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—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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• (0850)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC)): I'd like to call the meeting to order and thank our speakers today for coming in on this nice early fall morning.

You will have 10 minutes each to do your presentation. We will start with Kate McInturff.

You have 10 minutes.

Mrs. Kate McInturff (Executive Director, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action): Thanks very much.

I was anticipating five minutes so I'll be brief. Perhaps there will be more time for questions.

Thank you for asking me to appear today. I appreciate the invitation to speak on Bill C-471.

There has been a lot of discussion about how you measure the wage gap between men and women in Canada, but I think by any measure we can say that pay inequity exists in Canada today. There is no substantial research showing anything other than that, either by the government's own measure or by the measures of organizations such as the OECD. Whether you compare hourly wages or annual earnings, all the data demonstrates that when men and women go to work in Canada, they come home with different paycheques.

When a person shows up for work on time, performs their duties, and meets their obligations to their employers, we expect that they will be paid for their work, yet for nearly two hours out of every full day of work, women are not being paid. More than that, women are not being paid because they are women. This is the heart of the human rights claim: that it is discriminatory, that the wage gap is based on discrimination against women because they are women.

That kind of discrimination is precisely what our own charter protects Canadian citizens against. That is what the Government of Canada is obliged to protect its citizens against, under both its own charter and a number of international norms and conventions, including: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which requires the government to take proactive measures to ensure that such inequity does not continue; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which protects the economic rights of men and women equally; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which takes as one of its critical areas of concern the economy and women's access and full participation in the economy; and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It's worth noting that most of the monitoring bodies internationally that examine Canada's compliance have cited Canada for the continuing gap and failure to redress that gap in pay equity. For example, Canada accepted recommendation 16 under the first Universal Periodic Review to redress the wage gap through, among other things—and these are the words of the government—“pay equity legislation”.

These obligations to the human rights of Canadians cannot be subject to collective bargaining. Subjecting human rights to collective bargaining is analogous to suggesting that when someone breaks their leg they should sit back and wait for a few months while their employer and the government decide who's going to pay, how much, if anything, and when, so that they can maybe access health care.

Repealing the PSEC act and implementing the recommendations of the Pay Equity Task Force in a timely manner—in short, enacting Bill C-471—will ensure that Canada is meeting its obligations to uphold the human rights of everyone who lives and works here in Canada. This is what the government has obligated itself to do under the charter and under the international human rights instruments I've mentioned. This is what I believe they should do.

Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Cathy McLeod): That was three and a half minutes, so it leaves us a lot of time for questions. Thank you.

Next we have Barb Byers, executive vice-president of the Canadian Labour Congress.

Welcome, Barb. You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Barbara Byers (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress): Thanks very much.

I also have prepared shorter remarks because I think we want to engage in the discussion with people here in the room.

I'm going to forewarn you that this will be a verbal presentation this morning, but we will send over our presentation as soon as it comes out of translation at our office. Just to make sure that you're not short on things to read, we did bring you copies of our research paper number 47, "Pay Inequity", our analysis of the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. That should give you a little bit of time to read before you get the other remarks.

As always, we want to thank you on behalf of the 3.2 million members of the Canadian Labour Congress for having us here to present our views on Bill C-471. As you know, the CLC brings together national and international unions, federations of labour, and labour councils. We work in every community, in all kinds of occupations, and in all parts of Canada.

This bill provides for the implementation of the recommendations of the task force on pay equity. As you know, these recommendations were the result of years of careful and comprehensive study and consultation and were widely supported by labour and women's organizations. The study could be the most significant and in-depth study of pay equity anywhere that we've been able to find.

The task force recommended a series of measures that would have transformed the federal pay equity regime and made it more effective and fair for women working in the federal sector. I'm going to highlight some key recommendations that the Canadian Labour Congress singled out for support when the report was issued in 2004. I'm also going to contrast these recommendations with the Conservative government's response to the task force, which is the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, or what I'm going to just call ECA.

I just want to say as well that this is a little bit like *déjà vu*: how many times do we end up appearing in front of this committee on pay equity in some form? It's time to get the job done.

The task force recommended that "Parliament enact new stand-alone, proactive pay equity legislation in order that Canada can more effectively meet its internal obligations and domestic commitments, and that such legislation be characterized as human rights legislation".

This recognition that pay equity is a fundamental human right acknowledges that we require systemic solutions to eliminate systemic discrimination. In contrast, the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act completely ignores this fundamental recommendation and proposes the exact opposite, relegating pay equity to the bargaining table.

The task force recognized that Canadian workers who belonged to other designated equity-seeking groups also experienced wage discrimination. A proactive pay equity law would be expanded to cover racialized workers, aboriginal workers, and workers with disabilities. This expansion of pay equity was ignored by ECA.

The task force placed the onus on employers to correct discriminatory wage disparities. It also obligated employers to work with unions and employee groups by creating pay equity committees to prepare and monitor pay equity plans in all workplaces, unionized or not. These committees should include a significant proportion of women workers from predominantly female job classes, and the

plans would cover all workers, regardless of full-time, part-time, contract, or casual status.

Although the current government labelled its Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act "proactive", we are not convinced that this is so. That act does not place the responsibility for eliminating discriminatory wages on employers alone; it introduces market forces as a factor for consideration when valuing women's work in the public sector. It only targets certain employers, redefines a "female predominant" group, and restricts the comparator groups, thus making it more difficult to establish where wage discrimination exists. This is not proactive pay equity legislation in any form.

The pay equity task force proposed the establishment of a separate pay equity commission to assist employees, employers, and unions to provide education on pay equity issues and to resolve any disagreements. Rather than establishing a separate body for specific pay equity expertise, the government's ECA refers disputes to the Public Service Labour Relations Board, prohibits unions from filing complaints, and compels women to file complaints alone, without the support of their union.

● (0855)

It's difficult to imagine a system further from the vision articulated by the pay equity task force, despite the government's claims that they acted in the spirit of its recommendations.

It's been six and a half years since the task force on pay equity tabled its report and recommendations and six and a half years since the Canadian Labour Congress and others have been advocating for its implementation. Given the amount of work that went into the development of the task force, it's shocking and quite frankly shameful that this report has been relegated to the archives without any meaningful implementation.

But women have been waiting far longer than six and half years. We've been waiting for decades and decades and decades. We've waited while we've haggled with resistant employers at the bargaining table. We've waited while settlements have been held up by employers who drag their feet in lengthy court proceedings, and, as some of us heard just last weekend at a conference in the Bell Canada case, 18% of the women who were affected died while that was being fought out. We've waited at great expense in many ways.

We've waited, and we've advocated for proactive pay equity legislation, as leaving the matter to collective bargaining or to a complaint-based system simply does not help us close the wage gap for women in this country. While we wait, the debt owed to women who were caught in the wage gap continues to mount: women with children to raise, women who deserve a dignified retirement, and women in every sector and community in our country.

Justice delayed is justice denied. We urge you to support this private member's bill and to bring proactive pay equity to Canada's working women.

Merci beaucoup.

• (0900)

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): That was a good brief, Barbara. Thank you. That was great.

Ms. Barbara Byers: We're ready for questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll hear from Ms. Côté, the women's and human rights officer for the Public Service Alliance of Canada, and Ms. Berry.

Ms. Côté, will you share the time with Ms. Berry? Or will you do all of the presentation, with Ms. Berry taking part in the answers?

Ms. Andrée Côté (Women's and Human Rights Officer, Membership Programs Branch, Public Service Alliance of Canada): I'll be speaking. Thank you.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada appreciates this opportunity to share our comments and recommendations in regard to Bill C-471, the Pay Equity Task Force Recommendations Act.

