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Chair

Mrs. Stella Ambler

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• (1800)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC)): Good evening, everyone, and welcome to meeting number 5 of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): I have a point of order. I was wondering, Madam Chair, if we could have a minute of silence for the women who have been missing and murdered since we last met. That would be Cheyenne Fox, Terra Gardner, and Melissa Payne, whose body was found yesterday in the Northwest Territories.

The Chair: I thank you for bringing that up, Ms. Bennett. That is a great idea.

We'll proceed to a minute of silence for the women who have gone missing this week.

[A moment of silence observed]

The Chair: Thank you.

Welcome to our guests today from Status of Women Canada. Thank you both, Mr. Goupil and Ms. Savoie, for attending our meeting. We're looking forward to your comments.

Please begin.

Ms. Linda Savoie (Director General, Women's Program and Regional Operations Directorate, Status of Women Canada): Thank you.

My name is Linda Savoie.

[Translation]

I am the Director General of the Women's Program and Regional Operations at Status of Women Canada. I am joined today by my colleague Sébastien Goupil, Director General, Policy and External Relations. It will be my pleasure to describe to you the work that Status of Women Canada does to end violence against aboriginal women.

Status of Women Canada works to promote and advance equality for women and girls through its focus in three priority areas: ending violence against women and girls; increasing women's economic security and prosperity; and encouraging increased representation of women in leadership and decision-making roles. These three priorities allow Status of Women Canada to take a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality between men and women across the country, including the needs of diverse groups of women such as aboriginal women and girls.

I would like to speak to three aspects of the work that SWC carries out to help end violence against aboriginal women and girls: first, collaboration with other government departments and levels of government, then the work of the Women's Program, and finally, our support of the Native Women's Association of Canada for the Sisters in Spirit initiative and other projects.

First, as you know, the Government of Canada's approach to the very serious issue of violence against aboriginal women and girls has been to work horizontally across departments, including Justice Canada, Public Safety Canada, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, along with other federal departments — several of whom have appeared before your committee.

That said, this shared responsibility for addressing violence against aboriginal women and girls also involves other levels of government, aboriginal people, civil society and other stakeholders.

For Status of Women Canada, a collaborative approach is a key strategy. It is the method to resolve the issues facing women and girls in Canada. That is why we work with other federal organizations and with the provinces and territories, on a regular basis.

For example, we collaborate with our colleagues to support the implementation of gender-based analysis or GBA. GBA is a practical tool to facilitate inclusion of gender and other factors in the development of policies and programs in government.

For instance, Status of Women works with the RCMP, looking at their national police training on human trafficking. Our role was to ensure that the vulnerabilities of aboriginal women and girls as well as their perspectives were highlighted in the police course.

SWC also works with partners to develop and exchange knowledge on issues impacting women and girls. For example, we recently developed a publication entitled "*Measuring violence against women: statistical trends*" with Statistics Canada and our federal, provincial and territorial partners.

This report will be used by stakeholders in many sectors to inform their work. It includes current data on the nature and extent of violence against women in Canada, with a strong focus on aboriginal women. It also addresses violence against women in Canada's territories, where we know rates of violence are high.

● (1805)

[English]

The second aspect of our work in addressing violence against aboriginal women and girls takes place through the activities of the women's program. The women's program extends the reach of the work of Status of Women Canada beyond government. It is a \$19-million-per-year grants and contributions program that works primarily with non-profit organizations across the country. It funds community-level projects that advance equality between women and men in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada.

The community-based organizations funded by the women's program bring essential ingredients to the table. They understand their communities and the population they work with, as well as which approaches or strategies will work best locally. For instance, since 2007, some \$19 million in funding has been dedicated to projects that help aboriginal women and girls build economic security, gain leadership skills, and address the issues of violence they face. These include a number of projects to help communities plan and implement approaches that address violence against aboriginal women and girls. These projects vary in their location and scope. They address issues that include working with service providers to provide culturally appropriate services to aboriginal women and girls, and supporting communities to develop action plans to address the issue of violence.

The women's program also works collaboratively with other federal departments to fund projects of mutual interest. A number of projects have been co-funded by Status of Women and other federal departments, including Justice and Aboriginal Affairs.

