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Thursday, May 30, 2013

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Chair

Mrs. Stella Ambler

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• (1810)

[English]

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

I'd like to begin by thanking our witness, the Native Women's Association of Canada, for being here today. This committee recognizes the important role you play in identifying these horrific issues that this committee has been created to study. For this reason we believe your organization should play an important role in the work of this committee.

I'm happy to inform you that the committee has adopted a report that outlines the role your organization will play in this study. The committee would like NWAC to be an expert witness for this committee to rely on for guidance in the study we are undertaking.

More specifically, we're proposing that your organization be invited to appear at the beginning of each of the themes the committee previously agreed would frame our study, these being violence and its causes, front-line assistance, and preventing violence against aboriginal women.

We believe this will ensure your organization has multiple opportunities to appear as a witness before the committee, and to provide your expert views on the areas you think this committee should consider as we begin each theme, each section of the study. Of course, you're always welcome to attend all of the public meetings, if you so choose.

It is our hope that as an expert witness your expertise will help guide the committee as we undertake our study on behalf of the victims of these horrific cases.

Today we welcome you again. Please take as much time as you would like for your opening remarks. Normally it's 10 minutes. I'm sure you won't get any argument from anyone here if you want to take much longer than that. Please give us all the advice and information you would like us to have at this point, because we feel that's a very good place for us to begin.

When the three of you are finished your remarks, we will have our regular round of questions for you.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Audette.

[Translation]

Ms. Michèle Audette (President, Native Women's Association of Canada): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[The witness spoke in the Innu language.]

If I may, I would first like to pay tribute to the Anishinabe Nation for welcoming us on their land. As I say every time, many moccasins have trod on Parliament Hill, on this beautiful land, to remind Canadians that we, the aboriginal peoples, are and will always be proud of who we are.

It would also be important to pay tribute to all those people we work for on a daily basis: families who have lost a mother, a sister, a cousin, a child or a granddaughter. In the past two months, in my nation alone, three young Innu women have been murdered or held against their will for several weeks. I would like to pay tribute to them. If you would like to pay tribute to them, we could observe a minute of silence for all missing or murdered women, a phenomenon that has been happening here for too long.

[A moment of silence observed]

Thank you very much.

[The witness spoke in the Innu language.]

This is our first meeting, and I hope it isn't our last. I would also like to share a bit of our perspective with you and tell you what we, at the Native Women's Association of Canada, feel about this reality that I call a national tragedy, a tragedy that affects everyone. In fact, we all are close to someone who has lost a child or dear loved one.

I must also say thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to speak with this committee. This is how I see the role of the Native Women's Association of Canada with you, dear MPs, who represent the various regions of Canada. It is an opportunity to exchange and have debate, but healthy debate. That doesn't mean we are always going to agree on the same ideas or understand everything we are going to discuss. That isn't how it works in a family, either. However, I hope we can do this respectfully, because we are talking about human lives and dignity here. People really have a lot of hope in the committee's role, but also in the role of the Native Women's Association of Canada. I think that, if we work together, we can surely bring about great change.

The Native Women's Association of Canada was founded in 1974. Allow me to provide a brief summary of who we are and where we're from. Our association has been advocating for several decades for individual rights, collective rights, the environment and human rights. We condemn discrimination, racism and sexism, but always in a constructive way, to enable our societies to live in safety, in dignity, obviously, and far from violence.

Our role here today, in fact the role we are going to try to build together with all of you here, is to better understand how the Native Women's Association of Canada will be able to fuel the debate and contribute to the committee's work through expertise, passion, love and knowledge of women across Canada and the member organizations. This represents a lot of people.

There are various issues that we are concerned or unsure about. Perhaps we also have solutions, quite simply, who knows? I would also like to say that we are currently in discussions with elected officials and colleagues within our organization. We do not see ourselves as witnesses, as we are known as here, but rather as partners or people who can help move these causes forward. I don't think we have the same status as everyone who comes and appears as a witness. I think it will be important to clarify that and agree on it formally.

In April, we sent a letter to the chair to find out how we could discuss the role of the Native Women's Association of Canada, the understanding of the process and how we could be involved in this exercise.

● (1815)

We also sent an email this week, I believe, explaining how our organization would work in good faith and goodwill in the coming months and over the next year.