[*Translation*]

We have provided you with our brief and supporting documentation in French, but I have not had time to prepare speaking notes in French. I apologize for that. So I will give my presentation in English. I will be pleased, of course, to respond to questions in French.

[*English*]

PSAC represents 185,00 members from coast to coast to coast. The majority of our members are women. After years of tribunal hearings and court cases in the pursuit of pay equity, it's no surprise that we and our members were outraged when the Conservative government stripped public sector workers of their right to pay equity by including the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act in the Budget Implementation Act and forcing it through Parliament in just a few weeks.

PSECA is fundamentally flawed and cannot be improved by amendment. It must be abrogated, as provided in Bill C-471.

In May 2009, the PSAC came to this committee and outlined in detail our concerns with PSECA, so I'll review them in a very summary way today.

The Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act will, in a nutshell, do four things: make it more difficult to claim pay equity; transform pay equity from a human rights to an equitable compensation matter that must be addressed at the bargaining table; completely remove pay equity from the human rights framework and prohibit federal

public sector workers from filing pay equity complaints under the Canadian Human Rights Act; and prohibit unions from representing their own members by fining them for assisting their members in filing pay equity complaints with the Public Service Labour Relations Board.

Our more detailed analysis of the PSECA is in the document entitled "The End of Pay Equity for Women in the Federal Public Service" that is appended to our brief.

The proposed regulatory framework that is being examined by the federal government, and by Treasury Board in particular, would make things even worse. The proposed regulations would impose a higher burden of proof to demonstrate the existence of a so-called "pay equity matter" under PSECA. The regulations would trivialize several female-predominant job classes and would propose the use of wrong comparators for the purpose of comparing women's work of equal value.

This PSECA law is so flawed that PSAC has challenged its constitutional validity in courts. The case is now proceeding. We have also filed a communication with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which is appended to our brief. You can consult that.

The PSECA does not solve any of the many problems identified with the ongoing complaints-based system under the Canadian Human Rights Act, and other federally regulated workplaces are still having to deal with this ineffective system. For example, the PSAC has an outstanding pay equity complaint against Canada Post that we filed in 1983 and it is still before the courts.

It's precisely because of the failure of the complaints-based model and the ineffectiveness and discriminatory impact of the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act that PSAC fully supports Bill C-471 and calls for the immediate abrogation of this ill-advised and ill-conceived piece of legislation.

In addition to eliminating the PSECA, there's a need for real proactive pay equity legislation. In its groundbreaking report entitled "Pay Equity: A Fundamental Human Right", the task force concluded that the existing complaints-based legislation under the Canadian Human Rights Act needs to be replaced by a proactive pay equity law.

Last week, Treasury Board spokesperson Hélène Laurendeau came to this committee and told you that PSECA is proactive and that it incorporates several key recommendations from the pay equity task force. She even suggested that the PSECA builds on proactive models such as the Quebec Pay Equity Act.

In fact, PSECA takes an approach that is in direct opposition to the task force recommendations. For example, PSECA transforms pay equity into a labour relations issue subject to bargaining. The pay equity task force was very clear in its recommendation that the process for achieving pay equity be separated from the process for negotiating collective agreements. The task force extensively studied, consulted, and discussed the issue, and concluded that pay equity is a human rights issue, not a labour relations matter. Pay equity is a mechanism for achieving women's right to equality in the workplace, not an issue to be used as a bargaining chip.

● (0905)

The task force calls for the adoption of a proactive pay equity law that places positive obligations on the employers to review compensation systems—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): The people responsible for simultaneous interpretation are asking that the speaker slow down a bit. They are having difficulty following.

[*English*]

The Chair: Could you please slow down a little?

Ms. Andrée Côté: I hope I'll be okay on the time. I will try to slow down a little.

The pay equity task force calls for the adoption of a truly proactive pay equity law. That means placing positive obligations on employers to review compensation systems, to identify gender-based inequities, and to take steps to eliminate them. It includes timeframes for various steps in the process and mechanisms for maintaining pay equity.

The task force recommends also the establishment of joint pay equity committees to oversee the development and the maintenance of pay equity and the creation of a pay equity commission and a pay equity tribunal.

By contrast, the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act does not have any provisions giving unions the right to the information or data required to do an equitable compensation assessment, the right to paid time to participate in an equitable compensation assessment, the right to training, the creation of pay equity committees, and so on. The PSECA stipulates a joint responsibility of employers and unions, whereas the pay equity task force specifically recognized that joint responsibility for pay equity cannot exist in an environment where there is an imbalance between the power of employers and that of employees and their unions.

The position of the federal government as both employer and legislator is a clear example of this imbalance. Nowhere was it more obvious and ironic than in the 2009 federal budget, which contained both the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act and the legislated wage rates that were imposed on public sector workers.

The PSECA is a very far cry from real proactive pay equity legislation, and the proposed regulations that will bring the PSECA into force are, even more so, taking us backwards. As I mentioned, the regulations would specify a higher burden of proof. Women will be required to prove both gender discrimination and wage discrimination. They will provide for comparing female-predomi-

nant job classes to job classes that involve similar work, not work of equal value.

Even the unilateral consultation process that was engaged in by Treasury Board is flawed to the point where we question its legitimacy. While PSAC has participated when requested in two consultation sessions, dates have been unilaterally imposed, documents have been sent at the very last minute, and most of the presenters and facilitators in these consultations appeared to be employer oriented. The comments provided by PSAC and other bargaining agents from the first round of consultations were not included in the documents for the second round of consultations.

In 2010, far too many working women are not being paid the full value of their work because of residual systemic sex discrimination in the workplace. Indeed, as Kate mentioned, CEDAW, the United Nations committee, has remarked on several occasions that Canada is not doing enough on the issue of pay equity.

More than 30 years after the adoption of the Canadian Human Rights Act, it's time to do something to end this form of pervasive discrimination. The federal government should be playing a leadership role in this regard. The Public Service Alliance of Canada, on behalf of its members, strongly urges this committee to support the passage of Bill C-471 and to once again call on the federal government to fully implement the pay equity task force recommendations.

Thank you very much.

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you very much. You have almost one minute left.

Now we will proceed. As many of you know, we'll begin with questions and answers. The questions and answers both take up seven minutes, so I will ask everyone to be mindful of that.

We'll begin with the Liberals and Ms. Neville.

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

Thanks to all of you for coming.

I am sitting here with a real sense of déjà vu. We've been through this many times before.

I want to ask some questions about being proactive, but I was struck by your comment, Ms. Côté, about the very most recent negotiation that took place. I'm wondering if you could elaborate on that.

Ms. Andrée Côté: Yes, Madam Neville.

I'm referring to the consultations that were organized by Treasury Board on the development of the regulations under the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. The legislation is not yet in force pending the adoption of these regulations.

We participated in April and June in two two-day sessions of consultations and have been most frustrated by the process itself, which, first of all, we considered not fulsome consultation, to the point that we questioned the extent to which they were done in good faith. Second, but more seriously, we're really concerned about what is being proposed in the regulatory framework, which will not improve in any way on the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. On the contrary, we're really concerned that it's going to take us backwards.

Hon. Anita Neville: In your view, are the consultations legitimate consultations? When I ask that, here's what I mean: do you have any indication that your concerns are being incorporated into the regulations and the discussions?

Ms. Andrée Côté: It's a bit premature to have a definite conclusion. We will be meeting again with Treasury Board representatives. We have just received an invitation to that effect, so perhaps subsequent to our written comments we sent them this summer they are going to take our concerns a bit more seriously. We'll hope so, but even if they do, frankly, the legislative framework is so flawed that I don't see how we can improve things. But at this point we're very concerned that the regulations will very much worsen a bad law.

