



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 012 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

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Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I'm going to call the meeting to order.

Welcome to our witnesses.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this committee is studying violence against aboriginal women.

I would like to ask if the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan and the Métis National Council are appearing as one group. You are? Thank you.

Witnesses have 10 minutes, and if there is more than one witness for a group, you can share your 10 minutes. Each person isn't allowed 10 minutes, each group is allowed 10 minutes. I will give you notice when you have two minutes left so that you can wrap up what you have to say.

I will begin with the Assembly of First Nations and Chief Elizabeth Cloud from the women's council.

We also have the Métis Nation Saskatchewan, with Helene Johnson, regional director of the eastern region 2; and the Métis National Council, with Wenda Watteyne, executive director.

The Native Women's Association of Canada, NWAC, has Kate Rexe, director, Sisters In Spirit; and Karen Green, executive director.

Then we have the Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association, with Tracy O'Hearn, executive director; Joyce Ford, manager of special projects; and Sandra Tucker, manager of abuse issues.

These are our witnesses for today.

I'll begin with the Assembly of First Nations.

Chief Cloud, you have 10 minutes.

Chief Elizabeth Cloud (Women's Council, Assembly of First Nations): Thank you.

Let me begin by thanking the chair and members of the committee for the invitation to appear before you on behalf of the Assembly of First Nations women's council.

My name is Chief Elizabeth Cloud. I represent the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point in southern Ontario, known as the place where Dudley George was shot and killed in 1995.

The Assembly of First Nations is a national organization representing first nations citizens in Canada, inclusive of gender and residency. The AFN women's council works to ensure that the concerns and perspectives of first nations women inform all the work of the AFN. I represent the Ontario women chiefs at the national council.

Violence against indigenous women is not only a criminal concern or a social issue, it is also a fundamental human rights issue. Evidence suggests that indigenous women are targeted for violence and fail to receive an adequate level of protection by the state because of their gender and indigenous identity.

In a 2004 Canadian government survey, indigenous women reported rates of violence—including domestic violence and sexual assault—three and a half times higher than non-indigenous women. An earlier survey conducted in 1996 by Indian and Northern Affairs noted that young first nations women are five times more likely than other women to die as a result of violence.

There is still a lack of national data. Police in Canada often do not even record whether or not the victims of crime are indigenous. According to a 2009 report by Amnesty International, Saskatchewan is the only jurisdiction in Canada where information on long-term cases of missing and murdered women has been compiled by state authorities and made public. In that province in 2007, a joint committee of government, indigenous people, police, and community groups reported that 60% of the long-term cases of missing women are indigenous, although indigenous women make up only 6% of that population. The fate of these women remains unknown to this date.

The Native Women's Association of Canada has used the testimony of family members and media reports to create an ongoing list of indigenous women who have gone missing or been murdered over the last three decades. They have collected information on more than 520 cases. We are sincerely grateful for all of the work they do. We understand that it's going to be reported—hopefully today—that there is even a higher number of recorded cases.

While there are limitations on available data, a strong and compelling picture has emerged, and the rates at which indigenous women are experiencing violence in a targeted fashion are nothing short of appalling. In addition, an Amnesty International 2009 report notes that police have often failed to take reports of missing and murdered women seriously, delaying investigations, or making little effort to conduct searches or otherwise seek public help in the search for missing indigenous women. A lack of responsiveness by police services is no doubt a contributing factor to the number of cases that remain unsolved.

Amnesty's report also notes that perpetrators may target indigenous women, believing that the indifference of police or society to the well-being of indigenous women will allow them to escape justice. It is for these reasons that, as I stated earlier, violence against indigenous women is more than a criminal concern or a social issue but a human rights issue.

The Assembly of First Nations was pleased to hear the importance of this issue recognized in the Speech from the Throne last month and welcomes a commitment of new funding to begin addressing the issue. However, there are concerns with regard to how this money will be spent and whether it will provide the necessary and critical supports for women at risk or currently experiencing violence.

We need to recognize that there is a need for more shelters. Across Canada there are fewer than 40 emergency shelters serving indigenous women. This is not acceptable, particularly given the disproportionate rates at which first nations women experience violence.

There is also a need for better victim services and supports, along with targeted programs to assist women who have been trafficked in the sex trade.

Last year the Assembly of First Nations committed to joining the Native Women's Association of Canada, Amnesty International, and others in a call for a national action plan. This would include dedicated advocacy with all levels of government through the best means possible, bringing clear focus and attention to this issue, including making authorities more accountable for their actions.

● (1535)

It is our position that such a plan would, first, recognize violence faced by indigenous women; second, work to build an effective and unbiased police response through appropriate training; third, supply adequate resources and coordination to address violence; fourth, improve public awareness and accountability through the consistent collection and publication of comprehensive national statistics on rates of violent crime against indigenous women; and fifth, include supports to reduce the risk to aboriginal women by closing the economic and social gap between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Canada.

The Assembly of First Nations has also called for the creation of a joint parliamentary committee—made up of this council, the status of women; aboriginal affairs; justice and human rights; and public safety—to study the issue of why so many indigenous women and girls are missing or have been murdered, why so many cases remain unsolved, and to provide specific recommendations on how to address and prevent a continuation of these conditions.

While specific policing responses are within provincial jurisdiction, the matter requires national oversight and coordination in a manner that is elevated above the specific mandate of a federal department.

Others are looking closely at this issue, and it is an item of attention and key concern for the aboriginal affairs ministers working group, created by the Council of the Federation last summer. The aboriginal affairs ministers working group will be meeting in Toronto next week, and we hope it will not only make this a priority focus, but will also agree on the need to develop a more coordinated approach to address violence against aboriginal women and girls, including addressing systemic influences such as the health, social, and economic status of aboriginal women.

As a closing thought, the federal government has recently signalled its intention to take steps towards endorsing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which sets out minimum standards for human rights. Article 22 of the declaration states that:

Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration.

And it continues:

States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is currently under way in New York, and our National Chief, Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, is presenting to the forum tomorrow afternoon. He will be calling for international attention to the alarmingly high rates of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, and the high rates of violence against indigenous women and girls.

It is our belief that Parliament can and should play a role in addressing this situation in collaboration with the indigenous leadership and women's organizations, and can take concrete steps to address the underlying issues that continue to place first nations women at risk.

Thank you.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Cloud.

Now I will go to the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan and the Métis National Council.

Who will be speaking for you? Will you both share it?

Thank you.

Helene Johnson, please begin.

Ms. Helene Johnson (Regional Director, Eastern Region 2, Métis Nation Saskatchewan): Good afternoon.

I would like to begin by thanking the honourable members for providing the Métis National Council with the opportunity to appear before you today. We commend the committee for its examination of the root causes, extent, and types of violence experienced by aboriginal women, and its desire to recommend solutions in cooperation with aboriginal women.

Women account for over 50% of all Métis in the Métis homeland of Canada. The homeland includes the prairie provinces and extends into Ontario, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, and the United States. The 2006 census reveals that there are a little over 170,000 women who identify as Métis in the homeland. The Métis National Council represents the Métis nation at the national and international level. Through democratically elected representatives, the Métis National Council governing members speak on behalf of the Métis nation in Canada.

Our population is very youthful. Fully 25% of Métis women in the homeland are under the age of 15. Another 26% are between the ages of 15 and 29. The majority of Métis women are in fact children and youth.

Violence and discrimination against Métis and other indigenous women in Canada are a human rights concern that is national in scope and tragic in scale. Over the past several years, evidence of systemic discrimination and brutal violence towards Métis, first nations, and Inuit women has made it impossible for Canadians and the international community to deny. Reports about delays in investigating the disappearances of aboriginal women in Vancouver's downtown east side and in other centres such as Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, and Toronto have revealed unjust treatment of aboriginal women in Canada. Lack of Métis-specific data on incidence rates prevents us from providing a precise statistical view of the nature and extent of violence against Métis women. However, Métis women, their families, and communities know too well the magnitude of discrimination and violence.

Some research has been undertaken on Métis victims in the sex trade, for example, that demonstrates the stark reality many women and youth find themselves in. We would like to commend the federal government's recent budget commitment to address violence against aboriginal women. Initiatives such as the Native Women's Association of Canada's Sisters In Spirit campaign have played a role in raising awareness of issues through its research, education, and policy initiative.

According to NWAC's report, there are currently 582 known cases of missing or murdered aboriginal women or girls. It can be safely and sadly assumed that many of these cases are those of Métis women and girls. Another relevant report, which was produced by Amnesty International, is entitled *No More Stolen Sisters*. The report describes violence and discrimination against indigenous women as a major human rights concern.