Madam Chair, I was pleased that your introduction helped us understand the nature of our role a little better. However, I think it will be important to establish a much more official dialogue between the chair and me, or between the chair and our organizations. I think that we are going to find good solutions.

We are not here today to set aside the national public inquiry to document the situation of missing and murdered women. That remains a priority for us. We say this to all tribunals, be they local, regional or national. We recently said before the United Nations in Geneva and New York, and I will say it again next week in Norway: we want a national public inquiry.

As we have seen recently, a lot of people are calling for inquiries when money is misspent or when things happen in elections. We demand inquiries. It is normal. In this case, we are talking about a large number of missing women who have never obtained justice. Perhaps the problem is systematic. A national public inquiry would therefore shed some light on the issue and bring about solutions.

We are holding fast in our position. We want and demand a national inquiry. We also support the committee in its work, and hope that the NWAC's role will be clarified in the coming days.

It is clear to us that this is not just an aboriginal issue.

● (1820)

[English]

This is not an aboriginal issue. For us as mothers, grandmothers, and women—and I hope our brothers will come along with this—this is a Canadian issue and also a human rights issue.

I say that from my heart. I'm a passionate person, and I know that our office and the board of directors have the same goal in this exercise. We want to work in partnership and, of course, collaborate with this committee and the aboriginal affairs working group because we know for sure that since 1974, we have been developing that expertise on family violence, elders, and sexual abuse. There are many things we do, including research and training, databases, etc. We were a witness on several committees. We went all over the world learning and exchanging with respect to this expertise. We do need to work together, and I believe we'll find a good way.

Over the years, other organizations have noticed that we have that expertise. The Assembly of First Nations is mostly led by men. I know that more and more of our men are part of the strategy and solution with respect to ending that violence in our communities. I'm glad to say that AFN is also a partner with NWAC on this issue. We had a huge forum in Edmonton. There were probably 450 men and women from across Canada, chiefs and grassroots.... We had a strong three-day discussion with recommendations on ending violence against women.

We also work with first nations governments, not only with AFN but also with communities and with 11 provinces and territories on this issue. Each time we had an aboriginal affairs committee working group where the ministers responsible for aboriginal affairs and some premiers were there. I had the opportunity to have two meetings with them in December, and not long ago. We were so honoured to witness what I call a historical moment. For many years they didn't want to have a national public inquiry. For many years they were saying that a national task force would cost too much money, and other things like that.

After two meetings, NWAC was able to present something to them to say that the issue belongs to all of us. It's not only an NWAC issue.

I was so pleased to hear that they agreed to send a letter to Minister Valcourt and Prime Minister Harper saying that this committee and 11 provinces and territories support NWAC and AFN in wanting a national public inquiry.

We have the international aspect, and we have the other provinces and territories across Canada. They all think there is a need to go further. That's great. I was proud to be part of that historic moment. Let's hope we'll have some more.

Every day we work with families. I call them families—the Stolen Sisters and Sisters in Spirit. We work with them in order to prevent violence, to make sure we are there to support and to listen. We may gather with them once or twice a year just to make sure they're not forgotten. Those moments are so important to them, to know they're not isolated. Their stories are the same, whether they're from Yukon or from P.E.I., and it is important that we work with them.

For me, working with the people...and you all do. You were elected and you're accountable to the people in your respective regions. This is why we are in politics. This is why we decide one day to stand up and run for a position, to do something for people. For most of us, it's not for the salary; it's for our love for the people. We listen to them. They're the ones who give us the fuel, the things to say or do. Maybe they can't afford to do this themselves, or maybe they're not comfortable doing it. For us, those gatherings are really important.

Madam Chair, I hope you and your colleagues will take half a day or a couple of hours to listen to families. I'm from the Innu nation, and it's so Innu to listen to the person. It's probably your first experience in a different culture. Let's try that for an afternoon or a night. Let's gather a few families together and listen to what they have to say. While I don't promise anything, I believe that doing this might change some thoughts in your mind, and it might make you feel differently. They gave me the flame, in French *la flamme* after listening to many families. I work for the families and the women in the things I do every day. They are so close to my heart. It would be great if you had a special event or something with the families.

