another country to fill these jobs. They're brought here under false pretence by some unscrupulous immigration consultants.

Our goal is to make sure these temporary foreign workers, whatever role they're playing, know their rights, for starters. This is why, when they arrive and we give them the work permits, they are told what their rights are. They are counselled in their home country as to what their rights are and what they can expect when they get here. Under Canadian law, they must be treated the same as any Canadian-born worker would be treated, in terms of work conditions, wages, and labour rights. All the same rules apply to them. It's incumbent upon the employers to live up to those obligations.

That being said, HRSDC is working with the provinces to develop enforcement. We've made a commitment as a government to work on this aspect with the provinces, because after all, each province has its own legislation dealing with labour law, to make sure there is enforcement, awareness, and follow-up. It would be up to the Minister of HRSDC to provide you with further details on that.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Can I just get in on that one, too, Madam Chair?

I think it's important to emphasize the point that Ms. Finley talked about, which is the education part of helping these individuals find out what their rights are before they get to the country, and to make them aware of the rights they have. There are extensive sections within both the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act against forcible confinement, human trafficking, and of course assault and all the different aspects of it. So the laws are in place, and part of the challenge we have is to make sure those individuals who can benefit from the provisions in both those pieces of legislation are aware of the protections they are entitled to by working in Canada.

Of course, from my end of it, we support all those efforts to make sure they are aware of their rights. So it's important they have that, but the laws are there.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Well, there still seems to be a gap, because it's persisting.

I want to go on to something else.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: You're right, assaults can persist in this country, but we have laws on the books against assault. They don't necessarily stop it, and we can get into that discussion, but I can tell you that there are extensive laws in both those pieces of legislation that deal with forceable confinement, kidnapping, assault, and all the different aspects. Now if there are specific suggestions on either the Criminal Code or the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that you or others want to make, we would always consider them. But again, I think we have a comprehensive regime.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you. I will take you up on that offer.

I wanted to pursue something else in regard to the fact that not a single person, at least as far as I'm aware, has been successfully prosecuted for the offence of trafficking in persons. I wonder if I am correct. Is this still the case? And why hasn't anyone been prosecuted, if that is indeed the case?

•(1025)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: I have some information on this that may be of interest. Canada ratified those Criminal Code provisions in 2002. It was reported in the *United States-Canada Bi-national Assessment of Trafficking in Persons* that from the spring of 2004 to February 2006, there were at least 25 convictions under various Criminal Code provisions for trafficking activity. A review conducted by my officials in the spring of 2007 identified an additional five convictions in the previous year. As we know, the 2005 trafficking offences are now being used by our police.

Again, it's not perfect, Ms. Mathysen, and I'm aware of that. Again, we have to make sure that these laws work and that they are effective. Again, we take the area very seriously.

I hope that gives you a bit of background on this particular area and on those related charges.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, you have half a minute. Nobody will be able to respond, so can I just move on?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Ministers.

First I'll go to Minister Nicholson. Recommendation 11 of this committee's report said that the age of consent for non-exploitive sexual activity should be raised from 14 to 16 and that a close-in-age exemption clause should be included. Since it seemed to pass so quickly and strongly through this committee, can you comment on the difficulty we're having moving it further?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: I would be very glad to do that.

What we're talking about is the age of consent for sexual activity. It's presently 14 years of age, and our proposal is to move it to 16. I've said to people that this is not just something from the 20th century; this is something from the 19th century, in my opinion. What happens—and you're in the business of talking about and trying to deal with the problem of the exploitation of individuals—is that you get individuals who are sometimes not even in this country. You can be a 40- or 50-year-old from Texas and you start emailing a 14-year-old in Canada, and if you engage in sex with that 14-year-old on a trip to Canada, the police throw up their hands because there's nothing they can do about it. I believe this is absolutely wrong and is a mistake. We don't want this country to become a target for sex tourists who come to Canada because our law is actually out of sync, quite frankly, with the United Kingdom, Australia, and many American states, which sometimes have it higher than 16. We have to bring our laws into that.

What challenges am I having? You heard Senator Carstairs. She said on television last night that she has some concerns, because this might drive certain aspects of prostitution underground. Well, good heavens, if somebody is having sex with a 14- or 15-year-old, I want that to be an offence in this country, and I don't want these individuals to be using the defence of consent.

What we put in this is a close-in-age exemption of five years so that we aren't criminalizing consensual sex between teenagers. We're getting after those adult predators, those 40- and 50-year-olds who are going after 14- and 15-year-olds. I have made the point, and I made it last summer when I didn't get this thing through the Senate, and I made it again yesterday when I was before the Senate, that children in this country are not as well protected as they should be, because that law has not been passed. So I definitely hope it gets passed. I know this had widespread support in the House of Commons, and it's legislation that this country needs and that I would like to see enacted.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Minister.