The Métis National Council supports Amnesty's call for the federal government to create a national plan of action to protect the rights of Métis, first nations, and Inuit women. It agrees that a plan of action must include the collection and routine publication of gender-disaggregated data on health and social and economic conditions for Métis, first nations, and Inuit women and men, including the rates of violence against women; standardized protocols for police handling of missing persons cases that recognize the specific risks of aboriginal women; improved police investigations into missing persons cases and unsolved murders involving aboriginal women; and adequate, sustained, long-term funding to ensure the provision of culturally relevant services to meet the needs of Métis women and girls at risk of violence or in contact with the police and justice systems.

The Métis National Council urges the federal government to take a strong leadership role in response to deeply entrenched discrimination and to the large numbers of women who have been murdered or gone missing in Canada. As initiated by the Council of the Federation, an aboriginal affairs working group has been formed, consisting of provincial aboriginal affairs ministers and aboriginal leaders. It is preparing for a meeting on April 28 to address economic development, education, and violence against aboriginal women. At its initial meeting last fall, the working group reiterated the premiers' call for a first ministers meeting on aboriginal issues. The Métis nation also urges the Prime Minister to convene a meeting of first ministers with Métis, first nations, and Inuit leaders as soon as possible.

The complex and extensive nature of violence against Métis women will require a massive undertaking. It will need to involve multiple levels of government and include justice, law enforcement, child welfare, and social service agencies.

● (1545)

The MNC encourages the establishment of task forces such as the Manitoba Integrated Task Force for Missing and Murdered Women. This task force includes representatives of the Government of Manitoba, RCMP, the Winnipeg Police Service, and a spokesperson for Métis women in Manitoba. Meaningful change is not possible without sustained collaboration, political will at all levels, and adequate financial investments.

We would like to take this opportunity to further address the committee on issues of access to federal resources. Core funding for Métis women was previously administered through the Department of Canadian Heritage, and it is now being administered through the office of the federal interlocutor for Métis. However, this core funding is limited to incorporated women's organizations.

This policy has been a long-standing source of frustration among Métis nation leaders, both male and female, because it prohibits democratically elected Métis governments from accessing these much-needed resources. Status of Women Canada has a mandate to promote the full participation of women in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada.

The MNC is pleased to report that 48% of the elected provincial leaders are women. In two of our larger governing members, the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Manitoba Métis Federation, the percentage of democratically elected female leaders is 64% and 52% respectively. Métis women are elected both in general provincial elections and as women representatives. Women are elected to regional and provincial Métis councils and boards, and they are often responsible for the women's portfolios, or designated as ministers responsible for women.

Yet resources such as the Status of Women's partnerships and community funds cannot be accessed. This has been a detriment to Métis women, children, family, and communities. Current government policy imposes an approach to funding that is inconsistent with Métis nation governance. The Métis National Council recommends a review of government policy on core funding. It is open to working with federal departments to find an appropriate solution.

In summary, I would like to reiterate three recommendations.

The first is that members of the committee and the federal government more broadly take a leadership role in addressing violence against women by supporting a distinctions-based approach to social and economic inequalities between aboriginal peoples and the general population, including a Métis-specific plan of action; participating in and supporting the ongoing work of the aboriginal affairs working group; and calling upon the Prime Minister to convene a meeting of first ministers and Métis first nations and Inuit leaders to address the priority areas identified by the aboriginal affairs working group.

Two is that dedicated resources be provided to allow focused engagement between Métis nations, federal and provincial governments, service agencies, the justice system, courts, and police forces to address issues of violence against Métis women, including missing and murdered Métis women and girls.

Three is that the federal government work with Métis nations to address long-standing bureaucratic barriers to accessing funding for Métis women through Status of Women Canada and other agencies, such as the office of the federal interlocutor of INAC. This is an important starting point to advance the equality of Métis women in the manner that is consistent with the aspirations of Métis women and respectful of Métis nation governance.

In closing, the Métis nation is resolved to support, protect, and respect the rights of Métis children, women, and youth. We as a nation have lost too many of our mothers, sisters, daughters, friends, and children to violence. This cannot be tolerated in a just society.

Thank you.

• (1550)

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

We now move to the Native Women's Association of Canada, and we have Kate Rexe and Karen Green.

Will you share the time? Will you speak separately? What will happen?

Ms. Kate Rexe (Director, Sisters In Spirit, Native Women's Association of Canada): Karen Green wasn't able to make it today, so it will just be me. I will take the whole 10 minutes.

The Chair: Then please begin, Ms. Rexe.

Ms. Kate Rexe: Thank you very much. *Merçi beaucoup.*

I would like to thank everyone for being here today to allow each of the groups to speak on behalf of aboriginal women.

I'll begin by sharing a bit of history. In 2004 the Native Women's Association of Canada was funded for the Sisters In Spirit campaign, which was a campaign to raise awareness about missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada. At the time, it was believed that over the past 30 years, approximately 500 aboriginal women and girls had gone missing or had been found murdered in communities across Canada. However, government, society, and the media remained silent on this issue.

In 2010, the silence has been broken, but we still have a lot of work to do.

In 2005 the Native Women's Association of Canada was funded for the Sisters In Spirit research, education, and policy initiative, which was a five-year initiative to provide evidence of the number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada, as well as the root causes, circumstances, and trends of violence that lead to disappearance and death.

This has not been an easy task. In terms of our research methodology, we started from scratch. Previous to this research initiative there was no real methodology for collecting community-based information and providing evidence based on police data and criminal justice data for aboriginal women who have gone missing or been found murdered. As was identified by the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, there is very little information relating to aboriginal identity, specifically Métis, first nations, or Inuit identity of victims of crime.

The evidence gathered over the past five years has not simply been about research or numbers, but about the lives of women and girls who are lost. The stories that have been shared by families to honour the lives of missing and murdered sisters, mothers, daughters, grandmothers, and aunties remind us that each life was beautiful, each woman was strong, and each person is missed very much by her family.

We have gathered life stories and statistical information that have been a very valuable part of our research initiative. Using a mixed method approach, the method has evolved based on a collaborative and reciprocal process privileging the experiences of aboriginal women and girls and their families, and allowing for different perspectives, cultures, values, traditions, and needs, all of which need to be shared.

The research process is guided by the cultural and ethical values of caring, sharing, trust, and strength, which are important to this type of research because of their sensitive nature and the understanding that many of these voices, and the voices of families, have been lost over the previous generation.

The stories have also helped us to understand the circumstances, root causes, and trends surrounding missing and murdered aboriginal women, and to identify appropriate responses for action. It is aboriginal women and girls, families, and communities who understand what the most appropriate actions must be.

We have also taken seriously the need to successfully relay our findings back to the families, aboriginal communities, as well as the general public, provincial and federal governments, and various government departments, which all have a stake in this issue.

Over the course of this initiative, we have also learned there is no comprehensive source of data of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. Based on police data and jurisdictions across the country, police do not collect the ethnic identity for victims in a comprehensive or any kind of systemic way. The victims of crime are often gone without being identified.

NWAC now holds the only source of data of both missing and murdered women. We have been working very closely with police, including the RCMP, to make sure this data is verified and accurate based on information from their files.

In terms of the broader issues of violence against aboriginal women and girls, we have come to understand that academic literature and literature on violence tends to focus on family violence or domestic violence, but the experiences of aboriginal women and girls are much broader. It is also not just an aboriginal issue or women's issue, but an issue that needs to be addressed by all Canadians. We need to make sure that all the appropriate departments and ministries within government acknowledge that this is an issue of justice, public safety, culture, housing, economic security, and so on.

• (1555)

Over the course of the past five years, we have come to understand that violence against aboriginal women and girls is actually systemic, gendered racism and violence facing aboriginal women, which is the result of a legacy of colonization that devalues aboriginal women in Canadian society.

This devaluing of aboriginal women is evident when examining the disproportionate experiences of violence, the high rates of disappearance, and the disturbingly high number of murders among aboriginal women and girls. What is even more disturbing, however, is the very low clearance rate of homicides. We have recently found that the clearance rate is actually a very low 53% of all homicide cases in Canada, compared to Statistics Canada's report that found in 2005 that homicide cases in Canada overall had an 84% clearance rate.

What we also know, based on information collected through our research initiative, is that experiences of violence and the silence surrounding the experiences of violence are often mistaken for acceptance.

We know that aboriginal identity is one of the strongest predictors of violence in Canada. Aboriginal peoples are three times more likely to experience violence than any other group and, as was mentioned by Chief Cloud, aboriginal women are 3.5 times more likely to experience violence.

According to Statistics Canada, aboriginal women are also seven times more likely to be murdered than non-aboriginal women in Canada. Violence is often unreported in 60% of cases, it is believed, and violence is often linked to circumstances of vulnerability including low income, housing insecurity, age—an issue of youth—as well as geography, and sex.

Our recent research findings have shown that aboriginal women and girls are also as likely to be killed by a stranger or an acquaintance as they are by an intimate partner. This is very different from the experiences of non-aboriginal women in Canada, whose homicide rates are often attributed to intimate partner violence.