Hon. Anita Neville: The PSECA or ECA—I don't know—

Ms. Barbara Byers: I'll capitulate to going PSECA.

Hon. Anita Neville: —is deemed to be proactive legislation. Quite clearly, you don't see it as proactive legislation. Could you elaborate on that? Further, because I don't want to take too much time right now, I would ask if you could, based on your experience in labour negotiations, explain with some clear examples why you believe the collective bargaining process is not conducive to achieving pay equity.

Ms. Andrée Côté: Perhaps my colleague can pitch in, but I'll take the first point on why we consider this legislation not proactive. The pay equity task force—and I did bring this very heavy report with me just so the members can appreciate—

Hon. Anita Neville: It is substantial.

Ms. Andrée Côté: I'm not going to drop it and make a lot of noise, but it is a report of almost 600 pages report that has canvassed the issue in much detail. If you haven't read it, I would encourage you to take a look at it, because it really does answer a lot of the questions and points us in the right direction.

In this report, the pay equity task force did point out the different characteristics of a truly proactive pay equity regime. A proactive law puts the obligation on the employers—and I stress “the employers” because they are the ones who control the pay practices and the workplace. It puts an obligation on the employer to examine his or her pay practices, to discuss with the unions how to identify potential pay gaps, to create a pay equity committee that would develop a plan on how to address any existing pay gaps, and to request timelines within a certain delay, usually a three- or four-year timeframe. Then it proposes a mechanism to maintain pay equity through the years, because if there's no mechanism, it will gradually slip and pay equity will be eroded.

There's a whole series of steps and this report is really a blueprint of all those steps that are totally non-existent under the Public Sector

Equitable Compensation Act. In that act, as you can see, the only real obligation that's put on the employer is to provide a list to the union on which they say how many men and how many women are hired in the job group. That's it. The rest is all up for grabs and will be discussed at bargaining tables. It will completely disrupt bargaining and will take even more time, I think, than what is currently happening. It's certainly a far cry from proactive pay equity legislation.

• (0915)

Hon. Anita Neville: Can you comment a bit on the bargaining process, Ms. Berry?

Ms. Helen Berry (Classification and Equal Pay Specialist, Public Service Alliance of Canada): Sure. I think the bottom line is that this is a human right, and negotiations just don't lend themselves well to the back and forth, to the concessions that get made or put on the table, and things like that. We certainly don't want our members suffering in regard to their right to equal pay on the basis of some other group, on the competing interests that happen at the negotiating table.

I think, as Madame Côté has suggested, that the bargaining table just isn't.... The way the legislation is written, it's going to be so complex, and there are other issues that are being dealt with at the negotiation table. We just don't know how it's going to be workable, looking at the regulations and looking at the information that will be required from the employer. We just don't see how it's workable on that hand, but the more important point, I think, is around the human rights issue. You don't want to bargain away human rights on the basis of some other issue coming up at the table for the bargaining group.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That's good. We have 15 seconds, and if you think you can get something in, that's okay, but I'll turn to Madame Demers from the Bloc.

[Translation]

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

[English]

The Chair: Will you be splitting your time?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes, Madam Chair, that is what I was going to say. I will be sharing my time with my colleague, Mr. Desnoyers.

I would like to thank our guests for being here with us this morning.

I would like to begin by sharing a concern with you. Last week, when Ms. Laurendeau came before us, I had the impression that someone was really trying to pull the wool over our eyes and that the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act was being presented as a nice Christmas gift all tied up with a ribbon, as something great that would really help public sector employees. But you seem to be saying exactly the opposite.

Ms. Laurendeau said, and I quote:

The Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act will come into force once the regulations are developed and established through the governor in council. As we speak, the regulations are being developed through a consultative process. We have been consulting and working very closely with the bargaining agents and nearly 30 separate agencies [...]

I assume that this means bargaining agents for both sides, that is, the employer and the workers, and not just the employer's agents.

Are you among those bargaining agents and separate agencies?

Ms. Andrée Côté: Yes, we did receive an invitation. We took part in consultations that lasted two days in April and two days in June. That said, the dates were unilaterally imposed, the documents were sent at the very last minute, the resource persons for the consultations seem to be clearly from the management side, and the comments that we provided during the first consultation in April were not reflected in the document for the June consultation. So you might say that we did not have the impression that we were closely involved in developing the regulations.

I believe that my colleague would like to add something.

• (0920)

Ms. Nicole Demers: Ms. Berry?

[English]

Ms. Helen Berry: I just want to add that while we have had some consultations about the regulations, there was no consultation about the legislation itself. PSECA came out of nowhere for the union, and it was just introduced in the legislation.

The nature of creating regulations is that we're so restricted in what we can address. We can't address the bigger issues of pay equity, not only because of the nature of the consultations themselves but also because of the structure, because of how regulations have to be structured. I think there are only four areas in the legislation that require regulations that there's any say in; it's so restrictive that we question the legitimacy of the consultation on this, absolutely.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: What is your greatest concern about this legislation, which I assume should be in force by January the first?

Ms. Andrée Côté: There are a number of things. We are worried that setting the bar for female-predominant job classes at 70% will reduce access to pay equity. It will disqualify half of the female-predominant groups in our union. Adding market forces to the evaluation criteria in determining whether equal pay is being given for work of equal value reintroduces the criterion that created the discrimination in the first place. Market forces are what cause discrimination against women and result in their work being undervalued. We are very concerned by the fact that we will no longer have access to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. The legislation targets one category of women employees, that is, those

in the public service, prohibits them from taking action under the Canadian Human Rights Act or complaining and, in particular, prohibits the union from representing its own members. If a union has one fundamental duty, it is to represent its members. Now we are being prohibited from doing so.

As we have already mentioned, this will really bring chaos to the bargaining table. On the one hand, it forces us to bargain for this fundamental right for women, which is unfair, wrong and unjust. Moreover, it will dramatically slow down bargaining, given that everything has to be done at the same time as discussions on pay increases, leave, etc. It will really create confusion in the collective bargaining process.

Ms. Nicole Demers: I have too many questions I want to ask. I will give the floor to Luc.

[English]

Ms. Barbara Byers: Can I just add one point? If people really want to do something about the debt owed to women, we should get rid of the equitable compensation act and quickly start the process of implementing the pay equity task force, because that's what's going to bring equality to women's work, not just in the federal public service, but for women under federal legislation generally.

[Translation]

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

Barbara has just concisely answered the question that I wanted to ask. I was involved in negotiations in the private sector for over 30 years, and I can say that pay equity is a huge battle that women have been waging for over 50 years. They have made progress little by little, with this kind of legislation being passed in most jurisdictions. In Quebec, the legislation is a bit unusual. It is gradually being modernized, and women are continuing to make progress as a result.

As you have mentioned, two classes of workers are being created at the federal level, just in the public sector. We know that there will be no easy win through bargaining. Even if bargaining is poorly handled, women will be the losers.

I would like you to give us a little more detail about the consultations and how you see this negotiation being done at the federal level. Do you think the negotiations might be botched and that you might be told that there is not enough time to deal with pay equity, that other things need to take priority and that pay equity will be dealt with later?

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Ms. Helen Berry: I'm not a negotiator myself. I'm a classification and equal pay officer. We have always kept that side of creating job evaluation plans and pay equity separate from negotiations, for good reason.

I've been involved in the consultations on the regulations. One of the things that came across from the employer representatives who were there, from both separate employers and the core public service, was the huge concern with the amount of information the employer is going to have to provide to the union. As we're saying, if we're liable for this, we will want very good data. We want clean data. We want solid data.

