



House of Commons
CANADA

**Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills
and Social Development and the Status of
Persons with Disabilities**

HUMA • NUMBER 035 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, June 1, 2009

—

Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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

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

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Monday, June 1, 2009

• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study on the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada, this is meeting 35 here in Toronto.

To let our witnesses know, we've been in Halifax, Moncton, Montreal, and a couple of days here in Toronto. I hope in the fall we'll be heading to western Canada.

I want to thank all of you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here today and share with us a little of what's going on in some of the organizations you're involved with, as well as some of your suggestions on how we can do a better job on this at the federal level.

I'll start with Wendy Campbell from Canadian Business for Social Responsibility. I welcome you and thank you for being here.

Each of you will have five minutes. If you can, try to keep it to that, but if you're over a bit, obviously we want you to finish your thought. We understand it's hard to get it all into five minutes and we appreciate your doing the best you can.

Wendy, we'll start with you for five minutes. Welcome, and the floor is yours.

Mrs. Wendy Campbell (Director of Programs, Canadian Business for Social Responsibility): Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

Canadian Business for Social Responsibility is a national non-profit professional association. We have over 100 corporate members. We are Canada's globally recognized source for corporate social responsibility, and we support our members to advance their social, environmental, and financial performance and contribute to a better world.

We mobilize companies through our three business lines. Our member services deliver candid counsel, learning and networking, and access to an international network of CSR thought leaders. In our advisory services area, we have expert consulting services in strategic community investment, stakeholder engagement, strategy development, CSR assessment, benchmarking, climate change, governance, reporting, and communications. The area I lead on behalf of our organization is the programs area. We operate two programs that mobilize companies to take action on the issues of

poverty, employability, homelessness, and at-risk youth. They are called Seeing is Believing and Ready for Work.

Today I want to talk about the Ready for Work program. This is a national model for governments, business, and community to invest in work experience and skills training for marginalized people. It is a managed, coordinated, and measurable program to reduce poverty across Canada.

Canada's poverty rates are predicted to grow during the current economic crisis, and the overrepresented groups include new Canadians, aboriginal Canadians, lone-parent families, women, and visible minorities. The persistence of poverty also disproportionately affects our children. Poverty is the leading cause of homelessness, poor health, chronic health problems, lower education levels, and higher mortality rates. Taken together, the combined effects of poverty negatively impact every Canadian by adding to our social costs and by reducing our country's economic potential. Each group represents a complexity of issues, with the common issue being lack of employability.

Bringing marginalized people into the workforce should be focused on partnerships and programs that support employability over time and not on short-term initiatives and subsidies. The investment will pay off as more and more people move from income assistance toward financial independence and tax contribution.

The Ready for Work program is operated in the U.K. by our sister organization, Business in the Community. Canadian Business for Social Responsibility will operate this program as their licensee in Canada. The Ready for Work program has a four-phased and long-term approach. Candidates are formally registered and given a program introduction where they are taught work and life skills, given pre-employment training, and then matched to a work placement that takes into account their particular experience and interest. Clients then complete a two- to four-week work placement within a company, and they have a workplace buddy assigned to them on a one-on-one daily basis. At the end of the placement, they're given a recommendation as well as a performance reference. Then they are paired with a job coach for up to six months. That job coach is also a volunteer from the corporate sector who will meet with that individual on a weekly basis to help them with their job search.

Solutions to the issues of poverty will absolutely have to involve government, business, and community. Unfortunately, the P3 landscape can also be difficult to navigate because of limited mutual understanding across the sectors. Community agencies are experts in service delivery and client support, but at the same time they operate unlimited funding cycles with increasingly scarce resources. This challenges the sector's ability to offer stable and effective programs and hinders its capacity to deliver on long-term partnership commitments.

Although most companies also agree that poverty is an urgent issue, they too lack the knowledge, skills, and experience to navigate this confusing and disparate sector, with its wide variety of community organizations and the many variations of programs and initiatives. As a result, there's a crucial role for a broker offering a defined solution with an existing network of corporate partners and the ability to measure success in terms of increasing percentages of marginalized people getting work and living independently.

• (1110)

CBSR alone has this cross-sector experience to bridge the corporate community gap. Our leadership in the social services sector and in the business sector has been proven to mobilize business engagement at a strategic level and effect real social change. The Ready for Work program has a tested and cost-effective model.

Since 2002, in the U.K., the Ready for Work program has supported over 3,500 clients. Approximately 1,500 have gained employment, and over 800 have sustained employment for at least six months. In 2009, they have over 142 companies that support the program through placements, job coaches, and venues for training. In addition, 283 homeless projects and other employability organizations refer those clients all across the U.K.

The government can lead in the development of partnerships between government, community, and business. Business must play a key role in providing the jobs, the training, and support as part of its social responsibility agenda. However, our experience shows that upfront government investment will be required to launch a national employment initiative.

Business involvement and leadership will grow as their engagement generates bottom-line benefits in the form of enhanced reputation, improved multi-stakeholder trust, improved community economic outlook, and of course, a healthier balance sheet. One of the key success factors in the U.K. has been in its P3 funding model. In looking ahead, a key priority must be to ensure access to fulfilling work for all those who want it. By building bridges across the sectors and launching the Ready for Work program, we will take the crucial leap to bring marginalized individuals off the streets and into the work force.

Thank you.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Wendy.

We're now going to move to the Canadian Jewish Congress, and Melanie Simons.

Welcome. You have five minutes.

Ms. Melanie Simons (Director, Social Policy, Canadian Jewish Congress): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the standing committee.

On behalf of the Canadian Jewish Congress, or CJC, I'd like to say how pleased I am to have been invited to speak before the committee.

As the primary advocacy agency for Jewish communities across the country, CJC would like to thank the Parliament of Canada and recognize your work as individual parliamentarians in showing leadership in recognizing the scourge of poverty for what it is, as well as for undertaking to address it in very real terms.