Of course, in order to address this issue we have to make sure that we correctly identify.... We all know, I hope, the root cause. There are many reports, databases, and Statistics Canada data, etc. It is obvious that housing is a problem, as is the legacy of the residential schools. Even if we didn't go to the residential schools, our generation, I'm sad to say, is still affected by what happened there. I won't tell you my personal story, but it's everybody's story across Canada for first nations, Métis, and Inuit women in our generation who are still affected by that era.

We also have to take other issues into consideration. Housing, homelessness, addiction, racism, sexism, child sexual abuse, mental health, which is a big issue, negative government policies, historical victimization, gender factors, trafficking are all big issues in our community.

● (1825)

Trafficking is a big issue. We don't talk a lot about it, but it is there, and it's sad that aboriginal and indigenous women are affected by it.

It is past time that those individuals, processes, and policies responsible for maintaining the status quo and the subsequent harms to aboriginal women and girls be remedied.

It is also important that we see....

I'll switch to *français* for my own sake, and I'll come back *en anglais* to be polite to the rest who don't speak French.

● (1830)

[*Translation*]

It will also be good for me to speak in French for a bit.

It is important that you know that you have an extremely important role to play in the work to be done. We have seen a number of committees. I have been involved in aboriginal politics for 20 years now. That's 20 years of giving my heart to aboriginal women and, believe me, I'm giving it. In 20 years, we have seen it, committees, briefs, reports and so on. I would like you, Ms. Ambler and all the members of the committee, to ensure that this time, things are different and that the committee's recommendations are different. We are not just going to choose recommendations that are the least costly or the recommendations that are short term, or simply choose them based on a political capital. I'm asking you to find solutions here that all Canadians can benefit from in the short, medium and long term. It's a good exercise.

There have been various fora at several levels, federal, regional and community, in which national aboriginal organizations and aboriginal women's groups, including the Native Women's Association of Canada and its member organizations, have tried to make their recommendations heard.

Also, as you surely know, there were two editions of the national aboriginal women's summit that resulted in some very interesting recommendations that might be part of this exercise.

There was also the Assembly of First Nations national justice forum, where a significant portion of the second day was spent on missing or murdered women. Recommendations were made there, as well.

As I said, we recently had a summit with the Assembly of First Nations, and we are still working on the recommendations.

Keep in mind that British Columbia co-hosted an event with the Native Women's Association of Canada. It was a good exercise that, once again, gave rise to interesting avenues on the issue that this committee is studying.

I repeat that it is important not to simply take these recommendations lightly, but to invest in people. We are talking about women and families who deserve justice and answers.

We have presented this situation in many regions in Canada and in many countries. Quite recently, Canada had to submit an accountability report as part of the Universal Periodic Review to the United Nations in Geneva. I'll tell you that our organization worked really very well with the member countries that Canada was to respond to. We also felt the solidarity from the international community, which was concerned about what was happening here, in Canada. So it's everywhere. Although we are no longer active internationally for the moment—I'd be surprised if it stayed that way since nothing can stop me—the message was put out there, internationally.

Quite recently, we submitted a request to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Ms. Ameline is the chair of the committee. I met with her last week in New York, and I highlighted how important it is for the special rapporteur to work with us if she or he came to Canada. It's important. You also have the opportunity to show, internationally, that you really want to eliminate those statistics to make way for prevention and the safety of aboriginal women across Canada.

We had the opportunity to meet three times with members of the Organization of American States as part of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Quite recently, still as part of the Organization of American States, we reiterated our support. Lastly, Canada—thank you very much—agreed to bring the three special rapporteurs here. To date, on the international and inter-American levels, meetings have been held with the attendance of the special rapporteur, James Anaya, an official from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States and Ms. Ameline of the CEDAW.

All these people are aware of the situation. Every time, I invite them to come and see the situation, while telling them that I am convinced that we can change things together if we take a constructive approach. It's always a hope. However, if things don't budge, there might be recourse at the international court, but I don't think we need to go that far. At least, I hope not.

In Canada and the United States, there is a situation that some may feel is emerging, but that we know has existed for far too long, and that is the trafficking of women. And then comes prostitution. It is clear that prostitution and trafficking are closely linked, unfortunately. I hope you know that. For us, it clearly violates human rights.