In terms of the research findings that we released today, in a report entitled *What Their Stories Tell Us*, we know that there are 582 cases of missing or murdered aboriginal women and girls across the country. These cases identify a disproportionately high number of missing and murdered women in the western provinces, as well as a disproportionately high number that we have identified over the past 10 years. Two-thirds of the cases have come from the western provinces, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. British Columbia has the highest number of cases as well as the highest percentage of cases, with 160.

We also know that a great majority of the women were young. More than half of these women and girls were under the age of 31. If we are going to design measures that appropriately address issues of violence, we must take into account the needs of young women and youth. Many women were also mothers. As I mentioned before, we know that nearly half of the cases of murdered women and girls remain unsolved cases, with only 53% of the cases having a clearance rate.

We know that the majority of cases also occur in urban areas, but that we can't forget the circumstances of violence affecting on-reserve communities, rural and remote areas, northern communities, Métis territories, and having an identity-specific response to meet the cultural needs of victims of crime.

In summarizing the research findings and identifying trends related to root causes and circumstances, there are a number of key findings that should inform policy decisions, victim services, and action.

• (1600)

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Kate Rexe: Thank you.

Great strides have been made over the past five years to understand what the experiences of violence are. We look forward to continuing this work and assisting governments, police and justice systems, educators, service providers, and communities to take responsibility for moving forward with action.

In conclusion, there are many issues that must be addressed and that require the cooperation and collaboration of all communities, police and justice officials, service providers, and all levels of government. This collaboration must put the voices of aboriginal women first. As aboriginal women are the experts in this story, they must be acknowledged as having the answers if we are going to make any true and lasting change.

We do look forward to having new partnerships built and moving forward, not just with all of the partnerships that we see here, but also with the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we will move to the final witness, and that would be Pauktuutit Inuit Women.

Will you be speaking, Ms. O'Hearn?

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn (Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association): Yes, I will.

The Chair: So you will not be sharing your time.

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: That's right.

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Begin, please.

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: Thank you very much.

We'd like to begin by thanking you, Dr. Fry, the co-chairs, and members of this committee for providing us with this opportunity to address this very important issue.

We also bring greetings from Elisapee Sheutiapik, Pauktuutit's president, who was not able to be here today. She's certainly with us in spirit.

We support all the comments made by the previous speakers—our colleagues—and we welcome the opportunity to work together. We don't have that opportunity enough.

For those of you who may not be familiar with Pauktuutit, it was incorporated in 1984. It just celebrated its 25th anniversary. It is the national representative organization of all Inuit women in Canada. It was incorporated to address the many social issues communities were experiencing during the early days of land claims negotiations.

Since that time, Pauktuutit has broken the silence on very painful and difficult issues, such as violence against Inuit women and the sexual abuse of children. It has developed a very strong and credible reputation, because it is in close contact with women in the communities and has proven to be an effective vehicle for positive change. Other priorities over time have included political, social, and economic equality, and numerous health issues, including maternal and child health and midwifery.

Fundamental to all of Pauktuutit's work is the recognition of the uniqueness of Inuit culture and the responsibility for working within a framework that not only supports, but strengthens, Inuit-specific approaches, language, and culture.

Between 1984 and 2007, 244 resolutions were passed at the organization's annual general meetings. We did an initial analysis of

them, and the top five priorities over 25 years related to political equality, health, social issues, the administration of justice, and abuse. Violence against women continues to be a significant physical and mental health issue.

Our time is short today, so we will make a brief presentation and would welcome your questions.

We just held our most recent annual general meeting here in Ottawa at the end of March, and the board of directors and delegates had an opportunity to meet with the minister responsible for the Status of Women at that time. Issues related to women's safety and the lack of safe shelters dominated the discussions.

Inuit women live in 53 communities, spread across four vast geographic regions of the Arctic, spanning four time zones. There are eight major dialects of Inuktitut, and all communities are fly-in, pretty much.

There are only 15 safe shelters to serve 53 communities, and not all of these shelters may be operating at any given time due to operating costs, human resources, capacity issues, or even the lack of an adequate building to house women.

I won't repeat a lot of the statistics our colleagues have shared about rates of violence, but according to Statistics Canada, spousal homicide rates in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut were 7.3% for women and 3.6% for men, compared to 1.0% for women and 0.03% in the general population. Sexual offences recorded by the police in 2004 were three to six times higher in the Northwest Territories and between seven to 14 times higher in Nunavut. It must also be noted that Inuit women who live in the north also live in Arctic Quebec, the region of Nunavik, and in Nunatsiavut, which is now implementing self-government in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. So it's not exclusive to the territories or north of 60.

We won't take a lot of time today discussing the many unique factors that contribute to these shocking rates of violence against Inuit women, but we must note that the lack of community infrastructure, including housing options and the availability, or lack thereof, of crisis intervention and support services for victims, are significant barriers to ensuring women's safety.

• (1605)

We would like now to offer some recommendations related to the recent federal announcement of \$10 million to address violence against women. We welcome this commitment from the federal government, and we commend our sisters at the Native Women's Association of Canada for their outstanding work. However, in our discussions with NWAC, they acknowledged that they were not able to undertake Inuit-specific research and certainly support Pauktuutit in our efforts to address violence against women. We would ask this committee to help us ensure there is an equitable allocation of these resources to enable Pauktuutit and its members in the communities and regions to undertake Inuit-specific initiatives.

There is a need for a national forum of Inuit women to identify their own priorities and action plans. We heard clearly at our recent AGM that the lack of housing options and safe shelters is a huge issue for all of our members, all of the women in the communities. For a woman in a fly-in community without a shelter, there may be no safety if she's not able to get on a plane and go to another community, and given the cost of air travel in this country, doing so may be simply prohibitive.

We heard one story of a woman in Nunavut who asked social services to relocate her from her community and her violent partner. Her request was denied, and the next day she was murdered. In January this year an Inuk woman in Nunatsiavut was murdered by her spouse. This must stop.

Child sexual abuse is also a significant priority for Inuit women. A study done by Pauktuutit in the early 1990s indicated that up to 85% of health care providers and social service workers were aware of specific incidents of child sexual abuse. We do not know what the rates are today. There are also Inuit children at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation in urban areas. My colleague Sandy will be appearing before the Dallaire round table tomorrow.

We need adequate resources to conduct research on the prevalence of child sexual abuse of Inuit children across the country. We know from research in the general population that women will often take steps towards leaving an abusive situation when their children are at risk. We also know that this is the time when they are at the greatest risk of being murdered. There is an urgent need for effective and safe interventions for Inuit children who are being sexually abused within their families.

Pauktuutit has developed significant expertise in issues related to violence against women and their children. We have a national strategy to prevent abuse, and we are currently working with Status of Women Canada on a two-year project on abuse prevention. One emphasis of this project is abuse prevention through developing the leadership skills of women. We've also developed an initial action plan and communications strategy on child sexual abuse in conjunction with some of our recent work on this issue.

We need the assistance of many partners, including the federal government, to undertake substantive and broad-reaching holistic initiatives to save the lives of Inuit women and children. We have brought some copies of some of our work for you, and we would be delighted to talk with you any time.

We'd like to end by sharing our vision for our abuse prevention strategy. That vision is of an Inuit society of healthy individuals who respect the past and embrace the future as Inuit and who live in support of families in caring communities. In our vision, violence and abuse are rare occurrences that are dealt with swiftly and justly according to Inuit ways. Abusers are held accountable for their actions, and both victims and abusers are supported in their healing process.

We thank you very much for your time today, and we're available any time. Thank you.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to move to the questions and answers. There will be one round of seven minutes each for questions and answers. I'd like everybody to be as brief as possible.

We will begin this first round with Anita Neville for the Liberals.

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

I thank you all very much for being here today.

As you're all undoubtedly aware, this is the first day of what will be, I suspect, a very substantial study on the question of violence against aboriginal women.

Before I ask a question, let me take the opportunity to publicly acknowledge Sisters In Spirit and the spectacular report they tabled today. I've had the opportunity to read it. It's comprehensive, detailed, and thoughtful, and it encompasses a whole host of issues. Congratulations to you on the work you've done, particularly on bringing the issue of the missing and murdered aboriginal women to light. It's just excellent.

I have so many questions that I don't know where to begin. Some of them are small, detailed ones, and some of them are sort of overarching larger questions. Because you are the first group we've had here to talk on the issue, I'm going to identify a couple of overarching issues and then ask whoever wants to comment to speak to them.

When I read the Sisters In Spirit report I was struck, Ms. Rexe, by your detailed discussion on the impact of colonization on women and communities.

I'll ask any one of you who wants to answer to speak to the issue of colonization, residential schools, and the impact that's had on women. That's one issue.

If we have time, I'd like you to talk about some of the root social issues you deal with.