The third aspect of our work in addressing violence against aboriginal women and girls is in an area that this committee has expressed interest in—the Sisters In Spirit initiative. I can provide some information on our financial support to the Native Women's Association of Canada for this and other initiatives.

Specifically, between 2005 and 2010, \$5 million was provided through Status of Women Canada to the Native Women's Association to carry out the Sisters In Spirit initiative. This five-year funding relationship aimed to raise awareness of the complex origins and impacts of violence against aboriginal women, to increase understanding of the root causes of this violence, and to identify the measures that will increase the safety of aboriginal women and girls. This work culminated in the release of the report entitled “What Their Stories Tell Us”, which documented the results of the research.

Following the conclusion of this initiative in 2010, funding of over \$2.3 million has been approved through the women's program in support of the Native Women's Association's projects, Evidence to Action and Evidence to Action II. These two projects build on the knowledge developed through the Sisters In Spirit initiative by developing tools to strengthen the ability of aboriginal women and girls and their communities to break the cycle of violence.

● (1810)

[Translation]

I hope, Madam Chair, that this information has provided a useful outline of the contribution of Status of Women Canada to the

government-wide efforts to reduce and prevent violence against aboriginal women and girls.

[English]

I will gladly take your questions at this point.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Savoie.

We'll begin our questioning with Ms. Davies for seven minutes.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Chairperson, and my thanks to our two witnesses today from Status of Women Canada.

I'd like to begin by saying that many of the people we've met with informally—family members, activists in the aboriginal community, people who have for decades been involved in this issue of missing and murdered women—tell us that there have already been so many reports, so many recommendations, and that what we really need to focus on is a plan of action. We need to figure out how to move forward. We need to figure out what's going to be done to provide solutions. I'd like to begin with that.

In April of this year, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a draft report of what's called the Universal Periodic Review. In that report, a number of countries called on Canada to develop a national action plan to address the question of violence against indigenous women.

If you go back to 2009, which was the report before this one, you find similar recommendations. In fact, there are recommendations calling on Canada to systematically investigate and collect data on violence against women and to disseminate information. Recommendation 38 talks about a national strategy, comprehensive reporting, and statistical analysis to address root causes of violence, particularly against aboriginal women.

So where is the national action plan? Is there one? If it lies within your department, within Status of Women Canada, who is the lead?

You talked about collaboration, and we certainly heard that at our last meeting, where we had Public Safety, the justice department, and Status of Women Canada as well. We heard a lot about this term “collaboration”. But surely somebody has to be in the lead. Who takes that lead? Where is the national action plan? Is it something we can get hold of to see what these recommendations actually are? Is there a plan for implementing all of the work, all of the studies, all of the recommendations that have been done?

Ms. Linda Savoie: A national action plan would not be within our purview. Political decisions would have to be taken on whether there should be a national action plan and where it should go. I'm not sure I can offer much more on this issue.

Ms. Libby Davies: At the last meeting we heard there was a secretariat—I think that was the word used. We had a number of questions on the work of that secretariat, and it was difficult to determine exactly what work was being undertaken.

I would think that Status of Women Canada would be keenly involved, even if it was not the lead department. Has there been discussion about the need for a national action plan, following up on the work from the UN's Universal Periodic Review?

This is not something that's just jumping out at us now in April. This is something that's been around for years. I think it's time we got on and did it. I think anything you can tell us about the work you engage in or who's looking at this issue as part of your collaboration would be helpful. That's what we're here to try to find out.

• (1815)

Ms. Linda Savoie: I'm sorry. I misunderstood your question.

We could certainly tell you about our involvement in the family violence initiative, which is what I believe you are referring to. This has been mentioned as the secretariat that is trying to coordinate this issue. We could speak to that point specifically.

Ms. Libby Davies: In that case, I want to know if that's a national action plan. These are the recommendations from the universal review. Has anybody talked about a national action plan? Is that part of the secretariat's work?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil (Director General, Policy and External Relations, Status of Women Canada): The family violence initiative brings together 15 federal partners to discuss how we can jointly advance issues of common interest. I think you've heard that through other witnesses. The family violence initiative's lead department is the Public Health Agency of Canada. We're an active contributor in that forum.