Most of them around the table seem to think that wasn't going to be available. I know this from other processes I've worked in, and even the Auditor General has talked about the lack of computer systems that have solid data, across the board; there are inconsistencies from every department. That's just a minor concern. We have no idea how long it's going to take. There are no timelines in the legislation for this to take place except that it has to be before we can come to a final collective agreement.

As my colleagues have said, the sheer technical side of it has the potential to drag negotiations on indefinitely.

• (0925)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: Do you I still have some time left?

[*English*]

The Chair: That's it.

Thank you very much.

For the Conservatives, we now have Ms. Brown.

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

Thank you, ladies, for being here.

In some ways, I guess I need to congratulate an employer I had in the past. I worked as a draftsman in an engineering office many years ago when I was a student putting myself through school. I'm very pleased to be able to say that my employer looked at my work as a draftsman—draftsperson, if you choose—as equal to the work that was being done by any of the men who were in the drafting office with me. I was paid on par with what the men were getting. I guess I need to go back and congratulate him for being so proactive and forward thinking.

I guess really want to pick up on something that Ms. Berry mentioned.

By the way, Madam Chair, just so we have it on the record, I'm going to be sharing my time with Madam Grewal.

You talked about this dragging on indefinitely. If I look at the history of what's happened with pay equity, what we've seen over the years is that there were no negotiations. Women went to court and waited 20 years to receive the compensation. Probably the most topical was the situation with the women at Bell Canada. It took them 20 years to get that through court. There really was no goodwill on the part of the former administration to do anything on this issue.

I'd like to refer to a letter that was sent to Ms. Neville in October 2005. It was written by the Honourable Irwin Cotler and the Honourable Joe Fontana. It says:

Given the complexities associated with the implementation of proactive pay equity legislation, the Government cannot, at this time, introduce federal legislation by October 31, 2005, without further study and consultation.

There was no commitment from a former administration to even undertake to prepare a legislation. The letter goes on:

The Government will consider a range of methodologies and processes in implementing pay equity reforms and will work towards introducing a bill on pay equity by late 2006 or early 2007.

So again, there was no commitment from a former administration.

If I may just bring to your attention the date of the October 31, 2005, either the former Prime Minister knew he was calling an election or there was never a commitment to do anything on this anyway. But I want to say—

Hon. Anita Neville: Excuse me, on a point of order, I'd ask that the letter be tabled, and I'd like to point out that what Ms. Brown just read was a commitment to introduce pay equity legislation.

The Chair: Ms. Brown, will you table that?

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, we will table it in both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lois Brown: I don't think there was a commitment, because it was just going on to study more methodologies, more consultations. When we talk about this dragging on indefinitely, we have an administration that was in power for 13 years during the time when, for instance, the Bell Canada court case was going on for the women, and also no commitment to study pay equity.

Yet our government has said that we respect the principle of pay equity, we know that women are an essential part of the economy, and that when women prosper, everybody prospers. I know that in my own family when I prospered with the same pay as my male cohorts, my family prospered. I was able to go to school.

We took action last year to modernize pay equity in the public sector. We brought in a system that was more timely, that was proactive and that was to ensure equitable compensation. We did this because we knew that a better approach had to be taken to build on the strides that women had made over the decades.

If you look at the 2006 statistics, you'll see that Canada has one of the highest labour participation rates of females in the workforce amongst all the OECD countries. In 1983, we know that fewer than 5% of women were in senior management, but today we have more than 41% of women who are in senior and executive roles in our public service. I commend those women for doing that. We're seeing more and more women achieving top jobs. Not long ago, we had a presentation of women in non-traditional roles, and we're seeing women going into medical schools, with more than 50% of the applicants and the registrants in medical schools now women.

My question, first of all—and this is just to educate me—is this: does a female deputy minister in the public sector, with equitable education and experience, make the same as a male counterpart?

• (0930)

Ms. Barbara Byers: I think we need to be really clear here. We're not talking about equal pay for equal work anymore. That was, quite frankly, a fight of our mothers and our grandmothers, because there was a time when women doing the same jobs were paid differently. Some of us maybe weren't in the workforce yet, and maybe we were, but I recall the columns for male help wanted and female help wanted.

We're not talking about what you just started out with, which was about being a draftsman and being paid equally. That's different. We're not talking about equal pay for similar work. That was another fight by women before us. What we're talking about is equal pay for work of equal value. What we're talking about here is that there are jobs that are undervalued.

If the statistics about the participation of women in the workplace you've been giving are correct, then it's even more abysmal that we're still making 70¢ on the dollar on average, in every occupation except one, and that's as nannies. That's the only place where on average women get paid more than men do.

It's abysmal that racialized women in this country get paid about 64¢ on the dollar, that aboriginal women are at 46¢ on the dollar, and that women with disabilities are at around the same amount and have huge amounts of unemployment. By the way, that's for full-time, full-year work. If you start to throw in part-time, contract, and temporary work, on average we're down to 63¢ on the dollar. There's just been a recent study on that.

If you ask whether a deputy minister gets paid the same as another deputy minister, well, there are obviously rules that have been brought in on that. What I'm telling you is that our jobs have been undervalued. We're talking about bringing up the value of the jobs. The fight in Bell Canada was about bringing up the value of the operator's job to be equivalent to male-dominated jobs that had the same or different components of skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions.

Ms. Lois Brown: Then I'd go back—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Brown. We've run out of time.

I am sorry, Ms. Grewal, but you don't have time to ask your question.

I'm afraid that we are supposed to finish at a quarter to. Because we have Ms. Mathysen, I don't know that we will go to a second round.

Go ahead, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much. I think you've made very succinct the fight here and the issue of raising the value of women's work. Very clearly, that has been lost, I think, in the argument back and forth.

When I think about the reality of pay equity, I think about this government and its checklist. It has a checklist: let's create the impression that we've acted on real property rights for aboriginal women; let's create the impression that we're concerned and moving forward on missing and murdered aboriginal women; let's create the impression that somehow pay equity matters. It is going to put in this structure, this regime, and use all of the right words and all of the right spin and call it proactive, and somehow it will be.

I have my concerns. In creating this checklist, I keep wondering who benefits. Where are the disadvantages? I'm wondering if you could explain or if you have an understanding of the benefits of the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act—and I rather like the acronym ECA—for employers. Why go through all of this effort if there is no benefit? If there is a benefit, what is the benefit to employers? You very clearly illustrated the disadvantages to employees.

• (0935)

Ms. Helen Berry: I can just speak almost to a technical sense on that, which is that because the employer has an awful lot of power, in this case, and because when you're looking at the legislation, we're not clear on what job group is or what job class is, for bringing forward the 70% predominance of female-dominated groups, right now we have no idea if a system can be put in place or may be put in place so that no group will actually reach a female-dominated 70% job group or job class.

It may be all irrelevant. The employer has the control over that. In essence, they could create a system such that there would be no pay equity even though groups may have come in at 69%. Clearly there's a pay equity problem, but they will not be addressed in this legislation. Or we would have groups that are at 55% under the Canadian Human Rights Act and there is a clear pay equity problem, but they will not be addressed in this legislation.

Depending on how Treasury Board and the government determine how those job classes get defined in the regulations, it is very unclear at this point as to whether they can just legislate themselves or regulate themselves out of ever having to deal with this.

Ms. Andrée Côté: I would like to add to that. If an employer—in this case, Treasury Board—does have a pay equity readjustment to make, with this Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act the amount of the money for pay equity would go into the same envelope as the money for pay raises that year. So instead of paying the pay equity readjustment and then bargaining a collective agreement with raises, it would all be put into one.