The Jewish community's approach to fighting poverty in Canada is informed by both our Canadian and our Jewish values, as well as our experience as a community afflicted by poverty. Our broad yet distinctly Jewish perspective informs an approach founded not in charity but in respect for universal human rights and human dignity. Such an approach implicitly accepts that there are basic rights that must be underwritten in a civilized community. These rights are articulated in international covenants such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but they also flow from the moral foundations of the world's great religions, making intervention by faith groups entirely appropriate.

Over many decades, CJC and the Jewish federations that represent local communities across the country have fought to turn the dream of a poverty-free Canada into a reality. Our work has helped Jewish and other minority communities realize their right to live as full citizens of our country. This work has strengthened our cities, our provinces and territories, and our country. As the late Louis Lenkinski, a Canadian labour and volunteer leader in the Jewish community, observed, there cannot be justice for the Jews until there is justice for everybody.

In the Jewish tradition, we speak of two equally important concepts. One is *tikkun olam*, the ethical commandment that Jews accept responsibility for making the world a better place. It is coupled with the Talmudic observation that it is not up to humanity to complete the work of the world, but neither are we free to desist from it. The path is clear, and both the challenges and the opportunities are great.

The Jewish community has a successful track record of developing and providing programs and services to address poverty. We have learned that each community has unique needs, and that a one-size-fits-all approach has little probability of success. The lessons learned over time bring us to the realization that a multi-dimensional approach, integrated among a number of agencies and backed by community leadership, can be most effective at reducing the scope of poverty within the community.

To that end, Jewish federations across the country have created community-based responses to addressing poverty. The mission of Canadian Jewish federations is to preserve and strengthen the quality of Jewish life in Canada, Israel, and around the world through philanthropic, volunteer, and professional leadership. Our written submission provides some examples of our recent advocacy and ongoing program initiatives in the country, so I won't go into further detail here. Instead, I'd like to put a real face on poverty in our community. I think it's important to do so because, as Jim Torczyner, professor at McGill University, writes, "The Jewish poor are a minority among Jews because they are poor, and a minority among the poor because they are Jews. They lack representation in both communities." This is also true because, in general, Jews have been depicted in western civilization as financially successful and self-reliant, with a strong tradition of philanthropy and social service networks. These perceptions arise from Jewish philosophy, which places great emphasis on education and looking after the poor. However, in spite of these perceptions and the outreach efforts of social agencies and activists, poverty continues to afflict our community.

I'd like to read you three case studies that were provided to me by the United Jewish Appeal Federation of Greater Toronto.

First, there's Ari. He's 62 years old and he registered with Jewish Vocational Services, or JVS, in the fall of 2008. Ari and his wife once had a successful business with over 10 locations in North America. However, a combination of factors conspired to reduce the business to imminent bankruptcy. When he came to JVS, Ari presented as physically frail, desperate, and fearful of losing his last remaining tangible assets. In order to make ends meet, he took a physically and emotionally draining survival job, which took a heavy toll on his health and self-esteem. With the support of JVS, Ari has found secure, well-paid employment in retail management, and he's back on his feet.

Then there are Irina and Alex. They're in their late thirties. Irina is a psychiatrist from Argentina. Her husband is an agricultural engineer. They have two daughters and a son. As is the case with 650 Jewish newcomer families every year, they arrived in Toronto to make a better life. They had no friends when they moved here, limited English, and no income. The family was very disconnected and lonely. They received financial assistance from the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Toronto for rent and food, as well as a subsidy for Jewish school. With the community's help, they're back on their feet. Irina currently has a fellowship in child psychiatry, and Alex is working in his field.

• (1120)

Rebecca is 23 years old and a university student. She was earning straight As until her father lost his job and virtually all of his assets as a result of the economic downturn. When her father threatened her life, Rebecca went to Jewish Family and Child Services. Her dad is so depressed and desperate and emotionally and verbally abusive that Rebecca doesn't know when he'll snap. She is giving him part of her OSAP money to keep him afloat. Now she is barely making Cs. The pressure is becoming too great; she is currently receiving counselling from Jewish Family and Child Services, and the agency is also in the process of reaching out to her father to provide support services for mental health and physical assessment.

I'd like to conclude by emphasizing that poverty is a complex issue that crosses ethno-cultural and religious boundaries and requires multi-dimensional solutions. No one-size-fits-all solution will be viable. However, with provincial poverty reduction strategies now in place in Ontario, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador, the federal government has a critical role to play in creating an overarching national strategy to eradicate poverty.

Again, on behalf of the Canadian Jewish Congress, I'd like to thank the chair, vice-chairs, and members of this important committee for providing us with an opportunity to contribute towards the development of a national strategy to eradicate poverty in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Simons.

We're now going to move to the Canadian Women's Foundation, and Ms. Beverley Wybrow.

Welcome. You have five minutes. The floor is yours.

Ms. Beverley Wybrow (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Women's Foundation): Thank you.

The Canadian Women's Foundation is Canada's only national public foundation dedicated to helping women and girls reach their full economic and social potential. We invest in the power of women and the dreams of girls. We raise funds from the private sector—corporations, individuals, and foundations—to research, fund, and share the best approaches to moving low-income women out of poverty, ending violence against women, and building strong and resilient girls.

The foundation has raised over \$31 million and invested in over 825 programs all across Canada. We are one of the 10 largest women's foundations in the world.

To date, we have invested over \$10 million in economic development work to help low-income women in Canada move out of poverty. We fund by providing five-year grants; and we evaluate; and we provide training in self-employment, social purpose enterprises, and pre-apprenticeship support and retention programs for women in skilled trades and technology.