Pauktuutit, you talked about housing and the challenges of housing. I've been in a number of first nations communities and have seen first-hand the challenges of housing. I was in the Northwest Territories and was flabbergasted by the cost of housing. I saw the shelters that women didn't move out of because they had nowhere to go, and the challenges of that. I'd like some comments on that.

I know it's a faraway issue, but how important do you see Canada's endorsement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples? Many have been calling for it for a very long time. I'd like some comments.

So let's start with those three. I suspect there won't even be time for that.

•(1615)

The Chair: Who would like to begin?

Ms. Rexe.

Ms. Kate Rexe: I'll make a very quick comment on the last question, because we can share the report that was recently released addressing issues of colonization against aboriginal women in Canada.

On the UN declaration, I can't speak as an authority for the Native Women's Association of Canada, but I do believe that if there is an endorsement of the UN declaration, tangible measures must be taken to ensure that the responsibilities and rights of aboriginal people, specifically first nations, Métis, and Inuit women, are recognized through the endorsement. So having the appropriate responses, services, and resources available to all women in communities and their families must also come along with any endorsement of rights as recognized internationally.

The Chair: Would anyone else like to speak to that?

There were three questions here, so pick one.

Chief Elizabeth Cloud: On colonization, I would say what I heard my aunt say just a month ago. Our first nation has a municipal table with Lambton Shores. Obviously we're still getting over the effects of the Ipperwash crisis. I brought my aunt in to speak to the mayor and all of his colleagues and elected council members so they would understand the effects of the residential schools in my own community. The mayor and all of his council members, wards, were actually appalled to know that people who lived 10 miles down the road were taken when they were very small children.

My aunt went through a residential school, and she said, you know, I never knew how to love my children. That's what I raised, and those generational effects are still there today. It took away the ability of our grandparents to show love. When you can't show love in a family, it creates all sorts of social problems in that family.

So the effects of colonization, not only with the residential schools and other things, are still clearly felt in our communities today.

The Chair: Is there anyone else who wanted to tackle any of the other questions?

Go ahead, Ms. Johnson.

Ms. Helene Johnson: As a survivor of residential schools, I can speak on the effect of violence against women. There was so much lost within those schools. There was a lot of violence done to women, to girls and boys, but I'm a woman, so I can speak to that aspect.

When we left residential schools, unless you very consciously made a choice that you weren't going to perpetuate what was done to you in those schools... That's why we've got the intergenerational effect. I very consciously made a decision that I was not going to abuse my children, because what you learned in those schools was abuse, whether it was mental, physical, or sexual. But by the same token, I also didn't know how to discipline effectively. I knew what I wasn't going to do, but I didn't know what to do when it came to discipline, and you can feel it with my children and my grandchildren. Those effects, those behaviours, are still there.

It gets better and better with each generation. My daughter does stuff with my grandchildren. I don't know where she got it from; she sure as blazes never got it from me. She does crafts with them and does all these things. I never did that with my children because I didn't know how to play with them, and the reason is that I wasn't taught that in residential schools.

Getting over that and recognizing it, I think, is a big step.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Johnson.

I think we will move to the next round.

We will go to the Bloc and Mr. Desnoyers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, everyone.

I feel a little like my Liberal Party colleague. There are so many questions we could ask. This is a major societal drama, in my view. I heard you talk a lot about the cultural aspect of the various groups, whether they be Metis or Inuit, and of the various locations. I agree that, if action is taken, it is up to you to act, that is to say that you must direct all action, with money that you can manage to get from the government, to solve this problem.

One of my main questions—I don't know whether you're thinking about this as well—is whether the money will serve strictly to bring about justice or to put in place a real system for reversing the present culture? I was thinking about what Ms. O'Hearn said: in a remote community, how do you ensure that women are no longer battered? If you take them away from their homes, then return them to their homes, they will be battered again. So how do you go about resolving that?

There's no doubt a lot of awareness, information and work to do; action has to be taken. It's on that subject that I'd like to hear from you so that we can ultimately tell the government that it will take more than \$10 million to solve this kind of problem. If you start working on this problem today, it won't be solved tomorrow, based on what I've heard. So I'd like you to tell me how much time would be needed. It's incredible to see that these kinds of murders are committed, that they are not resolved, that the police do not handle them. They probably take the bodies and throw them to the bears—or I don't know what—and the police do nothing. The malaise runs deep.

I would like to hear more from you because what you say is fascinating, and we must listen to that today if we want to take concrete measures in future.

•(1620)

[*English*]

The Chair: Do you wish to answer that, Ms. Tucker?

Ms. Sandra Tucker (Manager, Abuse Issues, Pauktutit Inuit Women's Association): Yes, thank you.

I thank you for your insight into the ongoing issues and concerns that I think all of us face with typically limited blocks of funding for short-term projects. We all recognize what needs to be done. I think the first step in order to accomplish anything is sustainable funding. This happens on the front lines every day. We can trace this back to the lack of trust that has come out of the residential schools, that's come out of colonialization.

We just establish programs, be it safe shelters or be it education programs, and we gain the trust of the community members to take part in it, to begin their healing journey, when the money dries up and we have to start again. Each time we have to literally reinvent the same wheel, it takes away the trust that the people in the communities have in organizations, in the government as a whole, because there's not that stability.

We can relate that back to various funding opportunities that have been out there, particularly recently, with the announcement of the cut to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. With the amount of work that went into creating the reputation and the successfulness of that project, which is now gone, we're hearing people in our communities say it didn't take five years to create the problems we have today and it's going to take a lot longer than five years to fix them.

When, as aboriginal peoples, as indigenous peoples, we have been put aside historically as lower class citizens, the impacts of having funding opportunities and program sustainability taken away from us has a much deeper effect than what I think we believe to happen on the surface. So it's not only bringing the money in but keeping the sustainability of programs going.

Be it money for shelters, be it money for education programs in the schools, it has to be ongoing. That's the only way we are truly going to be able to bring about a difference in abuse, in missing and murdered children, in family violence. We need that sustainability.

The Chair: Is there anyone who wanted to add something? You have two more minutes to go.

Ms. Kate Rexe: I'd like to reiterate what Ms. Tucker said. Yes, absolutely, there needs to be sustainability in funding for resources and services, especially front line services, but we also have to start to make a shift in consciousness of society to recognize and to revalue aboriginal women and honour the rights of aboriginal women and the history, the tradition, the role of aboriginal women as mothers, as caregivers, as educators.

In doing so, the Native Women's Association of Canada is working toward educating not just aboriginal communities but also the police about the history of colonization, the impact of violence, and the experiences of violence on aboriginal women. How else are police going to better understand how to respond to calls of violence in communities and to work better with communities?

We're also starting to establish a working relationship in reviewing curriculum with the Ministry of Education in Ontario and we would like to do so for more educators across Canada, to talk about the issue of violence against aboriginal women in schools as part of the educational curriculum at the secondary school level so there is a better understanding not just within aboriginal communities but for all Canadians about what the issues of violence are and why these issues of violence exist.

We also think it's really important to acknowledge the apprehension of children in the child welfare system as simply an ongoing impact of intergenerational abuse and colonization, which has stemmed from the same types of government policies as residential schools in the sixties scoop. We must allow aboriginal children to stay in their families and in their communities in order to end this cycle of dislocation and cultural dislocation from communities.

Thank you very much.

•(1625)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm sorry, Mr. Desnoyers, your seven minutes are up.

Cathy McLeod for the Conservatives, please.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses. I think it's very timely that we've started this study, certainly in terms of the very recent release of the full study and report from the Sisters In Spirit.

I've always felt very fortunate to be from British Columbia and to live in Canada, but I have to share a sense of shame to know that my province and my country are identified as one of the worst in terms of missing aboriginal women and children. No one can feel anything but shame over those circumstances.

I appreciate all the very significant and good work of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. I was there for part of the debate, and I listened to some very powerful statements and comments by different members. I also have to look at...you know, within my riding, there was actually nothing happening. They weren't able to take advantage of any of the resources; there were no specific initiatives.

Also perhaps—this is in other ridings too—Health Canada might have the money, but most of the health care services, at least in my riding, have been devolved to the bands. They've been devolved to the groups. So hopefully what's going to happen is that this will allow an integration, managed by the bands, managed by groups like the Q'wemtsin Health Society, not only to provide some additional support but also to integrate it into a whole network and fabric of care. Certainly the intention of our government is to provide that support more broadly. It is not in any way to diminish the incredibly excellent work that was done.

A number of people talked about having data. I'm going to date myself—I do this sometimes—but I certainly remember that in the 1980s there was an identification of different ethnic groups within the health care system. That was seen as inappropriate and wrong, so I think we moved away from it.

How did it work in Saskatchewan? How did you get agreement to collect data in a way that was respectful to everyone involved?

• (1630)

The Chair: Ms. Rexe, can you speak to the data?