The employer will save money on the backs of women here. It will save money either by eventually bargaining lower raises or by eliminating pay equity at the bargaining table. One way or the other, the interest is for the employer, so there's a kind of conflict of interest here built into the bill, because the bill will ultimately benefit Treasury Board.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: This is where the market forces come into play.

Ms. Andrée Côté: On top of it, too, the market forces will be used as leverage, perhaps to bring wages down. In the consultations, we have asked that we at least acknowledge that you can't use market forces to drag wages down, that if you're going to use them, at least it's only to drag it up. That wasn't reflected back in the framework we received. The market forces are clearly also a threat to pay equity and a threat in general to the level of wages.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I know that PSAC filed a communication with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women requesting that the commission examine the pay equity situation under the 2009 PSECA in light of what you were talking about, Canada's international human rights commitments and obligations. I wondered what the reasons were for submitting the communication. Also, have you heard back from the United Nations Commission in regard to this?

Ms. Andrée Côté: The reason for submitting this to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is that in CEDAW, on the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination, there are explicit provisions to guarantee and promote equal pay for work of equal value. The international instrument CEDAW recognizes it, and so does the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as does the ILO convention 100. We went to the UN because the UN explicitly recognizes the importance of pay equity, and we wanted to alert the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women to the situation in Canada.

This isn't a formal tribunal or complaints process; it's a communication. We simply inform the commission. The commission then writes to the government and asks the government to respond to the information. Then it's channelled through the processes of the

UN and sent, if I understand correctly, to the economic, social and cultural rights committee, and they take this information to do the global assessment of the situation of where Canada is at.

To some extent, I think, Canada's shortfall on pay equity has been taken into account in the global assessment of Canada's performance in the international scene. I think this is why we see the results in how the international community is considering Canada right now, recognizing that Canada is no longer the human rights leader that it used to be and is no longer a champion of women's equality rights domestically.

• (0940)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you. Now—

The Chair: That's it. Sorry, Irene.

I apologize that we have to stop now. We have a teleconference with some aboriginal women in Labrador. We need five minutes to set up and they are time certain, so please accept my apology.

Ms. Barbara Byers: You would encourage us to leave early is what you're saying.

The Chair: Yes, we're trying to get rid of you, Barbara.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Ms. Simson.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Madam Chair, I just wanted to interject. Because we didn't get a second round, which is most unfortunate depending on how you look at it.... The fact that we're having this discussion in 2010 just blows me away. It's shocking. I was wondering if I could table a letter I was going to reference with respect to my line of questioning, which appeared in the *National Post*. It was authored by Patty Ducharme, and it was the letter of the day on Friday. It indicates that Ignatieff's plan is of real value to working women.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Simson. If you table that with us, then everyone will get to read it.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming and for, as usual, being clear and lucid in everything they had to say. It's a pity we couldn't stay longer.

Thank you again.

We will suspend so that we can set up for the teleconference.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-
- (0950)

The Chair: The meeting is resumed.

We have only three of the persons who are meant to be witnesses; there are another three who are probably still trying to get on. They can come on once we start. We are going to start so we can get this teleconference rolling.

I would like to welcome Ms. McGee, Ms. Benuen, and Ms. Hancock. Thank you for coming on. I know how difficult it is to take time out of your day to have a meeting like this. We do appreciate your coming on.

I would like you to introduce yourselves, but I would also let you know that we are on very strict timelines and you have three minutes in which to say what you need to say. I think you may just want to tell us who you are: Germaine Benuen works for the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation; Carmen Hancock works for Violence Prevention Labrador; and Joanne McGee works for Mushuau Innu First Nation.

I'd like you to start with your presentations. We're timing you here for three minutes, and I'll indicate when you have only 30 seconds left. Thank you.

Perhaps we will begin with Ms. McGee.

Ms. Joanne McGee (Health Consultant, Mushuau Innu First Nation): I'd rather not go first. I'd like Carmen or Germaine to go first, please.

The Chair: Germaine, would you like to go first?

Ms. Germaine Benuen (Director of Operations, Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation): I would prefer that Carmen go first.

The Chair: All right.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Well, Ms. Hancock, you're it.

Ms. Carmen Hancock (Executive Director, Violence Prevention Labrador): Hi, everyone. I was part of the initial meeting in Lab West back in June.

My name is Carmen Hancock. I'm with Violence Prevention Labrador. Our background is to create public awareness and attitudinal change about some of the fundamental dynamics that help to foster and cause violence. In our initial meeting, just to give a backgrounder to Joanne and Germaine, we discussed issues and barriers facing women who experience violence in aboriginal communities.

While Violence Prevention Labrador covers the Labrador region, we didn't have voices of experience at the table, that is, women from aboriginal communities. We felt that it was important that the standing committee hear from women in Labrador and we've since recruited quite a few women to join in on this call.

We appreciate the standing committee taking the time to do this as well.

I wonder if you could, Ms. Chair, just give Germaine and Joanne—because they haven't had any kind of backgrounder into what you might expect from them—some idea of what they might provide you with today.

- (0955)

The Chair: Is that all, Ms. Hancock?

Ms. Carmen Hancock: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Then we'll move to—

Who would like to go first, Ms. McGee or Ms. Benuen?

Ms. Benuen.

Ms. Germaine Benuen: I guess I'll go first, but this is the first call in which I will have a chance to get involved in this initiative, and I have no background whatsoever on it. That being said, I do have a lot of issues about violence in the Sheshatshiu Innu community and aboriginal women in particular. I've just been appointed to volunteer for this committee and I'm looking forward to it.

I'll also say that I was asked to be part of this committee only a couple of days ago, and I have no idea what to expect. I would need background information, I guess, with regard to this initiative.

The Chair: Ms. Benuen, we would like you to tell us what you know about the level of violence against aboriginal women in your region, the causes of violence against women in your region, and the forms it takes or how it expresses itself. Anything you know about that and can tell us would be very helpful.

Ms. Germaine Benuen: The community population is about 1,800 and the majority are minors. I guess there's a lot of violence in regard to the women's issues. A lot of women face violence, physical and emotional, from their partners in the community. They sometimes have a hard time going through the court system or going to the police. A lot of the time the police don't come when you want to report violence against you or something like that. That's why the Inuit or aboriginal women in my community are very reluctant to report it.

Also, there are a lot of issues with regard to the minors, the children, and violence. Just this morning I had a call from somebody who works with a couple of children who were involved in sexual abuse. CYFS was involved. Nothing has been done. They came forward and named their perpetrator and to this day nothing has been done for those two kids.

I think it's really important that these issues come forth and that we deal with them in whatever way we can.

The Chair: Is there anything further that you want to say about how the system is working now? Is the system serving you?

You have another minute, so perhaps you can elaborate on that. Do you think the system that is working right now helps? Obviously it doesn't. What do you think could be done to make it a little better?

We'll ask you questions later, but I'm just trying to help you use your three minutes.

Ms. Germaine Benuen: I think that the system has failed aboriginal women in getting the help they need, and not just through the court system. CYFS should be able to help by providing prevention programs, which they don't do. The police force never get there when they're supposed to, when they get called in. So the system has failed aboriginal women by saying that our issues are not as important as somebody else's.

I don't know how to get around that. That's been going on for years.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. McGee.

Ms. Joanne McGee: Thank you.

First of all, who am I speaking with? Who is in Ottawa?

The Chair: You're speaking with the Standing Committee on Status of Women. There are 10 members. I'm the chair. The members come from every political party—Bloc Québécois, NDP, Liberal, and the Conservatives, the government party. We're all here—as you heard me ask Ms. Benuen—to listen to issues on the level of violence, what form it takes, and what you think we can do about it.