Working with our grantees and external evaluators, we've pioneered the development and use of sustainable livelihoods, a positive and holistic asset-based approach to program development, implementation, and evaluation. We have provided training for over 100 women's economic development programs across Canada in its use.

In the fall of 2008, we launched the Women Moving Women campaign, the largest national movement of women moving other women out of poverty. It harnesses the philanthropic power of one woman to launch another woman on her journey out of poverty. We are recruiting 2,500 people to join the campaign by donating \$2,500 over five years to help 2,500 low-income women on their journeys out of poverty. The campaign will raise \$6.2 million over the next several years.

And I do want to note here, however, that while private philanthropy has a really important role to play, it will never replace the critical role of governments. And we really do need to be working together.

Extensive evaluation of our economic development work over the last 18 years has shown that when you help women, they go on to help their children, families, and communities, producing powerful economic and social ripple effects.

Based on that experience over the last 18 years, the following are the components that we think are most critical for the federal government's contribution to reducing poverty in Canada.

Women are disproportionately poor, so the strategy must target women, particularly those who are the most marginalized. There must be a gender analysis.

Lack of quality child care is a significant barrier to women's engagement in the economy. An effective poverty reduction strategy must address child care in a way that's flexible or in line with local labour market conditions and women's child care responsibilities. A national child care strategy is essential.

The work to move women out of poverty must be longer term and holistic. It should use a sustainable livelihoods approach, helping women to build on their strengths instead of seeing poor women as a problem. It should measure all asset areas: financial; personal, such as self-confidence; social connections; physical assets, such as housing; and human assets, such as education.

There is an urgent need to invest in training and retraining for women, and the following are required. The funding for economic development and employment training and retraining programs for women needs to be increased to ensure women are able to access the funding. Stable multi-year program funding is required. We need to eliminate EI eligibility as a prerequisite for access to training. We should also include structural supports, such as child care, income support, and health and transportation costs. And we need increased investment in employment transition services and pre-apprenticeship programs, and we need to expand financial literacy education.

Access to employment insurance is inadequate. There needs to be a better fit with women's paid work patterns, family responsibilities, and income support needs. The following measures are required: broaden the eligibility criteria and set a national qualifying standard of 360 hours of work, raise the level of benefits, cover the self-employed, and eliminate the two-week waiting period.

The high costs of housing and of living in inadequate housing are key factors that keep women living in poverty. We therefore need to develop a gender-positive national housing strategy and increase investment to meet the needs of women fleeing violence, aboriginal women, and women with disabilities. Women leaving violent situations are at great risk of homelessness, and a national action plan on violence against women is required, including investment in prevention and supports to help women and children rebuild their lives after experiencing violence. Lack of adequate affordable housing increases the likelihood that women and their children will return to violent situations. We need to increase investment in emergency shelters, second-stage housing, and in the construction of affordable long-term housing for women fleeing abuse.

Adequate income support programs are essential. We should improve child benefits, establish an adequate federal minimum wage, and require provinces and territories to increase social assistance rates.

• (1125)

Aboriginal women are twice as likely as non-aboriginal women to live in poverty, and they experience high rates of violence. A specific aboriginal strategy is required, including access to training and supports, adequately funded emergency shelters, support to address and prevent violence, and an investment in housing.

Status of Women Canada's mandate and funding to advance equality for women through advocacy and policy change was important to realizing systemic change for women, and it should be restored.

Finally, we encourage the development of strong multi-year indicators and annual public progress reports on the federal poverty reduction strategy. It must work in concert with provincial and territorial strategies and initiatives. We encourage poverty to be broadly defined and measured and to include the following: income, assets of all kinds, debt load, percentage of income spent on housing and child care; and population groups must be seen through a specific gender lens.

The Chair: Thank you, Beverley.

We're now going to move to the C.D. Howe Institute and Claire de Oliveira.

Dr. Claire de Oliveira (Research Fellow, C.D. Howe Institute): *Bonjour.* Good morning to everyone. Thank you for this invitation. My name is Claire de Oliveira and I'm currently a research fellow at the C.D. Howe Institute here in Toronto.

As some of you may know, the C.D. Howe Institute is a think-tank that is known for its relevant, independent, and quality research.

In my presentation I will briefly discuss how the federal government can contribute to reducing poverty across Canada, while providing effective solutions for dealing with this problem. In particular, I will be focusing specifically on child poverty and recommendations to deal with this issue.

The main tools that policy-makers have at their disposal to increase the welfare of the poor are usually cash and in-kind transfers of goods and services. Generally, policy-makers are interested in understanding whether governments can improve children's welfare by increasing cash transfers to low-income families or whether they should focus on the provision of services such as early childhood education or parenting training. Cash transfers typically raise the welfare of the poor by increasing their disposable income, while in-kind benefits are used primarily to alter the poor's consumption behaviour towards higher levels of a given good or service.

Thus, many economists have suggested that in-kind transfers are a better policy instrument than cash transfers to increase the well-being of children directly, as the former can be more effective in encouraging the consumption of specific goods and services that governments may wish individuals to consume. My own research confirms these findings.

Currently, funding for in-kind transfers for early childhood development and early learning and child care is transferred to the provinces and territories from the federal government through the Canada health and social transfer and is provided on an equal per capita cash basis to ensure that all Canadians have similar support regardless of their place of residence. The preference for in-kind transfers over cash transfers to address child poverty suggests that provincial governments have a larger role to play than the federal government in achieving the best policy outcomes. Provincial governments handle the provision and partial funding of most child-targeted programs, while the federal government provides the remaining funding.

For programs aimed specifically at low-income families, this model should remain as it is. Nonetheless, the federal government still has an important role within this context, and changes will need to occur at the federal level to improve the current model.