With respect to our role in particular—and you were referring to recommendation 38 of the UPR—we've been playing a very strong role over the past year in helping collect sex-disaggregated data. You may have heard or seen that we launched the publication *Women in Canada*, for which we get support from 18 departments. It's a very comprehensive compendium of sex-disaggregated data, and we have a chapter specifically to address the issue of aboriginal women. We also more recently completed—through Statistics Canada, some of our federal partners, and the provinces and territories—the update of the publication called *Measuring violence against women: statistical trends*. The goal of this contribution, if I can speak this way, is really to help inform the work that is taking place in government.

One of the key roles we have as a department is to ensure the government-wide implementation of gender-based analysis, which allows us in a range of fields across our mandate to look specifically at how we can better integrate gender and diversity considerations. We put a lot of focus, in advancing this work, on the specific issues affecting aboriginal women. This is what I would single out as one of the most important contributions from Status of Women Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we have Ms. Truppe for seven minutes.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you both for being here.

I know Status of Women Canada does great work in funding projects to end violence against women and girls. You mentioned the \$9 million that went to projects that targeted aboriginal women, I

believe. I think it was since 2011. Can you give me some examples of what some of these projects were, under the \$9 million in spending? What were the projects for, and how did they help aboriginal girls?

Ms. Linda Savoie: We tend to approach projects in a thematic manner. For instance, we launched a call for proposals for projects specifically addressing the issues in rural and remote communities. As a result of that, we funded a dozen projects within aboriginal communities that are focusing on getting the communities to identify their specific challenges and needs, to bring the stakeholders to the table who need to be part of the solution, to develop an action plan to address either violence or economic challenges of women and girls, and to implement a part of that plan and pilot it. We are giving them opportunities to share what has been learned as a result. That's an example of the types of projects we've been doing.

We have also funded some projects specifically for girls, where aboriginal girls are given leadership training and mentorship opportunities to become more engaged in their communities. Considering the demographics in the aboriginal communities, engaging young girls has become quite a focus for us because they need to be able to identify the barriers to their advancement, or their vulnerabilities in terms of violence.

So those are the types of projects we've been funding, many of them, in the last two years. Over the last six years, it's been an investment of \$19 million.

I hope that's helpful.

• (1820)

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

In 2012, Status of Women had a call for proposals called “Working Together: Engaging Communities to End Violence Against Women and Girls”. Given the levels of violence faced by aboriginal women, how did we reach the aboriginal communities to let them know about these proposals?

Ms. Linda Savoie: We work closely with our partners in the federal government, the provincial governments, and the communities to try to make people aware of the funding opportunities that are available. We take advantage particularly of the networks at Aboriginal Affairs to point out where we should be marketing our funding opportunities. We work closely with a number of regional associations that are connected to the aboriginal communities. In that way, we try to provide information as to what funding is available.

Clearly, we are one of many funders, and it's a challenge for communities to sort their way through that.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

You mentioned just a few minutes ago the young age of some of the aboriginal population. I was hoping you could discuss the relevance of the age of an individual and their likelihood of experiencing violence.

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: If we look at the most recent statistics, for example, if I refer back to *Measuring violence against women*, there is a clear indication that younger segments of the Canadian population are much more vulnerable to violence. There are limitations with some of the instruments. Right now we don't have information per se for people below I think the age of 15; you can get more detail on that from Statistics Canada.

But exposure to violence, and in particular sexual violence, is very high for the youngest segment of the population. We know from data as well that the aboriginal population is more vulnerable than any other segment in the general population, and that this rate is high in the territories and some of the western provinces.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

With the Stats Canada information you were just talking about, 16 was the youngest age. Is that correct? Is it 15 or 16?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: It's 15.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: It was all we had information on. Okay.

Some of the projects that Status of Women funded relating to aboriginal women in the past focused on developing partnerships with communities, organizations, those involved in service delivery, and the police.

Could you just describe the benefits that are gained through the strategy of partnerships?

Ms. Linda Savoie: Absolutely. The women's program is very focused on working with and supporting collaborations and partnerships. For us, it's a key ingredient of sustainability. It allows communities to take into consideration their own circumstances, identify the recipes that will work for them, and identify and take advantage of the assets they have available to them. For the most part, projects under the women's program are required to have partnerships or bring collaborations to the table to create an action plan that the community can then own and continue to work on once we are no longer there as a funder.