• (1000)

Ms. Joanne McGee: Okay. Thank you.

My name is Joanne McGee. I work with the Mushuau Innu First Nation in Natuashish, Labrador. Natuashish is a community on the north coast of Labrador. It's geographically isolated, accessible only by plane or ship in the summer months.

As for my role, I don't live in the community. I visit and work there on a travelling basis. My role right now is providing some assistance to the health director, who is Kathleen Benuen. She may have joined this call—I heard a couple of beeps on the line—and if so, she'll speak to things as well.

Certainly from my perspective, I do know that violence against women is an issue in Natuashish. Natuashish is a dry community in that there's an alcohol ban in place. It's in its third year now, but it will be four years in January.

The population is about 850 people, with a little over 50% of them under the age of 24, according to my last assessment of the last census data. It has a high birth rate. There are a number of young women who are having a lot of babies, generally.

Even though there is an alcohol ban in the community, there is still evidence of drinking in the community. Sometimes, as a result of that, women experience violence to themselves or their children. The community is serviced by a safe house, a building that is near the RCMP station. It serves two purposes. First, it's a safe place for youth who may be in unsafe situations, perhaps related mainly to substance abuse, for example. It's meant to be a very temporary solution until their family can sort themselves out, or until they come into the care of child, youth, and family services, or until whatever needs to be put in place happens once the immediate crisis has settled down. The other purpose of the safe house is to provide a safe

haven for the women and children who may be fleeing domestic violence situations.

The unfortunate problem we have in Natuashish is that the safe house is underfunded. It's funded jointly by Health Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs. However, the funding level we receive is insufficient to meet the needs of the community.

The mandate of the safe house is to provide 24/7 access to people who need it. With budgetary issues and problems, we've had serious challenges. We've been able to meet that mandate in providing 24-hour access, but we haven't been able to do a lot in terms of outreach and violence prevention types of initiatives. It's mainly been operational requirements of the safe house and trying to meet those needs for women and families.

I personally haven't had a lot of contact. We've recently started working, though, with the Women's Policy Office in Newfoundland and Labrador, and also have begun a working relationship with Status of Women Canada. That's been quite recent. We will be doing that work.

A lot of the work we do around violence prevention, once we can get some funds to support those types of initiatives, involves a group in the community known as the Next Generation Guardians. It is mainly a women's group that provides support to women and young girls in the community. It recently has reached out to men as well, but it's mainly for women and young girls. In terms of promoting, protecting, and preserving the Mushuau Innu culture, it certainly is one of their strengths.

I don't know what else I can say.

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

Two other people have just come on.

Can you please identify yourselves?

Ms. Michelle Kinney (Deputy Minister, Health and Social Development, Nunatsiavut Government): This is Michelle Kinney.

The Chair: Thank you.

And who else?

Ms. Kathleen Benuen (Health Director, Mushuau Innu First Nation): I'm Kathleen Benuen.

The Chair: All right.

Just to recap, you have three minutes. You're speaking to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women and we are looking at the issue of violence against aboriginal women. We would like to ask you a few questions, please.

Can you tell us about the level of violence, the forms of violence, what you think is being done to decrease that violence, and what the root causes are? If you can give us that in about three minutes, specific to your community, there will be a question and answer period later.

Perhaps we'll start with Ms. Kinney.

•(1005)

Ms. Michelle Kinney: All right.

I'm Michelle Kinney and I'm the Deputy Minister of Health and Social Development for the Nunatsiavut government. We basically provide services in five Inuit communities in northern Labrador, all of which are isolated, as Joanne said in her previous comments about the Innu.

We have a high level of violence in our community, with violence against women, but violence against children and other groups as well. That takes the form of sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and financial abuse, the whole gamut, I would say.

In three minutes or less it's difficult to give you an accurate picture, but I would say that a lot of it is due to social issues and intergenerational trauma that has been forced on people through relocation, dislocation, and residential schools—all of those pieces. There's a big sense in our communities of loss of culture and, in many cases, loss of language. I believe that in many cases people have not been taught how to form healthy relationships because of the dominance, the lack of decision-making power that individuals have had through relocation, the residential school experiences, and those kinds of things.

We need to do a lot of education and a lot of work about healthy relationships and healthy choices and those kinds of things. Often our programs are in response to incidents that occur. They're after the fact; we're intervening. We do have safe houses in three of our communities—shelters—and they're very valuable resources, there is no doubt about it, but what we're not getting to, I believe, is the heart of the problem, and that's educating: education for women, but education for men as well.

In all of the social interactions that have gone on and the losses that people have faced, men probably have faced even more losses than women. In many ways, women have been able to adapt to the culture shift and have taken on roles in the white culture as nurses, daycare operators, teachers, and those kinds of things. Although they're not the same as their traditional roles, they are more congruent with those. Men have been completely taken away from the things they would normally be doing in hunting and gathering and providing for families. I think that has really never been discussed fully in communities.

We are doing some intervention and we're providing some programming. But the big emphasis, I think, needs to be on learning new life skills, on education, on building healthy relationships, and on helping people to make healthier choices.

The Chair: For someone who said she didn't know what she was going to say, I think you did very well indeed. Thank you, Ms. Kinney.

Kathleen Benuen.

Ms. Kathleen Benuen: Yes.

The Chair: Kathleen, you've been listening, have you?

Ms. Kathleen Benuen: Yes.

The Chair: Perhaps you can take three minutes to discuss what we've talked about with regard to violence against aboriginal women.

Ms. Kathleen Benuen: In our community I find that a lot of women are keeping silent. It's hard to reach them. I see a lot of young girls in relationships at a very young age, and they have bruises on their faces. They're not telling anyone, but you can see that they're in violent relationships.

We have a safe house and a shelter for women. I would like to see more youth hostels. We need to reach the young women, and the women in the community need to come forward to break the silence in the community.

I know there is sexual abuse, but also there's silence. Nobody is speaking out because in a small community everybody knows everybody, and there is a big division in the community. That division also affects the way people keep silent. We need to break that cycle. We need to open the doors for our young women and the women in the community.

•(1010)

The Chair: Would you like to say anything more, Ms. Benuen?

Ms. Kathleen Benuen: No.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is Valerie Chafe on?

Ms. Carmen Hancock: Hi. It's Carmen speaking. I had a quick message from Valerie. She's had a personal issue come up, so she won't be attending the call.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Carmen, for telling us that.

Now, what we're going to do, for the five of you who are there, is have a question and answer period. We'll have four people doing that. We will have seven minutes for the questions and the answers. I'm asking the members of the committee to keep their questions short so that we can have more time to hear from you with regard to the answers.

We will begin with the Liberal Party members. We'll start with Mr. Russell.

Just for the committee, Mr. Russell will be replacing Ms. Simson for this part of the meeting, and Ms. Simson will remain as an observer.

We'll go to Mr. Todd Russell.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning to all of the folks back in Labrador.

I first of all want to thank the committee for undertaking this particular study. I know how important it is to the communities that are represented on the line this morning.

Of course, it is an issue that is prevalent throughout the nation. It is always important to repeat a particular fact: the Sisters in Spirit have documented over 580 murdered or missing aboriginal women in this country in the last 20 to 25 years, and this is a trend that continues. It highlights the importance of the work this committee is undertaking and what is happening in communities like those in Labrador.

I want to say thank you to all of the participants from back in the big land, Nitassinan, Nunatsiavut. You do fantastic work and you've given the committee a very brief but I believe a very deep understanding of some of the challenges we face in our communities in Natuashish, Sheshatshiu, and the Inuit communities, and in other places. I want to thank you for the work you have undertaken.