Ms. Kate Rexe: In Saskatchewan, there is aboriginal identity-specific information related to missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

I do understand your point around the sensitivity of collecting information around ethnic identity and specific aboriginal identity. I think there has to be an ethical protocol that goes along with it, that supports a sensitivity and cultural need. Rather than approaching it from a perspective of racial profiling, it needs to be welcomed by communities and essentially incorporated into communities able and willing to share information as opposed to having information extracted. Typical or traditional research methods, whereby information is extracted without any reciprocity back to the communities or even providing resources or services to meet the needs of communities, that's where it becomes a challenge.

About two years ago we conducted community engagement workshops on justice within 10 different communities to talk about the issue of collection of data on justice issues, and the specific question of collecting information by aboriginal identity, including first nations, Métis, and Inuit.

What came out was a very cautious, yes, this information should be collected, but it must be done in a culturally appropriate way. It must be done in a way that honours the communities, the cultures, and the need for services and resources once the information is collected. You can't just take information and then never apply the appropriate response to the communities in terms of victim services, access to shelters, culturally appropriate counselling services for victims of domestic violence or even other forms of violence.

That is where the disconnect is in terms of collecting information. We have to move forward with those resources and supports in place so that once we do collect the information, an immediate response is available to communities.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: So could you talk a little bit more about—

The Chair: One and a half minutes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod:—how Saskatchewan got to that place in terms of data?

Ms. Kate Rexe: I'm not quite sure exactly how it got to that place in terms of collecting information on missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. However, the RCMP in Saskatoon, I believe, had been working on a pilot project that was recently sort of quashed; it was to have had the ongoing collection based on aboriginal identity.

I believe one of the reasons it didn't move forward is that the resources and the victims services were not in place. Once police were collecting information and trained in a way to collect information in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way, they would not be able to provide the resources for victims of crime, based on aboriginal, first nations, Metis, and Inuit-specific needs.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Cloud.

Chief Elizabeth Cloud: I just want to say that we have the Gladue court in our area. I think a lot of people know what Gladue was all about—the systemic discrimination against aboriginals in the justice system. I think the government made a lot of good recommendations. Even though a person will plead guilty now, they have the choice to go before a Gladue court.

So there was a collection of magnitude at that level within the Department of Justice; it's not something that couldn't be done. That would be my comment: if it's supported by the federal government to start some sort of national database...

When I look at the Ipperwash inquiry, there is more sensitivity training for the Ontario Provincial Police now. I thought that was a very good recommendation. I really see some benefits from that in my whole area.

That's the only comment I wanted to make.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll go to Ms. Mathysen for the NDP.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you very much.

I have to say thank you for all the wisdom and information that you've brought to this committee, not just today but over the years that we've met to talk about the issues important to women. I also want to say thank you for *What Their Stories Tell Us*. It is a remarkable piece of work, and I know that we will be able to use it in order to advance the cause of ending violence and making things better for women.

I'm going to throw out some general questions. I think I might start with you, Kate.

Before I do that, I want to say to Chief Cloud that I knew Dudley George, and we miss him. It's been a great loss to all of us.

At any rate, in budget 2010, \$10 million was pledged to address the issue of the missing and murdered women. It sounds like a lot of money, but it's not. It's just a very, very small beginning, I think.

I am wondering if you have been advised when that funding will flow. Have you heard when it will flow? Do you know to what degree NWAC will have a say in how the money is used? Have you been informed at all in regard to the funding and how it will be allocated?

• (1635)

Ms. Kate Rexe: Actually, no; unfortunately, we have not heard any word on what this funding will be or how it might be allocated in Canada.

I do understand that it is under the Minister of Justice's responsibilities. We don't know what role NWAC will play, but we do hope that the knowledge, expertise, and leadership that have been shown by NWAC—specific to the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women—will be recognized in how the money is allocated and that this information will be used to make sure that the resources are spent in the most meaningful way.

However, I think it's important to understand this. As you mentioned, it's only a small amount of money, and I do hope that there will be complementary funds available to actually have direct front line resources available to communities and to women. The \$10 million will not be able to address the issue on the front lines and the immediate needs of women in communities.

So I do hope that, however the money is used, it is used in a very meaningful way and in the best possible way to address issues of justice.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Does it not make sense, though, to consult with all of you in regard to how you start, where you start, and what needs to happen with that money?

The Chair: Ms. O'Hearn.

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: Thank you very much. I'm happy to add to that and answer your question.

We have been actively trying to follow up with the Department of Justice, and we haven't been able to get a meeting yet. We understand they are still looking at how they will administer it.

I'd like to just reiterate the need for a population-based response and, with the greatest respect to NWAC, there has to be an equitable Inuit allocation, because the priorities of Inuit women may or may not be similar to those of the Sisters In Spirit initiative. There would be distinct northern priorities and urban priorities as well.

I would like to just touch upon the Healing Foundation for a moment. Our experience with the Healing Foundation has been that Inuit are often considered an add-on. Yes, they did outstanding work, but I would suggest it was not until about halfway through their mandate that Inuit were able to begin submitting successful proposals and organizing to be able to even apply to the Healing Foundation. A lot of the criteria just didn't fit.

So we're hopeful that with this recent and modest announcement, we will be able to negotiate an equitable allocation, and certainly Métis women would have their own priorities as well. We would certainly look to this committee for your support of that.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Ms. O'Hearn, you talked about the sexual abuse of children. We know that abusers themselves have often been sexually abused. It's a horrific cycle. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about the child sexual abuse strategy that you've developed, because obviously there has to be intervention. There has to be prevention. We have to see some kind of help for these children so that they're not going to be the perpetrators of the future.

I just wondered if you would talk about that a bit.

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: It would be my pleasure.

One of our primary concerns in raising awareness of the issue, increasing awareness and encouraging public dialogue, is that there are no services, by and large, in the communities for children who may disclose. So there has to be a careful approach.

In Nunavik a number of good, ethical research models can be looked at. One is a health survey that was done in the 14 coastal communities of Nunavik. They had a whole communication strategy, but of the people who participated in that survey, more than 40%

self-reported unwanted sexual conduct before the age of majority. That's 40% of the population of Nunavik. We would like to somehow get a better understanding of the prevalence. There's a need for resources.

We've developed some tools, including elements of a communication strategy, but working with an advisory committee of experts, we were strongly cautioned: we have to be careful how we introduce even teaching tools for use in the schools, because there really are no supports for children who may disclose.

• (1640)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I'm going to throw this out there—

The Chair: You have half a minute.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Okay.

This is from *What Their Stories Tell Us*. Essentially, it talks about the fact that in 88% of the cases of missing and murdered women, children and grandchildren were left behind. What kinds of culturally appropriate support systems are in place to help these vulnerable children? They're very young. Families are trying to cope with a devastating reality. What is there to help make sure these kids are okay? Or what needs to be there?

The Chair: Does anyone want to take that on?

Ms. Rexe.

Ms. Kate Rexe: Quickly, I can just say that I don't think there are any supports there. We need to actually work together and have the advice of those who are working in communities and with families to say exactly what needs to be there to help.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I'll go into the second round. The second round is a five-minute round, so you have less time for questions and answers.

We'll begin with Ms. Simson from the Liberals.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing today. I'd also like to reiterate what my colleague Ms. McLeod had to say. I don't come from B.C., but I share a sense of shame about an issue that is ongoing and on which we don't appear to be making much progress.

I'd like to address this to any of you who may know the answer. I was compiling some of my notes. Our briefing notes said it was 520 native women. It was actually reported—I had *CTV News* on in my office—that it was 582 native women, that it had in fact increased by 62 women, over the past ten years.

I'm trying to find out whether any of you has any statistics about the previous ten years, say from 1990 to 2000, to give me some perspective. Has there been an increase in the number of women who are missing or who have been murdered, or is there any progress being made in trying to have this end?

The Chair: Ms. Rexe.

Ms. Kate Rexe: The numbers specifically refer to the number of new cases identified since the report last year, which was released in April 2009.

Of the 62 cases, 27 are cases from January 2009 to approximately February 2010. There are 27 new cases from the previous 13 or 14 months. The remaining cases of those 62 are actually from information collected that can be identified to relate to previous years, based on archival research and additional information that has been found as we searched through secondary sources, police reports, and so on and so forth.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Is there any statistical data that would indicate to you that there was progress being made or that in fact this issue was becoming a lot more serious?

Ms. Kate Rexe: For the years 2000 to 2008 we did a trend analysis relating the information on known cases of murdered aboriginal women to homicide rates for all women in Canada. We found that between 2000 and 2008, there was a very similar trend in terms of the homicide trends in Canada.

Essentially, it follows the same trend line over this decade. However, when we're looking at previous decades, what we have identified is that we have very little information, because there is no available information on ethnic identity. But if we were to look at it in terms of inferring what the previous trend might have been, we could probably say that we have underestimated the number of known cases of homicide, back to 1974, by approximately 600 cases.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: So with respect to all your organizations, data has been an issue. Now, in the case of the funding, are you required to produce any type of annual report, not just on what you did with the money but on the results you're seeing? Is there something concrete? It isn't a criticism; I think it's just a lot easier for governments, and I would argue any government, to simply eliminate something if there is no indication to them that it is making progress.