The specific aspects in terms of benefits very much relate to sustainability. We have learned that when it comes to aboriginal communities, it's particularly important, because the communities need to be able to tackle their issues in a culturally appropriate manner. They are the best judges of what will work. So yes, we're very much into collaborations and partnerships.

On another level, in terms of partnerships outside the specific project, when we have projects submitted to us or when we're approached by a community for a project, we usually involve partners such as Aboriginal Affairs, the Department of Justice, Public Safety—those who have maybe more intimate knowledge of that specific community or could be bringing an ingredient to the table in addition to what we're looking at funding.

• (1825)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Savoie.

Thank you, Ms. Truppe.

Now for seven minutes we'll go to Madam Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thanks very much.

I'll just follow up on my colleague's comment around the call of the UN Human Rights Council for Canada to develop a national action plan to address violence against indigenous women. If there were to be a plan, who would be the lead minister?

Ms. Linda Savoie: I would assume at this point Aboriginal Affairs. We would support them and collaborate with them to offer any expertise we could in terms of the gender lens, the gender components. We do bring to the table expertise on the specific issues and the way to analyze issues as they relate to women and girls. That's left to be determined at the time that such a plan becomes government policy.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Other than the Gs and Cs that you approve in those areas, what cabinet involvement has there been in actually addressing this issue?

Ms. Linda Savoie: I could not speak to cabinet involvement, but

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But in terms of a memorandum to cabinet, or going to a cabinet committee, how do you actually get stuff done on this file?

Ms. Linda Savoie: Are you looking for information in terms of process?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Well, addressing the problem.

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: These issues are extremely complex. I would say that every time there is business brought forward—and one of the latest illustrations is the national action plan to combat human trafficking. You know, considerations around vulnerabilities of aboriginal women and girls were taken into account in coming up with the strategy. I would say, without getting into cabinet confidence, this is certainly something we can speak about, because when we sit around those tables and we're talking about collaboration and collaborating with partners...if Justice Canada is given the lead to advance a file on a specific issue, Status of Women will be at the table, and we will raise some of the points and emphasize the need to focus on prevention and look at the vulnerabilities of certain segments of the Canadian population. That is integral to the work we do in terms of advancing gender-based analysis in the work of government.

But I think it's important as well, when we look at the broader business of government...when we're talking about addressing root causes, this is also true in other aspects. We're pushing our colleagues across mandates—for example, those involved on economic files—to also take into account those vulnerabilities so that they can come up with the range of strategies that are necessary to address this issue.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: So in the national action plan to combat human trafficking, there are a lot of people who would see that it would be part of a national action plan on violence against women. Trafficking is something that comes up often when we talk to families or talk to the people involved in this. We're hearing about women fleeing abusive foster care. We're hearing about sexism and racism in policing. We're hearing about a number of things, but without a national action plan that involves all of the departments, you end up not being able to do what by when and how.

Now it sounds like the government has a plan on trafficking. Obviously we need to develop a work plan, because a national action plan, I would say, would be one of the recommendations that would come out of this committee.

Tell me, what do you know about the national action plan on violence against women in Australia?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: I know that it is a very comprehensive action plan. My understanding, from conversations I've had with Australian officials, is that it's a plan over 16 years. They are looking at a range of priorities that have to be addressed, and it has been developed in partnership with the communities.

• (1830)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In complexity theory, we say aim high in driving local wisdom, local knowledge to get it done. Things that cross all government departments and all jurisdictions seem to be the most difficult for governments to get a handle on, unless there's somebody really in charge who's driving it. I guess it's surprising to me that the Public Health Agency of Canada leads the family violence issue.

Is Minister Aglukkaq the lead minister on this?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: Yes, Minister Aglukkaq is the lead on the family violence initiative.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But the family violence initiative doesn't actually deal with trafficking, policing, or fleeing foster care. Right? So there's not an overriding plan.

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: Policing is not in the purview of the Public Health Agency of Canada. I think you've heard from witnesses from Public Safety. This is under their purview. They are the ones overseeing the development of policy on the policing front.