I note that Michelle said something about it being reactive. There has been a reactive approach to much of the violence, and there are many reasons. I just want to shift focus for just a little bit and ask each of you to underline one strategy you think is working to address this issue.

If you had one ask of this committee in terms of something we can move forward to help you in your work of trying to prevent violence against women and girls, what would that be? I know that there's not a lot of time, but I think that's where we want to focus. How can this committee help? What strategies can this committee promote to help you in your daily work to prevent violence against women and girls?

I thank you once again.

The Chair: Thanks, Todd.

I will ask Kathleen Benuen to start by telling us one strategy that currently works and one thing you would like to ask this committee to recommend.

Kathleen.

Ms. Kathleen Benuen: I see from the community that there is a division in the community. It's a struggle for the women who are trying to move forward. I think we need more resources in the community to help the women and more training for the women and the caregivers in the community.

•(1015)

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Kathleen Benuen: Promoting anti-violence empowers women and girls, especially the children.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Carmen.

Ms. Carmen Hancock: I'd actually like to echo what Kathleen has said in terms of what's working. Currently the provincial government has the violence prevention initiative, and right now there is a regional coordinating committee in Labrador to create and address some of the public education and awareness issues related to violence against women but also other target populations. I think some of the strategies are working in terms of the public awareness campaigns.

In terms of us looking forward, it's definitely about creating strategies and partnering with the aboriginal communities to bring some education and training to communities and help develop

resources, those types of things. I think those strategies, as Kathleen mentioned, are very positive.

It's also about working within the education system, not only with children and youth, but also in terms of post-secondary training to teachers as part of the curriculum around cultural sensitivity training around violence and violence issues. Having those types of training becoming part of the core curriculum within post-secondary institutions is key.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Germaine Benuen.

Ms. Germaine Benuen: I would think that it's more funding to educate the women and children against violence. I would like more funding for educating the family and to get the prevention programs, addiction treatment programs, on the go, and to treat the family as a whole, rather than just women and children. I think if we treat the family as a whole, it will not eliminate the whole violence, but it's a start, right? So I would say more funding in education, prevention programs, treatment programs, and all that stuff.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm sorry, Ms. McGee, did you have anything to say?

Ms. Joanne McGee: Yes. In response to Mr. Russell's question around one thing that works, I think certainly from my work and experience with the Mushuau Innu in Natuashish that women traditionally are very strong leaders and have a very powerful role in the community. I see that as a strength.

Also, there's the fact that the Mushuau Innu have maintained and retained their language and their connection to the land and their traditions. I see that as very positive.

Certainly one thing that works, whether it's in violence prevention, addiction, or whatever kinds of programs the community runs, is that those particular attributes are definitely strengths, and this is definitely one thing that works.

I think it's important to invest in prevention programs, in having the ability to do outreach work with women. It's great to be able to respond to crisis, but oftentimes we work in crisis mode, and that's not always effective in terms of getting at and addressing the root causes, I guess. So it's about having the ability to empower women and to offer some of the things that the other speakers have already said around education and training and also to involve them in policy discussion. Oftentimes, the women, in particular in northern Labrador—and I'll speak again just to Natuashish—are geographically isolated. It's very expensive to travel out of the community and participate in discussions that might inform policy, yet they have a tremendous amount to offer to such discussions.

One of the things that I'll speak quickly to as well that's bound to be a challenge is the jurisdictional issues that often come up. Somebody spoke about the provincial violence prevention initiative. We did succeed in getting funding from that, but for some of the issues that we had to work around in terms of Natuashish being a reserve and around federal and provincial jurisdiction, those can be challenging sometimes. I'm not sure if it's something this committee can address, but certainly it's something that we face sort of on an ongoing basis: whose responsibility is it?

I see it as the responsibility of both levels of government and I look at it more around the perspective of "do you want to work with us?", and if you do, then this is what we want to do. Do you want to be part of it or don't you? Sometimes those jurisdictional issues can be challenging.

• (1020)

The Chair: Ms. Kinney.

Ms. Michelle Kinney: There are two things. I'll go back to some of the comments I made. Education is key. From the fund that other people have talked about, we got some funding to develop a program, Boys to Men, where we educated boys, 10- to 13-year-olds, around respect for women, healthy relationships, and those kinds of things. Those kinds of prevention programs are essential both for boys and for girls, and too often we put all our eggs in one basket.

I fully support women having the resources and the ability to say no and to ward off violence, but we also need to put some of our efforts into education for males. The whole education piece around healthy relationships is key to many issues in our communities and to the ability to be able to make choices, when in the past choices have been taken away.

The one key thing I would like to say comes down to money. It is not the amount of money necessarily, but the sustainability of funding. Most of the funding we receive is project-based, so we're continually writing proposals. It's short term. It's piecemeal. It's not always the amount of funding but the fact that it could be sustainable that would give a lot more support to our projects or to our communities, more than just piecemeal short-term funding.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kinney.

Now I will go to Madame Demers, from the Bloc Québécois. She will be asking you questions.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Good morning, ladies.

I've been listening to Mr. Russell, who is from Labrador, and he had such good questions to ask you and you had such good answers to give him, that I will just tell you what I think about what you told him.

I've been listening to what you told us this morning. I believe you are very brave women. You touched me when you talked about what you have to live through in your communities. In most of your communities, you are cut off from the rest of the world. In most of your communities, you have to live in situations that we don't know anything about back here, down south. In most of your communities, there are young people who have nothing to do with their lives because they don't have opportunities like we have here, and young people here do nothing with their lives because they have too much. They have too much money and too much opportunity, and they still don't know what to do with their lives.

Over there, you say the system has failed aboriginal women, and we know that. Mr. Russell said that 500 young aboriginal women—and it is more now—have died or have been abducted. We know that is the truth and we know we should do something to find out what has happened to those women. You say the police forces are not responding correctly to your plight, and we know this is also the truth.

What can we do about that? We don't know. How do we respond to your plight while we are over here? I don't know. How do we respond to your needs? I don't know.

I am tired of saying that's what we should do for you because that's not the way we should do it; as you say, we should work together. Instead of telling you what we should do for you, you should tell us so we can help you better. You tell us that you need sustainability. I believe that's the truth. I'm not in the government, though; I'm in the opposition, so it's hard for me to give you sustainability. We'll work hard on that.

I believe you need more resources. I believe you need more training. I believe that promoting anti-violence is very important. Education, I believe, is at the heart of everything. If you have education, if your children have education, I think you might be able to save the next generation. You have my support for that. I do hope you'll get it.

Thank you for being here this morning. Thank you for sharing with us what you have to go through.

• (1025)

The Chair: Thank you, Michelle.

Ms. Nicole Demers: It's Nicole.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Thank you, Nicole.

We have another three minutes left for this. I was going to ask if anybody wanted to answer the question Nicole brought up but that hasn't been answered yet, which is, why are the police not responding and what do you think we can do about it?

Michelle, I wonder if you, as a member of the local government, could start off and tell us what you think. I just want a quick answer from everybody.

Michelle? Joanne McGee? Ms. Benuen? Has everyone been cut off? No?

A voice: I'm here.

The Chair: Okay. Germaine, did you want to comment on that point about why the police are not responding and what can be done about it?

Ms. Germaine Benuen: Whenever there's a question about this, we question the police on that, and they usually say they go by the priorities of the calls. For instance, there was a point there... [*Technical Difficulty—Editor*]. We said, okay, we need a detachment in our community. We have a detachment in our community and it doesn't make a difference. Across the street from the detachment, somebody called the police, saying there was a disturbance there, and the police didn't get there until two hours afterward. They're only across the way from this building.