For example, an important measure to minimize child poverty is to improve the national child benefit by broadening the range of services delivered under this program. This includes pre-natal screening, child care, parenting skills, and information on mothers' and children's nutrition. This will require the allocation of additional resources to the program, from the federal government to the provincial and territorial governments. Some may even suggest that when these funds are transferred from the federal government to the provincial and territorial governments, there should be some stipulation of how these funds should be spent.

Thank you for your time. I hope these comments are useful and can contribute to this debate.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Claire.

Next we will hear from Mr. Boudjenane, from the Canadian Arab Federation.

You have the floor, sir, for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Mohamed Boudjenane: Established in 1967, the Canadian Arab Federation is an anti-racist, non-partisan and non-profit organization which represents Canadian Arabs on issues relating to public policy. CAF raises awareness of issues that affect the Canadian Arab community through media relations and non-partisan government relations.

Poverty is a harsh reality, Mr. Chair, for the majority of Canadians but in particular for racialized and immigrant communities in Canada. We strongly believe that poverty increases the marginalization and victimization of racialized communities and individuals who are already at a disadvantage because of racial inequality. The Arab community in Canada is experiencing this reality first hand. In the last decade, the Arab community, long a presence in Canada, has

seen its economic circumstances decline. We believe this is the result of policies that have marginalized the community and in particular, of growing racial tensions and intolerance toward the Arab and Muslim communities.

The events of September 11 have certainly proven to be a catalyst for many changes that have affected the Arab community. A number of bills have been introduced and passed. These include the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Public Safety Act. For example, the provisions respecting the use of security certificates arising from the Immigration Act, as well as extradition policies, have made Arab Canadians the target of discrimination and their fundamental human rights have been denied them. One need only consider the fate of individuals such as Maher Arar, Abdullah Almalki, Muayyed Nureddin and Ahmad Abou El Maati.

Bill C-36, the Anti-Terrorist Act, helped to promote policies which, in our opinion, have further marginalized Arab communities. Instances of racial profiling and the targeting of these communities at various levels of Canadian society have increased. Media reports and the comments of certain political leaders have merely reinforced this existing negative image and perception held by Canadians. In our opinion, Canadians' feelings of intolerance toward Arab and Muslim communities have intensified.

[English]

Now I will turn to English to give you a sense of those studies and a clear indication of the highest increase of intolerance against Arab Canadians. The *Maclean's* poll on religion in 2009, a recent study, shows they surveyed more than 1,000 selected Canadians on religion. I'm quoting here what the survey said:

Those findings leave little doubt that Canadians with a Christian background travel through life benefiting from a broad tendency of their fellow citizens to view their religion more favourably than any other. Across Canada, 72 per cent said they have a "generally favourable opinion" of Christianity. At the other end of the spectrum, Islam scored the lowest favourability rating, just 28 per cent.

The Journal of Canadian Ethnic Studies in fall 2004, according to the survey conducted by Leger Marketing in September 2002, 33% of Canadian respondents declared they had heard racist comments against Muslims and Arabs. In November 2002 another survey by *Maclean's* magazine, Global TV, and the *Ottawa Citizen* indicated that 44% of Canadians wanted a reduction of immigration from Muslim countries. The highest percentage was in Quebec, with 48%, versus 45% in Ontario, 42% in Saskatchewan, 43% in Manitoba, 39% in the Maritimes, and 35% in British Columbia and Alberta. The average percentage in favour of a reduction of immigration from Arab countries was 49% a year earlier.

These figures show there is a definite increase in intolerance and racism toward the Arab and Muslim community in Canada, and of course, that in turn will economically impact the Arab community.

Statistics Canada showed that in 2002 Arab and West Asian Canadians had the highest rate of unemployment among racialized communities at 40%. In certain regions, such as Quebec, for example, Arabs of North African origin have a record of unemployment of 33.5%.

I'll give you an example of 200 doctors who went through the process to be recognized in Quebec to get their certification, and those 200 doctors had difficulty a year later to find hospitals to hire them. The Children's Aid Society of Toronto conducted a study called *Greater Trouble in Greater Toronto: Child Poverty in the GTA*. That study found that one in three children of Arab and West Asian descent live under the poverty line. A York University census study revealed that in 2001, 33% of Arab and West Asian groups in Canada live below the poverty line. Arab businessmen have seen a decrease in revenue post-9/11 due to travel restrictions and security checks.

We have also a few proposals to make to the committee in terms of how to address the situation. We think the federal government must acknowledge and address systemic barriers to inclusion as well as persistent experience of racial discrimination by adopting a racial equity outcome measure to all its legislation, programs, and public policies. The federal government must take a leadership role by developing a national poverty reduction approach, time-specific and measurable, which targets those most vulnerable, and I mean the racialized communities. The federal government should restore funding to provinces and territories for child care programs and increase funding for child care across Canada.

Racialized women are one of the biggest victims of poverty, and therefore there is a strong need for targeted programming strategies to help alleviate their suffering. EI reform should target women of colour, immigrant workers, refugees, and vulnerable workers as a priority.

The government should consider strategies such as paid internships and subsidies and/or tax incentives for employers who practise employment equity and any other measures that will make possible labour market integration for equity-seeking groups.

All provinces and territories that receive investments and allocations from the federal government must be required to meet the federal employment equity program targets for any jobs that are created as a result. There is a need for desegregated data, and this is a major and strong issue for our communities and for racialized communities.

Finally, we want to remind the government to put forward policies that will combat racism and balance anti-terrorism with human rights and civil liberties.

Thank you.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mohamed.

We're now going to move to the Canadian Council of Churches. I have Peter Noteboom, as well as Maylanne Maybee.

I believe, Maylanne, you're going to be doing the speaking.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maylanne Maybee (Coordinator for Eco-Justice Networks, Canadian Council of Churches): I will be making my presentation in both official languages, starting in English.

The Canadian Council of Churches is the largest ecumenical body in Canada, now representing 22 churches of Anglican, Evangelical, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. Together the Canadian Council of Churches represents 85% of the Christians in Canada.