There's a lot of research into root causes. Okay, so now that we've identified them, we have to have a plan and sort of fund the plan to eliminate this, or at least show progress. I realize that it won't happen overnight.

Without that, I think part of the problem is that it's easy to say, well, your mandate has been fulfilled—as they did in the case of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Are you required to produce any reports like that?

• (1645)

Ms. Kate Rexe: Yes, and we do produce annual reports, often in excess of 300 pages, that are given back to Status of Women.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: But are they results oriented?

Ms. Kate Rexe: Absolutely.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: All right.

Ms. Kate Rexe: It's about outcomes, impact, action—

Mrs. Michelle Simson: I'm getting an education.

Would any of the other witnesses like to comment on that?

Ms. Wenda Watteyne (Executive Director, Métis National Council): I would just like to take the opportunity to address the issue of funding. It is a serious concern for the Métis National

Council. Just for the record, currently there is no federal funding dedicated for Métis women.

We don't have the burden of producing reports. That is one good side of it. But it is a serious matter, and the Métis community feels very much that it has a lot of catching up to do.

We do support initiatives like the Sisters In Spirit campaign for raising awareness. This is just very broad awareness. There is still the issue of the lack of disaggregated data. That's very important. The Métis community, the Métis women and children, do not know precisely the extent or nature of violence against Métis women. That's a major issue. Once that is understood—we're even far from being at that place, unfortunately—there will be resources required to do something about it.

Certainly no action can be taken effectively without engaging Métis women and communities. We're a little bit far away from that, but there are some fundamental issues around accessing core funding, from the Métis National Council's perspective.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you.

The Chair: You've gone over your five minutes.

We'll go to Ms. Wong for the Conservatives.

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, ladies, for coming here.

I used to live in Vancouver. Now, of course, I live in Richmond, which I represent. I also used to teach in downtown east side Vancouver. I used to teach adult ESL, so I personally have seen a lot of situations down there. Of course, the Coquitlam pig farm case was really the one that brought the attention of the whole nation to the missing aboriginal women and girls issue. It started to generate awareness in the whole nation.

These are just a few pieces of information. Again, I applaud what Sisters In Spirit has done. They have done an excellent job. Based on their findings, we now have another program called "Evidence to Action". Based on the findings by Sisters In Spirit, we are going to have real actions following that.

I also maybe have some news about funding for Tracy—may I call you Tracy?—that the Aboriginal Healing support funding has now been transferred to the health ministry. The minister herself is actually from the territories, so that might be something you would like to have access to.

Also, the government is going to introduce a law for the rights of aboriginal women to properties. I think that will be a breakthrough. Economic independence and the economic situation of aboriginal women has been a root cause for that poverty. It has been the root cause for these mishaps.

Can you comment on that? If aboriginal women were given more rights by law, would that help?

• (1650)

The Chair: Who would like to answer that?

Chief Cloud.

Chief Elizabeth Cloud: Thank you very much.

If you're referring to the matrimonial real property law, obviously the only communities that are far ahead with the matrimonial property law are the ones that are involved in land code development and some that already have their first nations land management. From the perspective of what the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs is doing, there doesn't seem to be a lot of discussion with the community. The lack of consultation is still there.

In terms of the matrimonial real property law when it does enter into our communities, yes, in some cases it definitely will be giving aboriginal women the right to some of the matrimonial property. That's clear. But in our minds, it will more protect the rights of women who are not eligible for registration in that community. Whether that's a good thing or whether that's a bad thing, you have to take it with a grain of salt.

I know that in my community there would be a few people who would benefit if, let's say, the marriage broke up and then the property attained during the course of that relationship... There are some cases where it will cause a lot of internal family fighting, because in a first nation community anybody who is not a band member cannot ever own property or land in that community.

So there's some good and there's some bad. Definitely there will be a little bit of good in some instances, but it's all going to be individual cases.

Mrs. Alice Wong: Thank you.

My next question goes back to the urban situation. On the downtown east side, unfortunately, some of the missing women were identified as sex workers. Some, unfortunately, were also being affected by drugs there.

In terms of helping those women to get back to the situation where they would not be threatened during their work, I'm looking at prevention. We've said a lot of things about poverty in the territories. I met a couple of representatives from the national Teachers' Federation, and one of the teachers was from the Inuit community. He said that the children do not really want to go to school because of the poverty and also the housing situation. So I'm looking at the prevention side.

Do you have any suggestions regarding helping the downtown east side's missing women or the women who are actually still there but could be missing soon?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds within which to answer that question, Ms. Rexe.

Ms. Kate Rexe: There are very few cases where we have actually collected information whether...women have been involved in the sex trade, but for those who have been, we do think there is a need for changing the discourse around the issue of sex trade work to look at it in terms of human trafficking and promote the rights of women, and particularly the safety of women who are working in street-level prostitution and other forms of trafficking, whether it be the drug trade or human trafficking. They're issues that need to be explored, not just through us but through all people who are working in this area who have a specific expertise.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Ms. Demers for the Bloc.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for being here, mesdames.

I find it very hard to listen to what you have to say because, like many Quebec and Canadian women, I'm not familiar with the situation of aboriginal women. Like a number of you, when aboriginal people complained, I thought they were wrong to do so, that they already had enough, that is until Hélène Gabriel came to my office and told me the history. In fact, we don't know the history. History isn't taught in the schools. We don't know what happened.

So, like every good white person, I think we're the bosses and we know better how to take care of you. So we continue to do the same thing. The Sisters in Spirit have done an outstanding job. The aboriginal communities are doing an outstanding job with what little resources they have. I went to Iqaluit to meet with the people from the shelter. I was fascinated by the ability of the people who work there, despite the fact that the women who live there have to stay there for months—not weeks, but months—because there are no halfway houses. If they are sent back home, they are sent back to violence.

Currently they say there is \$10 million, but we don't give it to you because we don't know how to take care of you. We know how to stop violence. Once again it's us, the whites who are going to tell you how to stop the violence. I have a lot of trouble accepting that. We lead you to believe that there is money for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, in the health sector. If there is money, we should give it to you. We lead you to believe that there is \$10 million for the Sisters in Spirit. If that money is there, let's give it to you and stop leading people to believe things, telling stories and saying whatever and give you the money because you are the ones who know how to heal, how to take the measures you have to take to ensure that women no longer experience this violence. I've had enough! Pardon me, but I had to say that.

Don't you see you're in the best position to know how to help women get away from violence?

• (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: Who would like to start that answer?

Ms. Watteyne, you look as if you're interested...

Ms. Johnson...?

Yes, Ms. O'Hearn.

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: Thank you. I'd be happy to jump in.

Thank you for your comments. We would certainly agree. We understand anecdotally that a significant amount of this \$10 million will be going to policing, which is an important piece of the picture in trying to ensure women's safety, but we certainly agree with you that various organizations have developed significant expertise. That's something we would welcome.

The Chair: Chief Cloud.

Chief Elizabeth Cloud: I certainly appreciate those comments. You're right that it would be the people who have worked and lived in that field. My own daughter-in-law's mother was killed with an axe. I can't even begin to imagine what that would have been like for her when she was 16. Even though I might not have been a victim of violence myself, it's all around us. Even if we're professional aboriginal women, it's all around us. I worry about my grandchildren and what effect it will have. Will my daughter-in-law be a good parent because of what she had to live through and the violence she saw with her parents?

I really appreciate your comments. They are in the right direction. The people who have lived that would be the best people. We at AFN are promoting that the plan has to be in place to begin to deal with the situation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Tucker.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: We spend a significant amount of time talking about where moneys need to be allocated. Each group at the table brings such diverse yet common challenges and experiences to the table. For all of us, particularly for first nations and Inuit, we talk about on reserve and off reserve. We talk about northern communities versus the southern communities, and the commonalities and the differences that are there.

I'm reflecting back on a story that one of my co-workers was telling me today. A personal acquaintance of hers was recently, within the last couple of weeks, murdered by her spouse, and he in turn committed suicide. There are people in the urban settings who have plights equally as horrendous as those of people living in the remote communities, on the reserves, in northern or more removed communities. How many of those people are going unaccounted for?

I think, Ms. Demers, you bring up a valuable point, and I think it ties into our lack of ability to get reliable numbers and statistics. There's still a stigma attached to identifying as being first nations, Métis, or Inuit. Clearly that was the case in the 2006 aboriginal peoples study done by Statistics Canada, because even today, in 2010, we're still dealing with the stigmas attached to being aboriginal.