We are talking here about poverty, vulnerability. In the very beginning, we mentioned homelessness, housing problems, extreme poverty, the repercussions of residential schools. Canadians might be wondering what the connection is between the schools, the lack of housing and poverty. These are all health determinants, factors that make aboriginal women five times more likely to die of a violent crime. In many cases, the profile of these women fits into the examples I just gave you.

It is clear that there really is a systemic problem. Trafficking is becoming increasingly...

Madam Chair, I know that this is not our role, but in my heart, as an advocate, I think it would be interesting to look at the links between aboriginal women, trafficking and prostitution, as well as the factors that mean that our children and our daughters are in situations where they are extremely vulnerable. They are taken away

before they are 18 years old and then end up in prostitution. I'm hearing some groups say that these people have the right to choose what they do with their body and their life. But we have to keep in mind the fact that these young people might have gotten involved in an unhealthy environment before they were 18.

• (1835)

[English]

For us, violence clearly is not acceptable, and I'm sure all of us around this table agree. We have focused on very, very serious violence for many years.

Violence affects aboriginal women, our children, our families. I will share with you some stories and events that happened in our communities across Canada. They are sad stories, and they're true.

Back in the day when Paul Bernardo killed two white girls, every Canadian, even me, knew the names of the two girls, Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French. Everybody knew their names. But we have to remember, and we do, that in that same period, a number of aboriginal girls went missing, and today Canadians still don't know their names.

A shocking 1996 government statistic reveals that indigenous women between the ages of 25 and 44, with status under the Indian Act, as I said earlier, were five times more likely than other women of the same age to die as a result of violence. The numbers used here come from a federal organization. Today in 2013, aboriginal women are still facing that reality every day.

In two separate instances in 1994, two 15-year-old indigenous girls, Roxanna Thiara and Alishia Germaine, were found murdered in Prince George. The body of a third 15-year-old indigenous girl, Ramona Wilson, who disappeared that same year, was found in Smithers, in central British Columbia, in April 1995. Only in 2002, after the disappearance of a 26-year-old non-indigenous woman, Nicola Hoar, while hitchhiking along a road that connects Prince George and Smithers, was there media attention all over Canada. Her name was also on a list of the unsolved murders and other disappearances along what has been dubbed the Highway of Tears. But what about the other indigenous girls?

This is my last story for you today. In 1996 John Martin Crawford was convicted of murder in the killings of three indigenous women, Eva Taysup, Shelley Napope, and Calinda Waterhen, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Warren Goulding, one of the few journalists to cover the trial, commented. "I don't get the sense the general public cares much about missing or murdered aboriginal women. It's all part of this indifference to the lives of aboriginal people. They don't seem to matter as much as white people." That comes from one of your brothers.

The disparity between recommendations being made by aboriginal women at these events, such as, NAWS, the National Aboriginal Women's Summit, the Joint AFN-NWAC National Forum, and so on, and the one I named earlier in the presentation, and what government is actually doing is getting way too big. But I have a strong feeling—and we do, we had that discussion—that we will be able to—we have to—make sure that those numbers decrease until we don't have any more missing and murdered sisters.

• (1840)

There are many things we can do, but we have to work together. We have to work with the families. We have to work with the grassroots organizations.

We heard the same thing when we discussed this. When I met with several ministers from the Harper government, I heard that we have the same views. Action for us is important. We have to focus. I often heard some of your colleagues talk about action. It's the same for us. We have something here that connects us. We have to focus on action.

To implement the action we need, as I said, we have to work together. Funding is also necessary, not only for the Native Women's Association of Canada, but also the PTMAs, the members of NWAC, the organizations, volunteers, women who gave their heart and love to their region, but also other grassroots or first nations communities, Métis organizations, and Inuit. They need to have proper funding and the proper resources in place to prevent violence.

I will conclude this part, because we are a team and her English is way better. If the committee continues its work, and I'm sure it will after listening to your opening remarks, Madam Chair, but if the work is done without the full participation of the Native Women's Association of Canada, we will not be able to endorse this work. But I'm sure we'll officially find ways. We already had a good discussion with Madam Chair on how we can make sure, and the special advisory position is something we're really comfortable with. The dialogue between meetings will be important, making sure we can connect as much as possible to exchange some information, etc.