With respect to foster care, my understanding is that this is an area Aboriginal Affairs is responsible for.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You say 15 departments are all talking to one another. Are you aware if Minister Aglukkaq has ever had a meeting of all the ministers responsible for this?

Ms. Linda Savoie: We have no knowledge of this, but departmental officials have regular meetings around the family violence initiative.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: My experience has been that the officials can talk a lot, but if the ministers don't get engaged, not too much happens.

Could you help us? We've got to develop a work plan now. Could you submit to us what other witnesses...or who you would suggest we—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Bennett, you're out of time

For the next seven-minute round, we're going to go to Ms. McLeod.

You've got one more seven-minute round. Lucky you, you've got two more minutes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you. Every committee is a little different in their timeframe.

I want to reflect on a few of the comments that have been made here. You talked about statistical trends, and you worked with Stats Canada. My sense from Stats Canada is that we don't have comprehensive, valuable information, and when I asked them about trends, they didn't have any information on trends. We heard the last time about a myriad of government programs. We have heard that again tonight.

What are the trends? Is anyone doing anything that is making a difference on this issue?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: Are you looking at trends from a statistical perspective?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Absolutely. We know we have a horrific issue in murdered or missing aboriginal women in terms of violence. We've been trying to tackle it in a variety of ways, including the very fine work of the Native Women's Association, but what's happening out there?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: I saw some of the blues of this committee hearing. If you're looking at trends specific to missing and murdered aboriginal women, it's going to be difficult to identify the right number. You've heard that from witnesses. In this case, I would have to defer to NWAC and the RCMP and Statistics Canada as the best source of information.

Our publications are available online on our website. For example, in *Women in Canada* we have a chapter that is specific to violence against women. I think some of the trends are well documented in their most recent publication that we worked on with Statistics Canada. I think it is important to mention that this was a joint project with our federal-provincial-territorial forum. We were looking at trends in violence.

I have some data. I'm not the expert, and unfortunately I don't have my data expert with me, but we know for sure that there are some trends. Over the past three years, the number of homicides in Canada overall has declined. But if you look at the vulnerability of the aboriginal population, according to the 2011 homicide survey, between 2001 and 2011, at least 8% of all murdered women aged 15 years and older were aboriginal. That's double the representation in the Canadian population, which is about 4%. Aboriginal women accounted for at least 11% of dating homicide victims and at least 10% of non-intimate partner homicide victims.

• (1835)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Sorry to interrupt, but what year does that represent?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: It represents between 2001 and 2011, which is the most recent data we have, according to the homicide survey.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Do you have anything from 1990 to 2001? Could you maybe table it with the clerk? It's probably not the best use of my time to get into a big statistical conversation, but again, if we look at allocation of resources and what's happening, I think it's important to understand the trends, to the degree that we can.

My next question—

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: Can I respond to that, just very briefly?

We have, in *Measuring violence against women*, three data points, because the publication has been published three times. As well, *Women in Canada* has been published for over 20 years. So we have lots of long trends that we can look at from those publications.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I'm sure our analysts have probably spent some time on that.

Next, if I'm going to look at the comprehensiveness of your program and department, maybe you can help me as it relates to the issue that we are looking at. I know you have broader issues that you're looking at.

Status of Women Canada supported Sisters In Spirit in terms of the research project. Then they supported research in Evidence to Action, and then there's been a variety of grant-specific programs.

Is that reflecting the comprehensiveness of what your department is doing in terms of this issue?

Ms. Linda Savoie: That would reflect what the women's program is doing in terms of financial investment in communities and on such specific projects as Sisters In Spirit and Evidence to Action.

However, there is a whole other dimension to our work, which is to influence other government programs and policies that have other funds to invest on this issue. That's through our gender-based analysis responsibility.

We do use a number of other levers that are probably much more powerful than the actual funds we're investing. They are there to influence the way in which the entire federal family addresses their issue in terms of considering the issues of girls and women in their diversity, and therefore including aboriginal women and girls.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I see in here this \$9 million in 2011 project funding. Two are organizations that I know fairly well. One is in Kamloops, our White Buffalo...and there's the economic security and prosperity. I worked as a nurse in Mount Currie—that's many years ago now—and I see some programs there.