On May 13, MP Tony Martin noted in the House of Commons that the Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada had together hosted an MP Roundtable on Parliament Hill on Faith and a Sustainable Economy. He further noted that the religious left and religious right were coming together to call for an end to poverty. While we wonder which one of us is religious left and which one is religious right, churches in Canada are united in their determination to contribute to ending poverty in Canada.

• (1140)

[*English*]

In a letter sent on November 26, 2007, 21 member churches of the Canadian Council of Churches—that's one fewer than we currently have—unanimously signed a letter to the Prime Minister, calling on the Government of Canada to establish a high-level task force to develop a national poverty reduction strategy within the next budget year, incorporating these features: measurable goals and timelines, indicators to measure poverty in Canada that are publicly comprehensible, a means to monitor and evaluate progress, budget commitments that focus on the needs of vulnerable people—and we've heard some of those vulnerable groups named here: women, children, racialized groups, aboriginals, immigrants, and refugees.

To date, Madam Minister, the federal government has not established a poverty reduction task force, nor initiated a poverty reduction strategy.

At the recent May round table held with members of Parliament two weeks ago in Ottawa, there was a striking agreement among all participants, which included representatives from each political party. They all agreed that a resolution calling for the end of poverty in Canada would not be enough unless it included a plan of implementation. They agreed that a unanimous vote for an action plan to end poverty in Canada would carry more weight and be more effective if it included measurable goals and timelines, publicly comprehensible indicators, and a means for monitoring and evaluating progress.

Canadians want to hold their government accountable for ending poverty in Canada.

[Translation]

Throughout Canadian history, churches in Canada have long proclaimed the need for people to stand with those who have less, to give charitably and to work for justice. In the 1960s, churches were instrumental in advocating for Medicare and universal public health care for all in Canada, regardless of economic circumstances. The Salvation Army, to give you one example, is the largest non-governmental direct service provider of social services in Canada.

[English]

However, it is the Government of Canada that is charged to establish justice for all and to secure a common good for all. We join with our member churches and partners in specifically calling for the Government of Canada to include these concrete policy initiatives: first, a federal plan for poverty—we're not just talking about a nationally coordinated strategy, but one initiated by the federal government for poverty elimination that complements provincial and territorial plans; poverty reduction targets, timetables, indicators, especially for aboriginal families, in coordination with Inuit, Métis, first nations, and urban aboriginal communities; sufficient federal investment in social security, through taxation and other means, for all Canadians, including an increased child benefit for low-income families and expanded eligibility for employment insurance.

• (1145)

A cornerstone of any federal anti-poverty strategy or poverty reduction strategy must include a national housing plan that includes substantial federal funding for social housing and a means for holding provinces and territories accountable for delivering social housing. There is a role for the federal government.

We need a universally accessible system of early childhood education and care affordable to all children and, finally, a federal anti-poverty act that ensures enduring federal commitment and accountability for results.

Finally, we urge the panellists themselves to demonstrate support for the Dignity for All campaign recently launched by Citizens for Public Justice, a faith-based policy organization, in partnership with A Canada Without Poverty, formerly the National Anti-Poverty Organization.

We invite you to search online for dignityforall.ca and to click the button "I support". Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Maybee.

Now we're going to start a round of questioning. Go ahead, Ms. Minna, for seven minutes, please.

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

Thank you for being here with us today.

I think that so far in our hearings, the majority of the witnesses have requested a national anti-poverty strategy with various planks. I think the planks are overlapping a great deal at this point, and that's good; at least there seems to be a consensus.

I want to refer to a couple of matters that were discussed just now. One of them is the issue of women. It was raised both in the recommendations from the Canadian Jewish Congress by Ms.

Simons and then by Ms. Wybrow from the Canadian Women's Foundation. Both mentioned the need for strengthening women's programs and mechanisms. That was part of the recommendation of the Jewish Congress, and then Ms. Wybrow talked at length about the importance of women's economic programs and other programs specifically addressing women.

I think I know the answer, but I wanted to raise this point and to put it on the record. Am I getting a clear message from both of you that investing specifically in women, whether it is for housing, education, literacy, upgrading, training, or any kind of assistance, is one of the best ways, if not the best way, of addressing child poverty in this country? Do you agree?

Ms. Beverley Wybrow: Yes.

Hon. Maria Minna: That was a short answer, but I need these things on the record, because we don't talk about women. I was part of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Studies we did on women's economic security and on gender-based budget analysis demonstrated very clearly that government budgets are discriminatory towards women and that, without a gender analysis, programs will not hit the mark.

I wanted to tease out from you whether you've read any of those reports. Are we on the right track in those areas? My colleagues will read them as well.

Ms. Beverley Wybrow: I will expand a little on my "yes".

We firmly believe the best way to help poor children is to help their mothers, and there is lots of research, including evaluation of our own economic development programs, that supports that belief. Research by the United Nations and the World Bank firmly demonstrates that investments in women produce the greatest returns in terms of democracy and in terms of stronger economies. The countries that have the strongest protection for women's rights and investment in women are the ones that are the healthiest. There is lots of evidence to support that now.

We see it in evaluation of our own programs in terms of the extent to which women, as soon as they start to change their financial situations, immediately start investing in their children. They start with things such as allowing their kids to go to birthday parties again. They haven't been able to go before, because they couldn't afford presents. Simple things like that really speak to kids' inclusion in things and how kids feel about themselves. It goes all the way up to our research demonstrating that 30% of the women in the programs that we fund are now involved in the community, volunteering as well as giving back economically.

So there's lots of evidence to support it.

• (1150)

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you.