I have lots of hope, Madam Chair. I had a good meeting with you, so the hope is still there.

• (1845)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Audette.

Irene, would you like to say a few words?

Ms. Irene Goodwin (Director, Violence Prevention and Safety, Native Women's Association of Canada): Hello, everyone. I'm Irene Goodwin. I'm Ojibway from northwestern Ontario. I've been in Ottawa for about seven years now and have had the opportunity to work with NWAC for about five of those years. It's been quite a privilege, and a learning experience as well.

I'm quite honoured to be here as part of this presentation to the committee. Unlike our president, I'm not very fluid in talking off the cuff, so you'll see me actually read my notes. I apologize for having my head down.

Many of you know that we have published a number of our works. It's very well known. The 2010 publication of "What Their Stories Tell Us" by NWAC made public information about 582 cases of

missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls, cases that have occurred in every province and territory in Canada. NWAC continues to monitor information about occurrences of violence and notes that these do not appear to be substantially declining in number.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to update this data. NWAC is not resourced to maintain our database of occurrences at this time. The RCMP missing persons database has only just become operational, and there are still substantial gaps in the collection by the RCMP of information on the aboriginal identity of victims, which makes this a poor source of information.

NWAC has collected information on new cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls since the cessation of our database work in 2010. In January 2012, for example, NWAC compiled 56 new occurrences of missing or murdered aboriginal women and girls that occurred between April 2010 and January 2012. There were an additional 16 potential cases that required further investigation into the circumstances or in which the aboriginal identity of the victim was unknown.

In March 2013, NWAC updated this compilation of new occurrences and found that the number of cases had risen to 86 missing or murdered aboriginal women and girls. Together, with the initial number of 582 and now with the 86, the number is 668, but we need to make clear that these are only the known cases. We are very aware that the number is much higher than that. There are limitations to our ability to collect data at this particular point, so the number could be three or potentially four times higher than what we are currently looking at.

Our database, our research, and our work with families to create life stories for individual women and girls have demonstrated that aboriginal women affected by violence are not restricted to only one occupation, income level, or lifestyle. Our work also documents that many of the affected women were mothers, leaving children to mourn them who may be irreparably harmed by the trauma of the loss of their mothers. Our ongoing efforts with volunteer workers indicate that the issue is not resolving, that new cases continue to occur. We hear of them every day.

To provide some structure in terms of the work we do, we adhere to the following five values and principles, which are also in use by the aboriginal affairs working group which Michèle mentioned earlier.

First is relationships. We feel it is important to build respectful relationships among all involved parties. This is critical to finding effective solutions. Respectful relationships include a willingness to learn about and value what each has to offer, ongoing clear and consistent communications, and inclusion in processes and mutual accountabilities. I think this is what Michèle was mentioning earlier and referring to very strongly, concerning the work that we in this committee can engage in.

Second is community-engaged and community-led responses. Communities, however they define themselves, must be involved in identifying and implementing responses. Programs and services are built on the knowledge and lived experiences of aboriginal women and families. Working in relationship, governments and first nations, Inuit, and Métis women and families should play a central role in the development and implementation of programs and services, and not just the service providers and organizations. We feel it is very important to involve community in all the work that is done, especially when it involves the community.

• (1850)

Third is an engaged and accountable relationship. Leadership at all levels of government, including federal, provincial, territorial, and local, as well as first nations, Inuit, and Métis, must make the issue of violence against aboriginal women and girls a priority and must allocate resources and demonstrate leadership in addressing these issues. All leadership must be accountable. That's an important principle.

Fourth is integration, collaboration, and equity. All involved parties should work collaboratively and effectively to make every effort to integrate programs and services to create holistic networks that are accessible to women, children, youth, seniors, elders, and men.

Fifth, it's very important to be culturally based. Programs and services should be designed and delivered in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner that recognizes the importance of tradition, cultural knowledge, and identity, and which builds on the resiliency and capacity of first nations, Inuit, and Métis women, youth, and men.