I think we've come a long way, but we've still got a very long way to go, particularly for the Inuit people in the north. We often forget that they were as equally impacted by the residential schools as were the first nations and the Métis people.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I would like to go to Ms. Mathysen again, for the NDP, for five minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: With the indulgence of the committee, I'd like to share my time with Ms. Ashton.

The Chair: The committee will have to unanimously agree to that.

That's fine?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The committee agrees.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you very much for your presentations. I found them very moving. Certainly, as somebody who represents northern Manitoba, many of us know of the important work of Sisters In Spirit and are deeply concerned about the current situation and the fact that \$10 million, as we've heard today, remains to be allocated. But of course there's a serious lack of consultation.

A number of questions, similar to what we've heard, came to my mind as you made presentations. While I heard your presentations, I heard the voices of friends of mine, of women I've grown up with, who are in our communities speaking out about these issues. There are the posters of missing women on the highways around our region and in our public places. While a silence has been broken, a silence still exists when it comes to finding answers and dealing with the root issues.

I believe one of the themes that came up in your presentations about the comprehensive nature of not just dealing with violence once it's happened, certainly in terms of research, was the prevention aspect. I would like to get all of your thoughts—Ms. Tucker, you were the first to bring it up—on the question of the unsustainability of programming, with a particular focus on the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

As a passionate advocate of the need for the AHF and its programming in the region that I represent and all across Canada, I've been very concerned about this government's approach to the AHF. I'm also concerned about comments that were made today that the money from the AHF is now with Health Canada. Community organizations that have shut their doors on the ground will tell you there is no money for these kinds of programs, that Health Canada employees do not exist to pick up the slack, and that Health Canada has no plan to pick up the programming that was implemented by the AHF.

But what I would like to hear is your understanding of the importance of healing programming; the need to bring out the residential school experience; the need to understand that this isn't just about making an apology but about listening to communities and allowing communities to create their own programming; and your thoughts on whether or not the federal government ought to be supporting this kind of comprehensive programming as a way of also dealing with the issue of violence experienced by aboriginal women.

The Chair: Who would like to start this?

Ms. O'Hearn.

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: Thank you.

It's critical—it's critical—and I would like to share with you a couple of examples of the need for distinct and unique approaches.

There are 26 communities in Nunavut spread very broadly. It's not possible to have a full web of support services in a community of 500. Through the Healing Foundation a mobile crisis response program was developed so that a group of experts could go to different communities. It's not ideal, but it was a made-in-Nunavut healing approach.

We develop a lot of models at our organization. We don't do service delivery, but we work with people in the communities and experts to develop healing models. We're refining an "on the land" program. We're working with Status of Women Canada over two years to support women in leadership roles. This is based on a project called Somebody's Daughter, which brings women on the land.

Over a week, people reconnect with traditional skills, like making kamiks and cleaning skins. There are elders and counsellors present. There's a journaling component. So through the week, with different and complementary activities, it really builds women's self-esteem as a very important tool in addressing violence, whether in their own lives or in the community.

So yes it's critical, but it has to be specific to different regions and different peoples. Language is very important.

• (1705)

The Chair: Ms. Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good afternoon, mesdames. I am pleased to see you here.

Knowing and understanding what is going on is a real concern for us. We must admit something unfortunate: I agree with Ms. Demers when she says that, as white women, we don't really know the situation of aboriginal, Innu and Metis women.

I've been a parliamentary secretary for nearly three years. I have had the opportunity to meet with a number of groups. However, I am not used to doing this, but I'm going to correct the perception. Ms. Demers was experiencing what I call a hormonal crisis. We have invested the \$10 million amount because we believe in it.

In my view, everyone around the table absolutely wants to know and do one thing... I'm not done. I've been attacked personally. Today I want to understand why women... Women have to get together, not against each other, to understand what is happening to aboriginal women who have disappeared.

I'm going to repeat what I said, Ms. Demers. I repeat so that you will be present. I merely said that I wanted to correct a perception. I didn't know how to say it exactly; I used the words "hormonal crisis", but she knows me and knows that's not what I meant. I wanted to correct the perception because I think we want to understand here why this happens to aboriginal women.

If Ms. Demers were here, she could respond and Ms. Neville as well. One day, aboriginal women came. On the first page of the newspaper, we saw the picture of a white woman with blue eyes and blond hair who had disappeared. The photograph of an aboriginal woman was on another page, not far from the sports page. I remember it because it made me angry. I'm white and I don't know the situation of aboriginal, Innu or Metis women.

However, I would like to know this. You said a little earlier that you weren't getting any help from the police. What should the committee do to try to help you the best way possible, by working together to help aboriginal women and especially to understand what happens in the field? How is it that we get no more information on disappeared women?

[English]

The Chair: Before we answer the question—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I have a point of order.

[English]

The Chair: —I would like to suggest, Madame Boucher, that I think we need to be very careful in this committee how we speak about our colleagues. I would hope that you would want to take back your comment about Madame Demers.

I would like to state that as chair: I think that was not appropriate.

Ms. Neville, you wish to say something.

Hon. Anita Neville: I have a point of order on Ms. Boucher's comment, Madam Chair.

I found it offensive for Ms. Demers and I found it offensive for all the women sitting in this room.

The Chair: I think the chair has duly noted that.

Monsieur Desnoyers.

• (1710)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I'm going to withdraw my remarks.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Like Ms. Neville, I believe that Nicole spoke with passion and determination about a cause in which she believes, the situation of aboriginal women across the country and that of women, in both Quebec and Canada. I believe she is a woman of heart and intent. I agree that we should not treat each other this way, amongst ourselves.

[English]

The Chair: Especially in a status of women committee that is dealing with issues of women, the sense that, if a woman becomes passionate about something, it is hormonal is something that we as women do not accept.

Ms. Boucher, I will allow you to retract and apologize.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Out of respect for Ms. Demers, whom I like and for whom I have an enormous amount of respect, I withdraw my remarks.

Ms. Nicole Demers: I accept her apology.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Boucher.

Now we will begin again.

Ms. Rexe, we have two minutes for the answer to the question.

Ms. Kate Rexe: I'd like to make just a very quick comment.

You asked about why you don't have the evidence, why the standing committee has not been provided with the evidence. I think it has been very clear, and it has been acknowledged by others, even by other groups here at the table, that the Native Women's Association of Canada has been providing the evidence. What's more important is having people start to listen and having government start to listen to what aboriginal women are saying.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Is—

[English]

The Chair: Is there anyone else who wanted to answer that?

I think I saw Ms. Watteyne's hand up.

Ms. Wenda Watteyne: Maybe I'll just quickly add, in regard to one of our recommendations, that resourcing is one issue, but political will must accompany that. The upcoming aboriginal affairs working group meeting provides an opportunity where violence against women is on the agenda. So we encourage federal representation in that meeting and support for it.

The Chair: You have one minute.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: The reality of aboriginal women is far from my little village, in Quebec City, but I have met a lot of women's groups. When there are disappearances, murders of aboriginal women, the image projected of aboriginal women is never positive. They are associated with trouble. I think it's also a matter of education.

What can we do, as a committee, to change the image of the population of aboriginal women? We've been hearing about violence against aboriginal women for only a few years now. I think it's very important for the committee to know what the best tools are in order to help you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. I will take that as a statement, Madame Boucher.

We have time for a third round, but it's going to be a three-minute round. I'm going to have to ensure that everyone is very crisp, otherwise the whole piece will just be a question and the witnesses will not have the opportunity to answer. Really, it's about getting the witnesses to give us the information we're seeking as opposed to us making little speeches.

I would like to start with Ms. Neville, for the Liberals, again.

Hon. Anita Neville: I can't do it in three minutes.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Come on, give it a try. You can make an S.O. 31.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

There have been so many questions and so many issues raised here today.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation report, which I commend to those of you who have not looked at it, talks about the community determinants of family violence and abuse and it identifies twelve.

I was struck by your comment, Ms. O'Hearn, about the rumours that the \$10 million is going into policing and justice. I look at the twelve determinants of family violence and abuse as identified by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and I don't think the justice piece is here, or it is a very small part of it.

So my concern, and I welcome your comments, is in terms of what kind of resources and what kind of supports are needed to address some of the root causes and the root issues that deal with violence against aboriginal women, be it domestic violence or any other form of violence.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have about two and a half minutes to answer.

•(1715)

Ms. Tracy O'Hearn: Thank you.

I appreciate your question. We have to acknowledge racism, institutional racism and racism in our daily lives. There are no nice and neat finite steps that can be taken, but there is a lot that can be done.

For Inuit women, I think it also has to be acknowledged that it was only in the 1950s, really, that people were moved into communities. So in two generations, there have been almost unprecedented changes to lifestyle, parenting, and the imposition of foreign institutions. It takes a long time to undo that and to restore empowerment and self-control.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anyone else who wanted to take that question?

Chief Cloud.

Chief Elizabeth Cloud: I'll just add that in our community, the Head Start program really does help, working with parents to teach them how to be good parents. We have a very successful Head Start program.