Minister Finley, there may or may not be an election coming. There are some practical implications to some of these bills not passing. With respect to Bill C-17, what are some of the practical implications of the impact of delays that would happen if an election came on planned activities in Canada over the next couple of years, specifically, obviously, the Olympics?

• (1030)

Hon. Diane Finley: This committee has indicated a strong concern about what will happen at the Olympics. Frankly, I think that is just a magnification of what can happen every day. Every single day there's the opportunity for women to be trafficked into this country, and children too, because quite often a lot of these women don't have documentation as to their real age, so they may be brought in as adult women making a choice but they're in fact children who are being exploited, exposed to sexual exploitation.

We want that to stop and we want it to stop now. We don't want to wait till 2010. We're talking about women who are being exposed to this degrading treatment on a day-to-day basis, who are being put in these situations. We believe they need protection right away. That's why we want to get this legislation through. We want to make sure that we as a country are doing the right thing by them and doing everything we can to protect vulnerable foreign workers just as soon as possible.

Frankly, I wish it had been done years ago. It hasn't been. I'm impatient to get it done now.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

Minister Day, just quickly, we're trying to train 400 more CBSA, 1,000 more RCMP. We can't just go to Wal-Mart and pick them off the shelf. Can you comment on some of the challenges of getting up to those numbers?

Hon. Stockwell Day: The funding is there to do it. The 1,000 more RCMP is well under way; the 400 more officers at the borders is also under way. When you have a strong economy, as we do in Canada, people have a variety of attractive choices, including working in these particular professions, so the challenge is there, but extra money has been set aside on the recruiting side also and on the training side. The dollars are there. They're aggressively recruiting. In a strong economy, there are challenges that go with that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to the third round. We start off with Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll go to Minister Nicholson, if I could. Personally, I want to say, with respect to the bills we were just discussing, it was the prorogation of the House that killed them for a while. We did offer to fast-track those. In addition to that, there is protection for children that exists in law. It may not be as black and white, but the protection is there.

I want to go to questions that I started with earlier.

Minister Nicholson, you referred to me earlier with respect to legalizing brothels and so on, and that was not my point at all. I'm completely on the other side of things.

I have three full recommendations that I really need to focus in on. The first one has to do with criminalizing the user and decriminalizing the prostitute; this is really what it's about. Let me just read to you. Sweden, the Swedish Parliament actually, in 1998 passed legislation criminalizing the purchase of sexual services. Under the act, which came into effect in 1999 in Sweden, prostitutes do not face criminal prosecution for engaging in prostitution; however, the consumers of prostitution can be fined or sentenced to up to six months, and then it goes on, of course, with respect to pimps, and we also have legislation for that.

Essentially what they have done is reversed the coin. Instead of charging the prostitutes when they're offering, they're charging the user. They've had major, good success. We met with them. Their success has been actually tremendous, because the traffickers and the pushers go to countries like Germany, where they've actually legalized it; it's the opposite. So we're seeing it differently.

My first question is, is the government looking at all of this in terms of criminalization?

Following that, of course, is recommendation 7, which basically reinforces recommendation 6. It says that the Criminal Code be amended to include a criminal offence of purchasing a sexual service. To support that further, recommendation 9 then refers to the defence act to be amended to include new offences of purchasing a sexual service, which is to then become compliant with that.

The question is, is the government looking at that at all, in terms of going in the direction this committee has recommended?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Thank you.

With respect, if prorogation were the only thing that was getting in the way of the Senate passing that sexual exploitation bill, I hope there's nothing standing in their way now. I was there before them yesterday, asking them to please get it passed, because everybody wants it done, and I will be the first one to stand up and applaud if we can get that through Parliament.

I mentioned your name, I believe, with respect to a question from Madame Deschamps, only because you did raise the matter, but I think we were at the end of the seven minutes, so I didn't get a chance to get on to the subject. Again, with respect to the legalization of brothels, I think I made that very clear—

• (1035)

Hon. Maria Minna: We're not talking about that.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: With respect to the customers, there are Criminal Code provisions, and certainly I support them. As for those who procure the services of prostitution, live off the avails, people who transport individuals to prostitution—as I said to you, I'm all in favour of any prosecutions that are directed towards the john.

In answer to your question about whether we are studying examples from other countries to legalize the activity, we are not. I made it very clear that this government has no intention of legalizing any aspect of this business.