As an active advisory member to this committee, NWAC can provide directly relevant information in this regard. Policies and legislation implemented without aboriginals' input have failed and will continue to fail. Many of these policies continue to impact aboriginal women, leading to many socio-economic challenges that can impede their safety and welfare and lead to increased risks of sexual exploitation or human trafficking, or to falling victim to violence that may lead to their disappearance or death. There's a difference between addressing immediate and future needs, things which respond to violence that has occurred but do not prevent or stop more violence from occurring in the future. This should be known.

With regard to this work, NWAC has created a chart. I have it here, so I'll provide it to you, Madam Chair. It is a coloured chart. We call it our missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls chart.

The chart itself is not a logic model, nor does it identify all aspects around the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. Rather, it provides a snapshot, an overview based on prevention and intervention. Each segment can contain multiple variables and potential solutions.

Very briefly, it's built on a short-term, medium-term, and long-term look at the issue. For example, in the prevention aspect of the chart, addressing the immediate personal needs of aboriginal women

and girls in the short term will lead to the necessary supports for families.

• (1855)

The Chair: Madam, I'll ask you to provide that to the clerk. Is it in English only?

Ms. Irene Goodwin: It is at this moment.

The Chair: The clerk will have it translated, and then we'll be able to distribute it to the whole committee.

Please, go ahead and refer to it for now.

Ms. Irene Goodwin: I'm just showing that it has a short-term, medium-term, and a long-term look at this. Again, this is only a snapshot of this particular issue.

We have done a lot of work in the areas of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

If we addressed all of this, can you imagine what the results would be if aboriginal women and girls were empowered instead of constantly being victimized by society?

At this time I believe it is important to make note of other key and important points observed by our partners as well. I know Michèle mentioned it before, but it is particularly important to mention that in February 2012 the AFN held the National Justice Forum. It included action planning on a strategy to end violence against indigenous women and girls. NWAC participated in this process.

The key areas of action and recommendations were provided in the workbook for action planning. They included the need for greater understanding and public education on first nations realities and experiences that have led to both victimization and violence; encouragement for all leaders and individuals to take personal responsibility for preventing and addressing violence; the need for outreach to youth and specific targeted approaches for men and boys, as well as better partnerships with service agencies, policing services, and corrections.

At the AFN 2012 Annual General Assembly, they presented "Demanding Justice and Fulfilling Rights: A Strategy to End Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls". I don't know if the committee has these documents, but they are certainly available. The strategy contains a number of priority activities in addressing and raising awareness, parliamentary and international engagement, policy and research, facilitating dialogue to support communities in their efforts to increase safety, and ending violence.

Aside from what NAOs have been doing, we know there have been many justice inquiries, task force studies, and federal, provincial, and territorial working groups that have generated hundreds of recommendations for governments, service providers, communities, law enforcement, and courts to prevent violence and better address violence when it occurs.

However, chronic and systemic issues have meant many recommendations have not been implemented.

I did come with a list of recommendations, but I understand you already have a copy of it, so that's good. This document of recommendations continues to be updated. We're adding more reports to that as we move forward.

What is very important is that a thorough analysis of each of the reports and the recommendations on the issues needs to be undertaken, followed by a logic model or other demonstration that can capture the multiple levels and jurisdictions required to successfully undertake and implement recommendations. With these actions taken collectively, we will all be in a better position to examine and orchestrate a way forward that appropriately responds to the issues.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Goodwin.

I'll ask Madam Dumont-Smith to say a few words.

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith (Executive Director, Native Women's Association of Canada): *Kwe*, hello, bonjour.

I'm Algonquin from the Kitigan Zibi community. My background is in nursing. In July, it will be three years that I have been the executive director of the Native Women's Association.

After hearing your opening remarks about the role of NWAC, Madam Chair, I'm very pleased that it seems NWAC's expertise is being acknowledged and that we'll be looked upon as advisers to the process. When we came to this meeting today, we didn't know that. I'm very glad you've relayed that information to us.

As you know, NWAC has been involved in doing work on violence—domestic violence, elder abuse, violence against children—for many years. Violence has always been a priority and will remain a priority until the issue of missing and murdered women is addressed in a manner that will be comparable at least to the rest of Canadians.

By far we lag way, way behind in terms of statistics in missing and murdered women, poverty statistics, educational statistics. Our fight goes on and on. We do want to be involved with the government and with all the players to change the status quo.