We seem to understand this lesson very well when it comes to international development programs. As the former minister for CIDA, I know this is a major focus at that department, but we seem not to learn the same lesson for our own policies, which is one of the reasons I wanted to highlight this in the reports that have been written by the standing committee. For the first time in our country—it was only about a year or two, maybe three years maximum—we have a Standing Committee on the Status of Women in Canada. Up until then, we didn't even have a standing committee to study women's issues in this country in terms of looking at things from that perspective. I just want to put that on the record.

I want to focus on another aspect of these planks we're looking at, and that is about childhood education and child care. I heard this morning, and we've heard consistently, that a great many people mention child care as critical and early education as fundamentally important to addressing the issue of poverty. Yet we have a program that was eliminated and we have \$1,200, so that doesn't do it.

I want to go first to Dr. de Oliveira, because I just want to clarify what you were telling us this morning. You mentioned that cash transfers don't work well, and that transfer-to-province money to create spaces works better. I presume you mean that the \$1,200 type of program is not the way to go, but that transferring dollars and establishing a national child care program in partnership with the provinces is the better way to go because it creates accessibility. Am I right?

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: Yes, that's true. The federal government should transfer the cash as it does now. That should remain as is, but that money, instead of being provided as a cash transfer or a cheque, should be provided in terms of services, for example, to provide child care or to fund child initiatives.

There is another thing you mentioned with regard to mothers and women. My research also shows that mothers tend to be a key element as well—parents basically, but mothers because they tend to be the primary caregivers. Other programs would include prenatal programs, programs that are directed toward women, not only when they are mothers, but even before being mothers. Research has shown there are impacts even when the child is in utero.

Hon. Maria Minna: Then your suggestion would be what? Because now it seems to be income support and not really a child care program as such, would you take the \$1,200 and turn that into the base of the child tax benefit or as direct income by increasing the child tax benefit? Would you lump it and transfer it to provinces for the purpose of child care? Would you leave it there? I'm just asking, because the \$1,200 right now is called a universal child care program, but it's not.

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: I agree with the last point you made, to transfer it to the provinces, then have it spent on child care or other child initiatives. However, I also want to highlight that, for example, cash transfers on their own are not effective. They are in conjunction with in-kind transfers. The fact that we do have these cash transfers... as you know, they do increase families' incomes, substantially for some families, and that can provide them with the financial means to purchase certain goods and services. However, sometimes it has been found that families may not know how best to spend that money, so what I'm suggesting is a long—

Hon. Maria Minna: Just to finish this, so I get it clear, if we were to do what many have recommended, which is to increase the child tax benefit income support to \$5,000 or \$2,000 and then establish a national child care, an early education child care program—they are two separate things, one is income support and the other child care—that would certainly address a great deal—

• (1155)

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: Yes.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Monsieur Ouellet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is no secret, as you noted, that poverty and housing are closely connected. Access to decent social housing could alleviate some of the poverty experienced by women. The same can be said for members of Arab and Jewish communities across Canada.

Aside from one investment of \$1 billion, no new money has been invested in social housing in Canada since 1993. A small amount of money has been invested in housing for seniors and persons with disabilities. That's all well and good, but there has been nothing for families, single women, immigrants or persons in distress.

Ms. Wybrow, what role do you see the government playing in the area of social housing for women?

[English]

Ms. Beverley Wybrow: I do believe, as I said, that housing is a really critical issue in poverty, and particularly for women. I think the federal government needs to have a national housing strategy that has a gender analysis built into it, and one that increases the funding for specific groups of women and types of housing. For example, second-stage housing for women fleeing violence is truly critical in making the difference as to whether or not women return to violent situations. Yet across the country, there is very little support for it and the number of second-stage shelters has really declined. That type of housing is really critical. It's longer-term support; women can stay for up to a year in that kind of housing with their children, as opposed to three to six weeks in an emergency shelter. You can't change your whole life in three to six weeks.

The federal government also needs to invest money in the construction of affordable long-term housing, with a focus on aboriginal women on- and off-reserve, in the north, and women who are fleeing violence, and for women with disabilities in particular.

So more money is needed for the construction and rehabilitation of social housing, and then support for particular kinds of housing, such as second-stage housing.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Thank you.

Ms. Oliveira, can decent social housing help children break out of the cycle of poverty? Is this an important element?

[English]

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: Thank you.

Although I did not specifically talk about social housing, I think it is important. This would be, for example, an in-kind transfer, so to speak. So you would provide a service for children and their families.

I haven't actually looked extensively at housing for children and how that can impact, for example, their health status or their education, or other welfare or other outcomes. But it is also important to guarantee that, because once that need has been addressed, then obviously the parents can focus on other things that are also important for a child's development and then, later on, their outcome as an adult in the labour market.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Ms. Simons, do we really need social housing? Is it important? What is your view of social housing?

[English]

Ms. Melanie Simons: Yes, absolutely, there is a need for increased supply of social housing, as well as more funds directed to the maintenance and upkeep of social housing.

We have taken some initiatives in our own community to develop partnerships with landlords. The federation tops up what would be the market rental price and offers a subsidized unit to families and a lot of single mothers with children, but also to seniors, who are another very vulnerable population.

So the answer, absolutely, is yes.

●(1200)

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Boudjenane, do you think the government should provide assistance to your community in so far as social housing is concerned, or does the private sector meet all of your needs?

Mr. Mohamed Boudjenane: I can't say that it meets all of our needs. As you noted, for the past twenty years or so, we have not seen any serious investment in social housing in Canada.

To answer your question, I would like to advance the following premise. As I stated in my opening remarks, any strategy aimed at addressing poverty issues must take into account racial analysis. Strategies for housing and access to education, employment and health do not take consideration racial discrimination, and historic factors that have led to the marginalization of some communities in Canada, such as aboriginal communities. If these factors are not taken into account, it will not be possible to develop programs that effectively meet the needs of these groups.