The Chair: Thank you.

There you go; you did it, Ms. Neville.

Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, ladies, for being here. It's been quite an education for me. I do have an urban riding, not an aboriginal community in my area. Much of what you have said to me today is new information to me in many ways.

I have a concern about this lack of national data that's being collected. I wonder if there is some way we can address this with our police forces. How can we work with them to gather this data so that it's available? How would that help you in your process going forward?

The Chair: Ms. Watteyne.

Ms. Wenda Watteyne: I thank you for that question, because I think that's really critical. I don't have a quick answer to that, but I do want to point to some of the challenges we see in identification within the child welfare system, for example, when the system is coming into encounter with Métis children.

I myself did some research within the children's aid societies in Ontario, interviewing them and asking how they are dealing with Métis children and families. The problem is that often they do not know who Métis children are. If they happen to look brown, then they get treated a certain way. If they happen to look white, they probably aren't counted at all as a statistic. So there's no distinction being made when they are coming into contact with that service. I suspect challenges with police forces across Canada have encountered the same thing, which I'm assuming at least partly explains the lack of Métis-specific data in terms of missing women and children.

Ms. Lois Brown: Would you want the police forces asking the question about origin? Is that counterproductive, or is that something you would want the police to note in their report? I guess my question is this: have many of these things gone unidentified because the police don't know to ask that question? Is it too sensitive a question, or is it something that we want them to be asking?

Again, I put that to all of you.

The Chair: Well, they cannot all answer, because we only have 30 seconds.

Ms. Rexe.

Ms. Kate Rexe: We have been speaking with the RCMP and also working with the Winnipeg Police Service. One of the areas around identification concerns police not feeling comfortable asking the question, not being trained in a way to be culturally appropriate.

That's where one of the barriers is. Another barrier is that it is perceptions-based in the police. It's the perception of the police officer who identifies the aboriginal identity of a victim, which is often identified as aboriginal in a pan-aboriginal approach, as opposed to first nations, Métis or Inuit specific. This creates huge problems around the actual and accurate numbers for the aggregate.

What we need to do, I think, is work better with police. The police force...in particular RCMP, which cover 75% of all policing jurisdictions in Canada, systematically refuse to answer the question of identity because there are different jurisdictions and different detachments of RCMP that collect information or don't collect information, and there can be no accurate response to the question of ethnic identity.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rexe.

Now I'll go to Monsieur Desnoyers.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I saw a program on CBC two or three months ago that showed aboriginal women across Canada working the streets. We clearly saw racism, sexism and even abuse against these women. It wasn't committed by other aboriginal individuals, but by whites. Earlier one of you, I don't remember who, talked about preventing

mistreatment. That may be intended for aboriginal people, of course, but I believe it could also be intended for communities located near aboriginal reserves, where women often go. Here we're talking about Vancouver, but I could also tell you about towns in northern Quebec. Women leave the reserves and go into those towns. That's where a lot of things start.

We were talking about abuse prevention. Are we also looking at the awareness component, information from white communities near those reserves? I don't believe the culture has changed a lot between dominant and dominated communities, even today.

[English]

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes to answer the questions.

Ms. Tucker.

Ms. Sandra Tucker: I think we need to look again at systemic racism and recognize that generations of Canadians have been given a very skewed picture of the experiences of Inuit, Métis, and first nations people in Canada. If we truly want to begin to combat violence and aggression, we need to deal with the racism as well.

The Chair: Anyone else wish to field that question? No?

You have one minute left, Monsieur Desnoyers.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: You talked about prevention programs. Have you considered informing white communities located near those reserves? I don't know how that could be done, but perhaps we need to go into white schools to talk about those cultures, that is where they come from, ultimately. As Nicole was saying, we have to talk about history because that's what has marked our country. I think you are very much a part of that. I know that certain things we no longer want to see are often banished from the history books because we think we've gone way past that, but, in fact, everyone is still there.

[English]

Chief Elizabeth Cloud: I think that's a great idea. We're introducing curriculum into our high schools, working with the Ministry of Education, to help students understand why the Ipperwash crisis happened. I think it's a great idea. Not only that, the Lambton-Kent board—their high schools, which our students attend—now has self-identification of students off the reserve who can self-identify as aboriginal, non-aboriginal, or Métis. It's another way to collect data. Some subtle things could be done, but that's with education.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief Cloud.

Now we'll go to Irene Mathysen. We're cutting this fine, so I'm going to be really rigid about the three minutes for the next two. It's Mr. Calandra after Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm glad to hear, Chief Cloud, that there is education going on, because the on-fire crowds scared me. They just scared me.

Violence prevention strategies—I'm going to throw this out for everyone—have been criticized for placing the onus on the victim: she is responsible to ensure her own safety. It effectively removes responsibility from the perpetrator, and, of course, society tends to allow it to continue to exist, because “she” is responsible.

I wonder what is available in terms of helping women and reflecting the real needs of aboriginal women with regard to something that is more positive than this. I know that's rather vague, but perhaps you could comment on prevention strategies.

The Chair: Ms. Rexe.

Ms. Kate Rexe: I think we often have to think outside the box in terms of prevention strategies. Some of the things we've identified as emerging issues relate to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, as well as issues of human trafficking and sexual exploitation of women, and changing the language around how we identify victims and what the solutions or possibilities for solutions might be.

They do include thinking outside the box. Women are often not given diversion programs when they are arrested for prostitution, but men are given opportunities for john school, which I think is probably a gender policy that has been created to protect men from criminal charges, whereas women who have been victimized or sexually exploited are charged with a criminal offence and given a criminal record.

That draws them deeper into a system of victimization and ongoing battles with the criminal justice system. Thinking outside the box and looking at opportunities to mentor young women and girls who are involved in the sex trade is probably a better way of preventing abuse and criminal justice infractions within the system and creating positive outcomes for aboriginal women who are too often faced with circumstances like that.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll go to Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Chief Cloud, you've touched on Ipperwash a couple of times. I'm wondering what specifically has happened with respect to changes in the OPP. You mentioned some sensitivity training. Have you or your community been involved in that? What other changes specific to your community have happened since then, and how has the community accepted that?

That was obviously an extraordinarily tense situation. If we've seen positive change there, then that might be a model by which we could start making some other changes, specifically also to the police, and if you are involved in helping them better understand how to approach native communities.

Chief Elizabeth Cloud: Well, definitely people still are afraid when they see—now—the black car; they've changed colour.

But what we really did and promoted in the area is a lot of sensitivity training. We've just had, actually as of last November, a huge symposium with all law enforcement—with the OPP, the Sarnia police, Nishnawbe police, the border patrol, Fisheries and Oceans—and all of our communities to talk about developing tools that will be used when the police are actually trained.

They have also identified some core OPP officers who I can pick up the phone and call directly so that we have better and open lines of communication. If anything happens where I do need an OPP as well—we have our own Nishnawbe police—I have people I know who I can call. So they've identified specific people themselves.

They have paid more attention, I think, to sensitivity training, so that they don't go in and watch a video for five minutes and think they're sensitized. Now there actually is a little curriculum, and it might take more than a few hours. I was even told that by one of the Sarnia police officers. He said that the only sensitivity training he had was a five-minute video and a “There, you're done”.

So make it as if it is a very important component of the sensitivity training, and just try to mend relationships generally. For the OPP, one of the recommendations they had was to help mend relationships in the community.

I'm not sure if they really had a part of that, but we do have a first nation municipal table, and we've been meeting now. Our MPP, Maria Van Bommel, is chair, because we wanted to make sure that it was a respected committee, not just something that people thought we threw together. Now we're talking about an entire Ipperwash Beach strategy, because we all share the same area.

So I think some significant things have been done, and our officers, some of the people involved in the Ipperwash crisis, now have also become involved in Caledonia, just based on their experience. We've also had the Simon Wiesenthal Center, the centre that deals with the Holocaust, come in and do some workshops, helping us understand our differences. It's called “Tools for Tolerance”.

We've done a number of things, but still, you can never really take away the fact that some of the people who were down there that night will cringe if they see an OPP car pull up behind them now. Dudley George's brother, who was with him in the car that night, he's healing. He's designing a monument for us, and he's doing the landscaping around the monument. That's how he's helped heal from losing his brother that night.

So there have been some really good things going on.

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

I think we have come to the end of this. I want to thank our witnesses for sharing so honestly with us.

I did want to make one comment, however, just for the record. The fund is \$10 million over two years, I understand. Secondly, I don't think it's just white persons who are racists with regard to aboriginal people. I think many people who come to this country as immigrants don't understand the history and behave in the same way. So I would prefer that we use “non-aboriginal systemic racism”, as opposed to just picking one ethnic group and focusing on them.

Thank you very much for coming.

Adjournment, someone?

• (1730)

Mrs. Michelle Simson: I so move.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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