So I don't know, but maybe they need more resources, maybe they need somebody working with them from the community, or maybe we need more funding to train our own people to deal with the issues in our community. That always involves more funding.

The Chair: Is there anyone else who would like to offer an answer? If you do, can you please give your name just before you say it?

Kathleen?

Ms. Kathleen Benuen: I don't think we really have that problem here in Natuashish, as it is a small community. I know first-hand that when I call them they usually come right away. Sometimes the woman doesn't want to place charges against her partner, but I find that the police look at the individual and what evidence they can get and they go from there.

I don't think we have a problem here in Natuashish. I haven't heard complaints from other members or women here.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think we will move on. It looks like we have four people left on the call. For some reason, Ms. Kinney has gone off the call.

Now we'd like to go to the Conservatives and Madame Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning, everyone.

I do not know whether the witnesses understand what I am saying.
[*English*]

The Chair: The witnesses should hear the translation.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: *Bonjour*. I will try to do this in English and in French, because sometimes my emotion is in French.

Violence against women is unacceptable in Canada. For all of us it's very important to understand why violence against aboriginal women is so common. You speak about men and the violence against young women—

I'll say this in French.

• (1030)

[*Translation*]

It is very important for us to understand this.

As Ms. Demers has said, we have another reality here. We know little about aboriginal women's reality and what we do know comes either from the media or from what we hear.

You have talked a lot about education and intergenerational problems. What can we do, the committee, the government and the opposition together, to provide as much help as possible for aboriginal women in this situation? How can we give you the best means to protect yourselves?

We have heard that the police in some communities are slow to intervene. Physical, verbal, emotional and sexual violence are unacceptable. So what can we do here to give you as much support as possible and help you to succeed as well as possible?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Boucher.

Because we're on a teleconference, we can't see you, so I would like to ask, starting with Ms. McGee, if you would like to respond.

Ms. Joanne McGee: I'm not really even sure how to respond. I find that the question seems to be directed as if I were a victim of violence myself, and I'm not. I'm here representing the health organization of the community. I honestly don't know what I can add to what we've already shared in terms of what we feel.

Certainly, my role is as a health professional and a support person to the community in terms of what can be done, but I'm personally not a victim of violence myself and I don't know if I can answer that question.

The Chair: Ms. Germaine Benuen.

Ms. Germaine Benuen: I will speak from personal experience because I was the victim of violence in a relationship years ago, but that's not there anymore. At that time, I was young. I didn't know anything about violence. It was acceptable in the community. As I got older, I got out of the relationship.

At that time, I would have probably needed the support from, say, counsellors, or support workers, or RCMP, or nurses, just to get information on what my rights were or where I needed to go to get help, how I could get help, and if I would be protected if I charged this person. What is needed today is education regarding violence.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Benuen.

Ms. Hancock.

Ms. Carmen Hancock: I don't have anything to add to this question, so I'll pass it over to Kathleen.

The Chair: Kathleen.

Ms. Kathleen Benuen: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]...question?

•(1035)

The Chair: Sorry, Kathleen, you cut out there. What were you saying?

Ms. Kathleen Benuen: What is the question?

The Chair: I think Madame Boucher asked what we could do to help women who are actual victims of violence.

Ms. Kathleen Benuen: Like I said before, we need training for the staff in the shelter who are currently working there. I find that the women who are being victimized by violence are keeping silent. They're not seeking help as they should be. They're ashamed of what is happening to them.

A lot of people here—including me—have witnessed violence and alcoholism in our families and in our parents for the last few years. We need to start assisting those women, reaching out to those women who are in need, before something drastic happens to them.

The Chair: Thank you, Kathleen.

We'll go to Irene Mathyssen from the New Democratic Party.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all of you on the phones for agreeing to participate in this discussion and helping us with our study. It's very important that we hear as much as possible in order to have a sense of what needs to happen in order to end this kind of violence.

My first question is to Ms. McGee. You talked about the piecemeal nature of funding. One of the things that we know is problematic in the status of women department is the fact that there have been changes to the funding. It's now all about small projects. There's none of the longer-term follow-through that you described.

I wonder if you could give us an example of one of the projects that needed this longer-term funding, and I wonder if you could comment on the cancellation of the aboriginal healing program or the fund.

The Chair: Ms. McGee.

Ms. Joanne McGee: Perhaps I can give an example around the piecemeal nature of the funding. Recently we were actually successful in a funding proposal to the Women's Policy Office here in Newfoundland and Labrador to access funds. Again, it's project oriented, and it's not a large amount of money. We would like to have the ability to access funding through Status of Women Canada, which we are only now learning about in terms of what they offer, and that was through our application to the provincial grants process.

What we learned was that in order to access that funding, we need funding in order to facilitate that proposal development. We have been successful in getting that funding from the provincial level, and as for what we want to do, we mentioned earlier that we really feel we're missing out on the outreach component, on reaching out to women who might be vulnerable or women who might be in desperate need right now.

We plan to use the grant we received to do that work, but also to engage women in such a way that it facilitates the development of further proposals or project ideas that we might put forward to funders such as Status of Women Canada. It is very piecemeal and, in terms of sustainability, it's difficult for us without the support from

funders to look at sustainable programs, because, essentially, the project we now have funding for finishes at the end of March. At the end of March, unless we have other funding, our outreach process is longer supported financially. We have to always think ahead in terms of how we can utilize that little bit of support we have in order to access other funds.

I don't feel that I can speak to the cancellation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. I'm not all that familiar with it. Most of my work has been with the Labrador Innu comprehensive healing strategy and Health Canada and sort of their core or A-base funding program. I don't feel I can speak to it or make any comment on that.

•(1040)

The Chair: Does anyone else want to answer Ms. Mathyssen's question?

Ms. Mathyssen, do you have another question?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Yes, it's for Germaine Benuen. You talked about the court system failing women and the fact that police sometimes don't respond as they should. I'm wondering, first, in terms of what it means to a family, to a woman who experiences this violence, if better police training might help to create a better relationship.

In terms of the court system, when we were in Iqaluit last spring, one of the things we heard very clearly was that putting young men in jail is not the solution to addressing violence against women and girls.

Could you comment on both those questions?

Ms. Germaine Benuen: I'll comment on the policing issue first.

I think the multicultural training would be very helpful for the police. There has been training for them. Some of them may have taken this training. Other than that, I'm not aware of any other training.

With the court system, we need funding for it. I believe that anybody who is going through the process and has gone to jail, who has been incarcerated in the jail system...they don't get any help when they go to a provincial system. They don't get any services or programs. They're not delivered there—unless they go to the federal system.

Having said that, we had a program we looked at to see if we could do it within our organization. It was supposed to be treatment-based. We had our probation officers, victims services, court interpreters, and prison liaison, yet the provincial government didn't.... That was what we needed. We needed a coordinator for it. We needed a treatment-based program for the people who were going through the court system or going to jail, but we couldn't get the funding for it, so we only have our employees in place. They have very little to do, but they do deliver the programs to the people in our community and that has had a very positive effect on them. The people who were on probation, say, went to the people in their own language, and that really helped.

But we still don't have anything in place with the treatment services, like addiction treatment. That's one of the things that we were trying to get going, but due to the funding we couldn't get that on the go.

I believe that it doesn't help the individuals who go to jail to not have the services there or to not have programs offered to them. They just sit there, do their time and get out, and do the same thing very soon after that. I think treatment would be more effective than going to jail.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That ends the session. We have run out of time.

I want to thank you all very much again for taking the time to respond to us. It's a difficult way of doing things when we can't see each other. You did very well indeed in responding. Thank you, again. We'll say goodbye now.

The meeting is adjourned.

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