Have I run out of time, or am I just being interrupted? Whichever it is, I turn it over to you.

Hon. Maria Minna: Madam Chair, I apologize.

The Chair: She wants to interrupt. I think there's a miscommunication.

Hon. Maria Minna: I apologize, but I do have to interrupt.

I think we're talking from two different sides of the coin here. I am not saying—and neither did this committee say—that we were to legalize prostitution. What we said is that women in prostitution are victims, and now we're treating them as criminals. We said we should not charge the victim and criminalize the victim, that we should create a law that says if you're found to be using, we charge the “user” and we help the victim. That's all we're doing. We're not saying that we're legalizing brothels at all. That's not what I'm saying. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Anybody caught in there should be charged. It's the other way around.

That's what I'm trying to get at.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: We have laws with respect to street soliciting, or soliciting in a public place, that criminalize completely the activity.

Hon. Maria Minna: It criminalizes, again, the prostitute.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: It criminalizes the activity, the individual trying to purchase that service, and the individual who is offering it, and that will continue to be the law of this country.

The Chair: Minister, she's just asking whether you will put in another law that will criminalize the johns.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: The johns are criminalized now. They are being charged in this country, and of course they should be.

The Chair: Perhaps we should be studying that law to make it more stringent because—

Hon. Maria Minna: Sorry, you're taking my.... Am I out...?

The Chair: That's okay. I'm not taking your time. Your time was finished. I just gave you the courtesy. Thank you.

At the end, Minister, we will have wrap-up time, so perhaps you could just address it. Thank you.

Madame Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have another quick question for Minister Day. Could you talk to us a little about the role of the new Human Trafficking National Coordination Centre. What exactly does the HTNCC do?

Hon. Stockwell Day: The Centre concerns itself with issues relating to human trafficking. Officials work to develop a network with other departments and to work in partnership with them. The Centre works with 18 other departments and border agencies to provide information and coordinate training efforts. The Centre also provided \$240 million for the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics for the purpose of developing an information network on human trafficking. These are some of the responsibilities carried out by the Centre. When a committee such as yours does a study or produces a report, the Centre examines it and determines how many recommendations can be or have already been implemented in order to continue waging the battle against human trafficking.

● (1040)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Madam Chair, just continuing with Minister Day, one of the topics we discussed at some length in the course of this study on human trafficking was the role of police services and law enforcement officials in adapting to the sorts of changing circumstances they were being faced with at the community level.

Could you expand a little further on some of the things that are happening in terms of helping police to recognize and cope with this new reality that they're seeing at the community level?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Well, on the budgetary side, just within the RCMP themselves, \$1.35 million out of this last budget was directed specifically to the area of training.

There are some things they have to be sensitive to. For instance, with some of the cases that my colleague has mentioned, you'll have a case where, thankfully, somebody either escapes the clutches of someone who is exploiting them or they are freed from that in some way, and one minute they're willing to testify and then later on they have great fear and concern and they may not be willing to testify. The officers need to be sensitive to a person who is a victim, who is trapped, yet is so afraid of testifying that the valuable evidence they need to go after the perpetrators becomes elusive.

That's just one aspect of the proper type of training and sensitivity that goes into not just RCMP officers, but border officers, immigration officers—the ability to encourage victims to come forward, to let them know they will be safe, that there will be protection.

Among the recommendations from this committee, recommendation 27 talks about the witness protection program. There has to be an assurance given to the potential victims that they will be protected. That's why there's a collaboration right now with Crime Stoppers across the country to continue to develop a program that has an outreach component to it, so that somebody who is a victim on the domestic side or someone who's been brought into the country will become aware that there is help for them.

That's a message we want to get out to them. And knowing that helps them to come forward with the valuable information that also helps us to go after the perpetrators.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Day.

We now go to Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Day, you spoke at length about police officers who would be hired to deal more effectively with human trafficking. You also talked about a change of policy within the RCMP. In recent years—and the Robert Pickton case in Vancouver comes to mind—police action has come up woefully short, and that is especially true of the lack of credibility given to persons making accusations.

Have you succeeded in bringing about a change of attitude at the RCMP under the organization's new leadership? A policy change does not necessarily mean a change of attitude.

Have you raised this particular problem with the new RCMP official? What is standing in the way of a change of attitude on the part of police officers who deal with these problems? They are the ones who deal first hand with the victims of human trafficking or prostitution in Canada. Victims of prostitution are often poor and have children to raise. They have no other option available to them. What steps do you intend to take to bring about a change of attitude on the part of police officers toward these individuals?

I have one final request before I run out of time. Could you provide us with copies of the documents you have prepared to date? You mentioned posters, pamphlets and binders.