Let me give you an example, a statistic that I believe speaks volume and is rather shocking at the same time. Between 1980 and 2000, the level of poverty among Canadians of European descent declined by 20%. During this same period, the level of poverty among aboriginal communities and racial minorities increased by 360%.

While some programs and strategies have been developed over time, if they fail to specifically target these communities, which already face discrimination at the grassroots level, then this issue will never be resolved. The same is true of housing problems.

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now going to Mr. Martin. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you for coming this morning. We have certainly heard some really good information and valuable ideas. It's good to be hearing from such a broad spectrum of the faith community and also the business community in terms of some things we should be considering.

We heard in Halifax from the YWCA that down there their experience is that women are the poorest of the poor. They made a strong plea for justice, not charity. I think I heard that mentioned this morning, not just from you but from the groups that came before you, that whatever we do as the federal government—and that's the role we're looking at here and trying to get a handle on—it needs to be rooted in human rights, and we have a moral responsibility.

The challenge, it seems—and I've been at this for quite some time—is to mount a campaign out there in the public discourse about poverty that then affects the kind of political will and leadership that needs to happen at the federal level. It's great to see the business community engaged, and I've seen examples of where they've done some really constructive and positive things, even in our own country.

I feel the faith community needs to be engaged in a more active way. It was great to see the forum in Ottawa, and we need to have more of that. I think I was sharing earlier that in my own parish in Sault Ste. Marie a survey was taken recently in terms of adult education and what would be the major topic for the fall. The results were overwhelming that it should be social justice. I think people have known and felt, as I feel, a moral responsibility to deal with this, but now it's becoming very real for many more people than ever before.

How do we engage the broader community in that discussion, such that it will impact the decisions that we make here and ultimately government's decision to move on this national anti-poverty strategy that everybody says we need?

• (1205)

Mr. Mohamed Boudjenane: Who are you questioning?

Mr. Tony Martin: Well, anybody. Perhaps the Canadian Council of Churches.

A voice: Do you want to go first?

Mr. Mohamed Boudjenane: I want to go back to what I said about having an analysis that encapsulates the reality of racial communities, gender issues, people with handicaps, and our first nation communities.

I think it's crucial in Canada to avoid the errors and the mistakes made in other places. I don't want to see Canada falling into a situation where you have a suburb like we saw in Paris a few years ago, where people had to rise up because there was crass social injustice, discrimination, and marginalization. And we do indeed have in Canada now some seriously alarming signals, where in the majority of big urban areas the overwhelming majority of people under the poverty level are from racialized communities or first nations, or are single mothers. In my view, that situation will have serious consequences for our social cohesion in this country.

As we said, we need to engage those communities in meaningful dialogue, but we also need to put forward serious legislation, strategies, and policies that will address that injustice. On employment equity, for example, we do have legislation in the federal government; but, boy, we know that racialized communities, women, and people from first nations communities don't have access to those jobs. We know there is a reality in terms of racism and racial profiling in this country, and I think it's important to address those issues and concerns.

Mr. Peter Noteboom (Associate Secretary, Commission on Justice and Peace, Canadian Council of Churches): I support much of what was said earlier. But one of the statistics we mentioned in our brief is that 85% of Christians in Canada who self-identify as Christian attend churches that are members of the council. So that's quite a few people, and it puts some of the burden back on us,

frankly. I think, as churches in Canada, we also need to do more in education and internal work to grow a stronger movement and coalition for change to end poverty in Canada.

And it's really a partnership. One of the things, of course, that churches do is internal education, but also participation in local neighbourhood and community ministries, and all of that, and social service programs. But it's also that justice and advocacy and human rights work that's so important. So the Dignity for All campaign, which was the last component of our brief, is one way to move it forward. It tries to name, just in a few key points, what it is that Canadians are calling for and how we want the Government of Canada to be accountable for ending poverty.

But with other big social movement changes, such as for universal public health care in Canada, it really took broad activity, a broad coalition of different sectors in civil society. And for this, too, we need to work together on it, both on the government side and on the civil society and faith community side.

Mr. Tony Martin: I know that on the Christian side there is the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the Council of Churches, but is there any multi-faith effort or organization going on, Melanie, that you're aware of?

Ms. Melanie Simons: Yes, provincially there is ISARC. Though lots of members of ISARC represent national bodies, to my knowledge there is no national coordination. And that's something we definitely should be working on, because I do strongly believe there is a very large role for faith groups to play in creating that safe political space within which we can have these discussions that, traditionally, have been very controversial and, let's say, unpopular in general with Canadians when it comes down to it, such as EI reform and those sorts of things. I think governments are often very hesitant to engage in those types of conversations, and they fall back on safe discussions around child poverty. But as we've heard today, child poverty is not just child poverty; you can't get at or solve child poverty without looking at strategies that support single mothers in particular, racialized groups, and families. A lot of families with dual incomes today are still low-income families.

Perhaps the role the federal government can play there is to provide support for and recognition of that sector, as well as the third sector in general and non-profits. But the faith groups in general do have a very important role to play, especially around that conversation of justice versus charity. This is not charity; this is justice we're talking about. This is human rights.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move over to Mr. Vellacott.

Sir, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to dialogue with Claire in respect to in-kind transfers as compared to cash.

From remarks you made in responding to Maria on some things, it's not that you don't think there isn't any place for cash; it's just that you're making some judgments based on research of some kind, I take it, that certain things are better done in cash, while certain things are better done in kind. Is that how it is?

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: No, I'm saying that based on research, if we transfer a lump sum of money to a family and look at certain outcomes—for example, children's health or children's poverty—what has been found is that transferring just that amount of cash has little impact on their health or on other outcomes, such as educational attainment.