I see this myriad again of grant initiatives. Can you tell me how they—

The Chair: Could I have a very quick wrap-up to your question, please? Then I will need a very, very quick answer.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Okay.

Are any of the projects complete, and have they been evaluated?

Ms. Linda Savoie: Most of our projects are multi-year, so the majority of the projects you would have on your list are not complete. Once they are complete, whether it's two years or three years, we do some evaluations. Each project has a close-out assessment.

• (1840)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Saganash, for five minutes.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Is it five minutes or seven? It's five. Okay.

[Translation]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to come back to what my colleague was saying earlier.

The 2013-2014 Status of Women Canada Report on Plans and Priorities states that: "In its policy function, SWC plays the role of a knowledge broker and facilitator, offering advice and support, conducting policy analyses, providing input and making strategic interventions at both domestic and international levels". This is important.

My colleague referred to the recommendations of the second Universal Periodic Review Canada was the subject of quite recently, which again raised the issue of a national plan to fight violence against aboriginal women. Indeed, this had already been raised in 2009. I think that at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, this matter had already been broached and recommendations had been made.

I think it is important to recognize the international contribution to this topic. The importance of this topic is acknowledged all over the world. This issue has also been discussed for a long time in our country.

I know that you referred to horizontal cooperation earlier, that is to say the cooperation that must exist among the various departments. I am going to repeat the question that was asked earlier. I would like to know who takes the lead during these discussions and collaborations. I am not trying to pin the blame on any department, but I would like to understand why this file is not moving forward, despite its importance and despite the fact that the issue remains just as urgent as ever, even as we speak.

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: As for who leads discussions and collaborative efforts within the federal government, I would answer that the responsibility is really shared, in light of the diversity of mandates. For instance, we asked the Department of Justice to take the initiative in developing a strategy for the \$25-million investment over 5 years concerning the women who have been murdered or have disappeared. For its part, the Public Health Agency of Canada coordinates the government's efforts to eliminate family violence. Of course, one aspect of that violence is that it involves women and children.

As you mentioned, and I think it is important, Status of Women Canada plays an important role as a knowledge broker. For our part, we have taken the initiative in that it is through our efforts that the necessary contributions were brought together to allow the various federal departments, through our publications, to better understand the reality of women in general, but also the reality aboriginal women face.

The following example concerns a very timely, emerging topic, not only throughout Canada, but internationally as well. Increasingly, the involvement of men and boys is being discussed. When it is promoted, it is considered to be a fundamental aspect, especially in aboriginal communities. We favour a holistic approach to preventing violence. At Status of Women Canada, we took the initiative to enable our colleagues to better understand the issues. In the context of the White Ribbon Campaign, we prepared a background document which described the problem, explained it, and allowed the departments to determine where they could intervene.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: With your permission, I am going to rephrase my question more clearly.

Given your role and your mandate as a government organization, can you tell us whether, yes or no, a national action plan is currently being prepared on this very serious issue?

•(1845)

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: Not to our knowledge.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We go over to Mr. Goguen for five minutes.

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

I thank the witnesses for being with us.

I have a brief question: is it necessary for a project to be described as a national plan in order to have 15 partners work together to try to end the problem?

Ms. Linda Savoie: The short answer is no. There are indeed a whole host of investments at this time. Although no strategy has been described as a national plan as such, there are certainly efforts being made by all of the departments who have a responsibility in this regard. They share information to try to make everything that is being done in the area complementary.

Mr. Robert Goguen: Unless I am mistaken, since 2011, \$9 million has been allocated to the issue of violence against aboriginal women. This has been described as a horizontal cooperation among 15 departments, including Health Canada, which is the lead department. Obviously, we are talking here about an enormous cooperative effort.

Do any projects which work particularly well come to mind? If that is the case, to what do you attribute their success?

Ms. Linda Savoie: There have been some excellent collaborations, among the communities as well as among federal departments. Our cooperative efforts work particularly well when the issue has been brought to the fore by the community. In Quebec, for instance, there was a case where there were no services, or very few, available for child sexual assault victims in aboriginal communities, to allow them to receive support in their healing process. Sometimes, the legal system was involved. However, in cooperation with the justice department and certain local stakeholders, at the request of local aboriginal communities of course, we are now funding a project to train people in aboriginal communities so that they can provide this support. That is one example.