Thank you.

• (1045)

Hon. Stockwell Day: Thank you for your questions.

I would just like to comment briefly about the attitude of the men and women of the RCMP. I have met with detachments on a number of occasions and I have patrolled the streets with officers. RCMP officers across the country are very concerned about the crime problem, especially crime involving young persons and victims of human trafficking. Officers are very compassionate and attuned to this problem. The men and women of the RCMP have children of their own and are worried about the rising crime rate. It is not a matter of getting them to change their attitude. I know for a fact that they are concerned about crime and want to protect the weak and young people, especially those who are vulnerable. I could tell you about several cases where officers stepped in personally to help a young person caught up in some criminal activity.

We are going to see some changes in the RCMP administration. Mr. Brown has put forward some recommendations calling for a different system. Shortly, I will be announcing the creation of a board to implement these recommendations. Given the complaints against the RCMP, it is important for us to have an open, transparent system, one in which complaints against the RCMP will be investigated by independent parties.

We can expect some significant changes. Let me say again that RCMP members are very focused on their communities.

Ms. Nicole Demers: May I ask who provides training to RCMP officers in the area of human trafficking? Who is supplying the expertise?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Groups work with police officers and civilians in a number of countries. Information is always being exchanged. They acquire experience in the field by working with victims and with community groups that work with victims.

As you mentioned in your report, they must continue to learn and to listen to these groups. The work is never-ending. Unfortunately, they have much to learn, especially about human trafficking, but they are more than willing to acquire the tools to do their job more effectively.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the last questioner, Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a multi-tiered question.

One of the things we've been talking about is addressing what is essentially a horrific situation and a horrific problem. We don't even know what the numbers are. There's no way of gauging it, no way of actually finding out how many victims there are.

It was said here that we can't tell other nations what to do with respect to the victims of trafficking, but we can address the trafficking that we know exists domestically. It most certainly does exist here, particularly among aboriginal women and girls. They are the most vulnerable.

We've talked about prosecution and prevention. I'd like to focus a little more on prevention and the things we can do, because we're not helpless. We can do some things in this country in regard to that, and I think through the social structures.

For example, we know about poverty. The report is very clear that while we can't necessarily address the demand for sexual exploitation, we can address poverty, and through a number of ways.

For example, one in six children in this country is growing up in poverty, and they become much more susceptible to the realities of poverty and to the wish to escape that poverty through one means or another. Those children are from homes where there are single moms who don't have access to child care and can't escape the poverty trap. We know that only 30% of young women who contribute to unemployment insurance are able to collect it when they are out of work. We know that self-employed women are not eligible to collect unemployment insurance. We know that there is a housing crisis in this country, yet we have no national housing strategy.

It seems to me that some of the solutions in terms of prevention are here. I'm wondering what this government is prepared to do to make sure there truly is a secure child care system that moms and young families can depend on; so that there is a national housing strategy; so that there is help when people are unemployed; so that those one in six children aren't so vulnerable; so that those women are not so vulnerable and aren't susceptible to the enticements of the predators we know are out there.

• (1050)

Hon. Diane Finley: It's very important that everyone have the opportunity to escape the poverty trap. You're absolutely right, Ms. Mathysen, when you say that poverty is one of the contributors to human trafficking and to the vulnerability, particularly of women, to being trafficked. We all want to prevent that, absolutely.

As a government we've taken a number of steps to help alleviate the poverty situation, first of all in trying to help people get good jobs. To do that we need to have a strong economy. We have been providing a number of forms of assistance to business, both large and small, because it's small and medium businesses that create 75% of the new jobs. We've provided incentives to help them be more competitive in a world market.

We've provided a universal child care benefit to parents so that they're not locked into a formal child care system. They can opt into it if they choose, but they'll have assistance to get the form of child care that best meets their needs. We've provided millions of dollars to the provinces to help them create formal child care spaces, so that young women can get into the workforce.

We've introduced the WITB, the working income tax benefit, to help people get over the poverty threshold that sometimes keeps them on welfare instead of becoming productive in the workforce.

We've provided education assistance to students in universities and colleges and have encouraged them, through incentives, to get skilled trades and get the education they need to earn a good living for themselves.

We've introduced EI reforms to extend eligibility but still encourage people to work.

We are spending more money on affordable housing to help these individuals who have low incomes than has ever been spent before.

So we're doing a lot to help ease the poverty situation that can contribute so significantly to human trafficking.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will be giving you each about a minute and a half to do a summation.

I'd like to thank the three of you, on behalf of the committee, for being here. It's a critical issue. When we did the study of human trafficking, all committee members felt it was an issue that demanded that we take some very critical actions.