We are committed to being full participants. We will attend all the meetings in the three areas that you mentioned in your opening statements, Madam Chair. If there is still time, we would like to have input on the list of witnesses you will be calling to appear before you. We feel we could add to that list and enrich the list of witnesses who will present to you. We are ready and willing to do that.

In preparation for today's meeting, we did review some of the witness testimony that has been brought forward to the committee. We wish to identify some misinformation and to correct the facts, and although they are in the record, I think they can be corrected.

For example, in your meeting of April 25, Ms. Lisa Hitch, who is the senior counsel of the family, children and youth section of the Department of Justice, indicated that:

The Government of Canada also provided \$5 million over five years, from 2005 to 2010, to the Native Women's Association of Canada for their Sisters in Spirit initiative, through Status of Women Canada, in response to concerns about missing and murdered aboriginal women.

This is a true statement, but I want to reiterate that the NWAC Sisters in Spirit initiative ended on March 31, 2010. It does not continue to this day. Our staff has noted that Ms. Hitch informed the committee that it was ongoing. That is not true. NWAC did not receive \$25 million in funding following that initiative. This is a perfect example, we think, of why NWAC should be involved at the outset, or be an adviser, or be at these hearings.

The latest funding we received from the government was \$500,000 for Evidence to Action I, which began April 1, 2010 and ended in September 2010. The objectives of this project were different from Sisters in Spirit. They were to strengthen the ability of aboriginal women and girls across Canada to recognize and respond to issues of gender-based violence within their families and communities, as well as strengthen the ability of communities to break the cycle of violence.

In the summer of 2011 we received funding for Evidence to Action II, which is a three-year project that will be ending in April 2014.

To sum up, as the executive director, and having heard what you said—and you've heard what our president has stated as well—we are available to provide our expertise. If we don't have it at the office, we will get that expertise. We also think we should be part of the development of your final report.

We're here to help the committee. There is one thing, though. We do have one concern. We are against the legalization of prostitution. We have come out very strong on that. We have noted that one of the committee members does not hold the same position that we do. That may be conflictual. I don't know. But it's something that I think warrants further discussion.

● (1900)

Again, as our president said, although we will support the work of this parliamentary committee, we are still holding firm in our demand for a national public inquiry and a plan of action to delve into the whole issue in a more comprehensive and deeper manner.

Thank you.

● (1905)

The Chair: Thank you very much to all three of you. Madame Audette, Madam Goodwin, and Madame Dumont-Smith, we appreciate your comments this morning.

Before we start with questions, I want to acknowledge once again the special contribution you're making. I think, frankly, that we're off to a great start in that partnership with you as expert witnesses.

Madame Audette, you mentioned the word “witness”, and if I could I will explain how I see it. I think sometimes as parliamentarians we take comfort in the structures we know and the ones we're most familiar with, so for us, witnesses are the people who sit at that end of the table. It's the word we use for your role at this meeting, but, as I mentioned earlier, it's as an expert witness. You are the only witnesses we'll be hearing from at the beginning of each theme, so we believe we've singled out the contribution that you will be making because your advice is so valuable to us. You've already given us a lot to chew on, and we appreciate that.

I think I speak for every member of Parliament in the room when I say that I believe the committee has made the right decision in having you here as experts to give us some guidance. We welcome that participation and we thank you again for being here.

We're ready to start with some questions, if you don't mind. We'll start with Ms. Crowder for seven minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair, and as always, thank you for appearing Madame Audette, Madam Goodwin, and Madame Dumont-Smith. I know you've come before a number of committees, and your perspective is always appreciated.

I have looked at the National Forum on Ending Violence and Community Safety in Edmonton and have noted 47 pages of reports and recommendations at this point. Although we haven't had the resources to go through these 47 pages to find out exactly how many of the recommendations in these reports have been implemented, I suspect I could say quite confidently that very few of them have been, just because of other work we've done.

The goal of this committee was to meet and hear testimony and to propose solutions to address the root causes of violence. One of the outcomes of this committee has been determined by the motion that's before us, to propose solutions to address the root causes of violence.