The fact that the needs were first of all identified by the community is one of the most important factors in the success of such projects. The communities are in the best position to tell us what the relevant needs are, at this point in their process.

Mr. Robert Goguen: In short, the 15 departments are continuing to cooperate to work on the elimination of this problem. They do not work separately, in isolation.

Are there any measures aimed at improving cooperation that you can tell us about?

Ms. Linda Savoie: I would say that at this time, it is probably difficult for the communities to know where to turn. It is very important that within the federal family, the agencies and departments provide clear information concerning what is going on and who can do what. Even if we are making great strides, there is certainly room for improvement in coordination and complementarity.

Moreover, our commitments to the communities must take into account their location, and their need to partner with us for a number of years, in certain cases. These are important factors in success. A program such as ours, which involves supportive care and attention that can last up to three years, contributes to the creation of more sustainable situations in the community. This certainly lays the groundwork for potential solutions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goguen.

We will go to Ms. Freeman for five minutes.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Thank you, Madam.

I'd like to start by asking about the women's program and the actual percentage of overall funding from Status of Women Canada in the women's program that goes to address violence against aboriginal women and girls. How is it decided where this money goes?

Ms. Linda Savoie: Our mandate is broad, as you know, and we have to address the issues that surface under all three of our pillars. Each year we establish calls for proposals, and that's where the bulk of the money tends to be spent. Of last year's calls, we invested the vast majority of our funds in projects that either addressed violence or in projects that were specifically targeting girls.

•(1850)

Ms. Mylène Freeman: With respect to “Working Together: Engaging Communities to End Violence Against Women and Girls”, could you tell us what percentage was attributed to ending violence for aboriginal women and girls, whether on or off reserve?

Ms. Linda Savoie: That's the call that was closed in the fall, and under that call we had 3 of the 27 successful projects for aboriginal communities. In the same year, our girls call had 8 of the 35 projects that targeted aboriginal communities, so, yes, I do have statistics. The rural call, for instance, the results of which were announced a year ago, had 12 of the 55 projects that were with aboriginal communities.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Would it be possible to get that information to the clerk so that all members of the committee can have it?

Ms. Linda Savoie: Certainly.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: I am less familiar with Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, but I'm of the understanding that there's no gender unit in AAND. Does Status of Women play a role in ensuring that there is culturally appropriate funding that comes out of either the women's program or works with AAND to ensure that there is a gender analysis on their funding?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: With respect to a gender unit at Aboriginal Affairs, we've been working over the past three years with 25 departments and Aboriginal Affairs was one of them. They built their internal capacity to be able to apply gender-based analysis, and currently this function is co-located in the cabinet affairs section. It is not a gender unit per se, but they have this internal capacity within the department.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Okay. Still speaking about sensitizing, what role has Status of Women Canada generally—the agency—played in sensitizing the RCMP, police, and different levels of government in terms of policing, and not just in law enforcement but also on the judicial side in addressing violence against aboriginal women and providing resources, etc.? What kind of role has Status of Women Canada played in that?

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: We play very different roles. I'd like to mention that some of the departments you've mentioned, such as Justice and Public Safety, this year are part of our... We have targeted those departments for the implementation of gender-based analysis.

This year, quite interestingly, we've been focusing a lot on public safety and law enforcement departments, so we're working with Correctional Service of Canada, Public Safety Canada, and the Canada Border Services Agency. We're trying to create clusters to foster collaboration so that we can enhance discussions and help those organizations who share similar mandates to implement gender-based analysis.

As well, we've been supporting police services in different ways. Linda mentioned, for instance, the work that we supported many years ago on human trafficking—

Ms. Mylène Freeman: I'll interrupt, just because I want to get more things in and I'll leave—

The Chair: You have 12 seconds, I'm sorry.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Do I? Okay.

A report by the status of women committee published in December 2011 talked about things like gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate training for police, as well as an array of other things. What has been done by Status of Women in response to that report?