The women who are being trafficked, who come through any form, whether they come in as nannies or as live-in caregivers or as exotic dancers, are all very vulnerable, and these vulnerable women seek protection.

We need some clarification on some of the statements the ministers have made here. If they come in and they never testify against their perpetrator, how can the justice system be made to function?

Minister Nicholson, I think we need some clarification on recommendation 6. Basically, what the committee had stated is that there are trafficked women who come here, who may be put into prostitution, and the john may claim, when he goes to court, that he never knew this was a trafficked woman. When we heard the evidence, that's where the critical issue was.

Recommendations 6 and 7 stated that we would like the trafficked woman not to have a criminal record but that the john have a criminal record. Perhaps it requires a lot more discussion than that, but could you give a response to that?

And Minister Day, we had asked in recommendation 17 that we have evidence collected centrally so that everyone can access it. For the justice system to work effectively, you need to have all the information. So in your summation, if you could, just give us a brief update, and then we'll thank you for being here.

Minister Nicholson.

•(1055)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to join with my colleagues to talk with you about a very important subject.

I am, of course, among those...anyone who purchases, for starters, sexual services.... It is against the law in Canada; it should be vigorously enforced in the country. Any time you attack the consumer of any product or service and you reduce the business itself, then of course we'll suffer, if we can call this terrible situation that.

But again, of course, with respect to those individuals who are in the business of trafficking, I believe there is a comprehensive set of laws within the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that deal with individuals who coerce, exploit, molest, confine, or assault individuals. And of course that is as it should be.

I am encouraged by a number of initiatives that we are doing. As Ms. Mathysen said, we can't tell other countries what to do, but we certainly can work with other countries. As I indicated to you in my opening remarks, the United Nations has made efforts to provide manuals to assist individuals who are in the business of law enforcement, judges, prosecutors in other countries.

I told you of one pilot project that I'm particularly interested in, which is this country helping individuals to get legislation on the books that helps in this area. Canada can be of great assistance in that. I'm very much looking forward to those initiatives.

The Chair: Minister Finley, for a minute, please.

Hon. Diane Finley: Thank you very much.

Before I sum up, I would like to clarify a point. I may have misspoken earlier when I talked about Bill S-218. It is a private member's bill that's before the Senate to put into law what we already have in regulation. I just wanted to clarify that for the record, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank you and the committee once again for having us here today. This is an important issue to you. Obviously, it's an important issue to our government. I think it's almost unprecedented to have three ministers appear before a committee at once, so it shows you the emphasis that we place on this issue, the fact that all three of us are here today.

It is important. We are taking steps in the right direction. There's no question we need to do more. We're trying to do that to help combat human trafficking. I would therefore urge each and every member around this table to come out and block Bill S-218, because it will needlessly impair the ability of the government to respond to changing needs in combatting human trafficking, but also to support Bill C-17, which will help us protect vulnerable foreign workers, particularly women and children.

I'd ask you, as members of the committee, to take these actions and to also urge your caucus colleagues, your colleagues on the citizenship and immigration committee, your colleagues in the House, and your colleagues in the Senate to take action on these two bills.

Thank you very much.

•(1100)

The Chair: Thank you.

It will have to be very brief, Minister, because we have the other committee here.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stockwell Day: Thank you, Madam Chair, members of the committee.

You have already had an impact on the efforts of our law enforcement officials to combat human trafficking.

[*English*]

You've already accomplished that.

I'd just say briefly to Ms. Mathysen—and we've corresponded on a number of issues, which I appreciate, or to any committee members—if you have a situation in which you hear of something that happens at the border, and there's a possibility of somebody at risk of human trafficking, and it didn't go as you would have hoped, please get that information to me.

On your direct question, Madam Chair, it is important to coordinate and get the right kind of information. That's why we've given \$240,000 from Public Safety to the Canadian Centre for

Justice Statistics. That's just one of a number of ways we have to get the right information.

I'll just close with the thought that we have—and I know this is your message—a dual message here, the message to those who are victims: there are people who will help you. There are people who will protect you. We want to get you out of the clutches of those predators, and we extend that to you. And that will be across the country.

And to the predators and the perpetrators: I can't think of many things more despicable than somebody enslaving another human being. It is hugely ironic that on the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade we would have to be looking at people who still want to enslave others.

We will stand with you in that great task to put an end to that through legislation, being tough on the perpetrators and the predators, and through education and prevention, reaching out so that we can have indeed a society and a country where people are truly free.

The Chair: Thank you all. Thank you very much for being here.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.