What I am trying to say is that alongside income transfers, we should be placing most of the emphasis on in-kind transfers. Along with those cash transfers, we should be having in-kind transfers, but with the focus on the latter, because those have been shown to be more effective in influencing children's outcomes, such as health and educational attainment.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: In terms of something fairly uniform, the child tax benefit, I think the figure is \$5,000 to \$6,000 per child. I don't understand exactly. Are you saying that in the case of that kind of thing, you think that if those dollars were used in kind instead, it would be a better use of the dollars?

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: I think so, yes. I am not saying to eliminate cash transfers, or at least some of that amount, but to have a greater weight placed on in-kind transfers. Have services rather than just transferring the money and giving the families total discretion on that. Provide services that the government and researchers and policy-makers feel have a greater impact on children's outcomes. It has been found that, for example, services directed towards mothers, or soon-to-be mothers, have a larger impact not only on the mother but also on the child during childhood and also later on, when they're adults.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Right. I'm trying to grasp and comprehend this, because most of the groups we've had before us in committee so far have been pretty adamant in saying that the present amount of \$5,000 or \$6,000 should be increased.

I want to give you an opportunity again to say that you think these dollars, in total, are better used in kind, which, as you're well aware, goes counter to some of the other evidence we've heard here. These people don't qualify it at all. They say it would be simply much better to take it up from there. They want that recommendation of a higher amount, and they say the federal government should do that.

I don't know if you would be at odds, but you realize you're certainly a little different from some of the others.

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: Yes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: You're aware of that—

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: Yes—

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: and this is no surprise to you.

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: No. I agree that there should be both, so the current level should remain as it is, but we shouldn't be trying to increase it and provide more and more cash transfers.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: We should not be.

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: Yes, but we should try to allocate those resources to in-kind transfers so that we're guaranteeing, for example, that children have the education that they need, have the child care that they require, or have certain goods that they require. I'm not proposing to eliminate it or to get rid of it.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: No, I understand. You're just saying not to increase it.

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: No. I think we need to try to understand better ways to allocate those resources, in the sense that sometimes when we simply transfer the money, we're not always sure of how that money is going to be spent. I'm not trying to say that parents do not necessarily know how to spend it, but sometimes certain strategies are better to obtain a certain goal.

For example, if we want our children to be healthier and more educated, there are certain strategies to obtain that goal. We should try, as much as we can, not only to inform parents and families but also to influence their consumption behaviours so as to achieve that goal. Obviously this is based on quality research with solid findings.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: It's a fairly frank discussion. Without getting too fancy around the wording here, you're saying that because it's discretionary, we may not have a sense that it's being used to get the outcomes we want. Basically, it gets down to your saying that we don't necessarily trust—that difficult word—that those people would either know how to use it or that they would use it appropriately.

● (1215)

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: That's not necessarily the case, because sometimes, for example, low-income families may not have the resources available to them. That's where the community, as some of my colleagues have mentioned, has a very important role. Sometimes they will play that role by informing them and telling them what they should probably do. A lot of times low-income families, or even marginalized families, don't have access to that, so at the community level we need to make sure they're integrated so that they're informed. Basically what I'm saying is that sometimes they don't have the information, but it's not because they don't want it; many times it's because it's not accessible to them.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Thank you. That's right—

Ms. Beverley Wybrow: May I please have a quick comment there?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Okay, and then I have one more question.

Ms. Beverley Wybrow: It also depends on whether or not the service is available. That's a very big part of it. Even if a family has resources, there may be no child care available in their area because there's a two-year waiting list. There may be no affordable, accessible child care, or not enough of it. That's a very big part of it. It's not just about the choice that parents make; it's also about the choices they make based on what's available or not available.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Right. Yes, and I was curious in terms of the health care, the pre-natal care, and so on—those kinds of things.

I'll wrap it up here very quickly. Others may want to have a quick response, but I'll direct the question to Claire.

Under the universal child care allowance, a family with three children who fit that category will be receiving \$300 per month. This is nothing to sneeze at. It is a great and significant help to that family—to the working poor, if you will. Are you saying or suggesting that once a government has provided something like that, which is of great help to a family, it should now be pulled back?

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: No, I am saying to keep that, but to not be.... They'd have that money, but some have been advocating to increase it, and I'm saying to keep it at what they have. Alongside cash transfers we should have in-kind transfers, but not complete—

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: You don't mean we'd necessarily take that \$300 per month back from them.

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: No.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

I know Ms. Minna wanted to follow up with one quick question.

Hon. Maria Minna: Actually, I was going to do that with Ms. Campbell, but now that we've got this other discussion going, I want to clarify something that I think is important to our work, and I want to be a little more blunt.

It's obvious that for some time the debate among some of us around this table has been as to whether we support the transfer of \$1,200 as opposed to creating new child care spaces.

My question to you is very simple, because I don't want to play around with these things anymore. The \$1,200 is taxed. It's not \$300 a month; it's taxed in the hands of people, so they don't get the full amount. We know that. That's number one.

I want to ask a question of Ms. de Oliveira. Are you saying that the child benefit, as recommended by many others in the last several days, should be increased by up to \$5,000, and that a national child care program should be established as well? Those two pieces are interdependent with one another, quite apart from what happens to the \$1,200.

Moving forward, are you saying you would not increase the child benefit, you would simply establish a national child care program, or neither? I'm not clear on what you're saying.

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: In terms of increasing that amount and by how much, I'd rather not pronounce on how much. Based on my own research and what I understand, I'm not sure. There has been some work, actually, and I've discussed this question with other people. What the optimal amount should be is something I would rather not say or give a—

Hon. Maria Minna: Would you leave a benefit income in place?

Dr. Claire de Oliveira: Yes, I would, specifically for low-income families, to guarantee the child care. Studies by other economists looking at whether there should be universal child care found very mixed and conflicting results, but it has been shown that having child care specifically for low-income families is beneficial.

The Chair: I want to thank our witnesses for being here and for taking time out of your busy days to give us evidence today.

With that, 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.