The Chair: I'm sorry, if you'd like to answer it, you can take time later if it's similar to another question, but we're going to move over to Ms. Block for five minutes.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to join my colleagues in welcoming our witnesses here this evening.

I find it hard to believe that it was almost three years ago that I joined the status of women committee on a tour to a number of communities to talk about violence against aboriginal women. I recognized or learned at that time that often women have to leave the reserve when they need to access shelters and services, and more often than not they find themselves in rural and remote communities or smaller urban centres.

I know earlier you mentioned a recent call for a proposal targeting violence prevention for women in rural and remote communities and

small urban centres. I was wondering how that need was identified to your department.

● (1855)

Ms. Linda Savoie: The needs identification was the result of a multi-pronged environmental scan. We got the inspiration from various statistical trends that were showing that women in rural and remote environments were at much greater risk of violence, for instance, and had fewer economic opportunities. We were also hearing from communities that they had some issues that were different from their counterparts in urban centres.

We had various sources that were confirming to us this need, and we tried to tailor-make an approach that would allow these communities that share certain challenges and have common issues to participate in this call for proposals and hopefully create a community of interest among these stakeholders that now are currently receiving funding from us.

Our objective is to not only support them through these three-year projects, but also to create opportunities for them to learn from one another. We do this primarily through conference calls, joining them together. We're also considering things such as bringing experts to possibly do a webcast of some sort to address what has been learned and has already emerged from some of the research that's been done with respect to rural and remote communities.

That's where we're at. The projects are under way, and once they've been closed, we hope to do a very thorough evaluation to inform our next steps.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Having lived in rural Saskatchewan for a number of years, I recognize that issues facing a small community are often compounded by its remoteness. You've mentioned looking at various communities that are experiencing similar issues. I'm wondering if you could tell us how this call for proposals is being received and how you are encouraging the various communities to work together.

Ms. Linda Savoie: The response we had to this call for proposals demonstrated that there clearly was a need within the communities. There was a lot of interest; the response rate was high. I could provide some specific statistics to the committee clerk if you're interested.

What was interesting was that early on we were dealing with stakeholders who had already identified some common challenges, such as isolation and lack of transportation. There are a number of common issues that these communities are struggling with, and by providing them with a forum where they can share their challenges, share the recipes they are testing to try to address these challenges, we're hoping this builds into something that is sustainable.

What we did as part of this call for proposals is we required that community action plans be developed and be implemented/tested. Those community action plans create distinct recipes that may work in different environments. We'll know after they've been tested.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We now have two minutes left, and we'll go to Ms. Hughes. You may want to ask the witness to finish off your colleague's question.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Yes, I would like that, if you remember the question.

Basically, it's this. What actions have been taken as a result of the report by the status of women committee? Also what role has Status of Women played in addressing the systemic violence created through prison and child welfare institutions, and advancing more sensitive policies to address ongoing inequities created through current government policies?

• (1900)

Mr. Sébastien Goupil: With respect to your second question, I would say that through the promotion of gender-based analysis and its wide use by government departments, we're helping our federal partners ensure that they take gender and diversity into account whenever they develop policies and programs.

An important aspect of the work we're promoting, through gender-based analysis, is looking at the specific realities and vulnerabilities of different segments of the Canadian population, in particular the aboriginal population. As I mentioned, we've been working with dozens of federal departments. Just over the past three years, we've supported 25 of them in sustainably implementing gender-based analysis within their own practice. The overall aim of this approach is to ensure that gender can be taken into decision-making processes of government.

Ms. Linda Savoie: In terms of the FEWO report you were mentioning, when it comes to reports from the standing committee, we go through the recommendations in detail and engage the different.... As you know, just because it's the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, all the levers are not necessarily with Status of Women. However, we do pursue each recommendation with the departments that have the lead, to make sure they are aware of the recommendation that was made and are looking at their internal mechanisms to address it.

I can't be more specific with that answer. If I had a copy of each recommendation, I could tell you what we did. We do that with every report, and then go through each recommendation.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Could you look at the recommendations and send back the action that was done?

The Chair: Certainly, if you wouldn't mind doing that, Ms. Savoie. Thank you.

Thank you for being here this evening, Mr. Goupil and Ms. Savoie. We very much appreciate your time and your testimony.

The meeting is adjourned.

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