Given the number of reports that have already been written, there is limited scope to what this committee has been tasked to achieve. You referenced a national public inquiry and you know we support that call, but there has also been reference to a national action plan. I wonder if you could address elements that you would see as being important in a national action plan, and if that could possibly be one of the outcomes of this committee.

I think Ms. Goodwin referenced some of that, because she talked about a thorough analysis of the reports and examining ways of going forward.

I wonder if you could talk about how you see going forward.

Ms. Irene Goodwin: Certainly, a lot of work has already been done around what should go into a national action plan. The UN has implemented a call that all nation states should have a national action plan to address violence in their various countries by 2015. Doing work in this regard is moving that particular international resolution forward.

We are currently looking at what should go into an action plan, so I think that right now it's a little premature to give an answer on this. We are doing a lot of work in this area. We're pulling together various reports. It may be something we could come back to a little

later as we begin to fully develop what should be included. Most certainly, as I mentioned, it's active inclusion of families and the various community members, including men and boys, of course, as well as the various leadership at all levels. This includes the need for federal participation in all the processes. We need that kind of buy-in and understanding from everyone that this particular action is required.

There are various levels in terms of addressing what the root causes are. There are a lot of socio-economic situations that cause problems. We also are fully aware that a lot of people really don't take the time to sit down and contemplate what the issue is, and may actually question why we're even calling for a national action plan and why there's a need for a national inquiry. Generally, before we actually look at the full aspect of it, we need to raise the awareness, and I think NWAC has been very, very successful in doing this.

For example, in 2006, we had only 11 Sisters in Spirit vigils. By last year, 2012, we were at 175 vigils occurring right across Canada. That's certainly a big increase over a short period of time in terms of awareness, but I don't think we're at the stage where the general population is fully aware of what our needs are. We need to continue doing this kind of work, and then at that particular point, we can get the buy-in that's required to actually implement an action plan.

I know I'm not fully answering your question at this point, but we are certainly working on what those variables would be.

• (1910)

Ms. Jean Crowder: I think Ms. Audette had a comment as well.

[Translation]

Ms. Michèle Audette: I will speak in French.

Over the years, I have travelled all over Canada. I have listened to aboriginal women and have read everything the NWAC has published. I got a hold of a document that really impressed me. It was a document that the Status of Women Canada had asked us for several years ago. Following that reflection process, or that analysis, one thing seemed clear to me. We demand, request and want a national action plan, but as my colleague Ms. Goodwin so aptly said, we first need to make sure that all the departments concerned have some understanding of the issue. Often, when we think of the first nations, the Métis and the Inuit, we think only of Status of Women Canada or Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. When we talk about NWAC, we think about Mr. Valcourt and Ms. Ambrose.

For several weeks now, I have been harassing, and I use that word lightly, the offices of these various departments. I have been calling them repeatedly and telling them that it is good that their government has decided to put in place a special committee, that it is a start and that it is a step in the right direction. However, it does not prevent us from setting up a working group that involves the various departments affected.

We spoke about homelessness or problems related to housing, safety and justice, as well as a number of issues. In the context of this thought process, why not work outside the vacuum? If I may, Ms. Crowder, that is how I see things. This reflection has not been collective, and we haven't yet consulted our members. Having a political will is important. I asked Mr. Valcourt and Ms. Ambrose to co-chair this working group, which could officially meet with representatives from departments such as Public Safety Canada, organizations responsible for housing, anything having to do with economic development, employment and training, and aboriginal women. We should bring together all these people, who would discuss this reality that no one should have to experience. Frankly, we are in survival mode. All these ministers could ask their deputy ministers and people who have decision-making authority to work with the Native Women's Association of Canada. That would be our first exercise.

To conclude, I will talk about another exercise. I will not give up as long as I give my heart to the Native Women's Association of Canada. We need to ensure that the provincial and territorial governments are stakeholders in this work. We managed to get the agreement signed in two meetings. You see, it isn't just the federal government that is involved; it's the provinces and territories, as well. I would even say that it is important to meet with municipal governments sooner or later because they have an important role to play.

We need a national action plan. We are going to implement socio-economic development measures to deal with specific problems that affect us. That is why we need this exercise.

•(1915)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Over to you, Mr. Goguen.

Mr. Robert Goguen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you for your testimony.

Clearly, the root causes of violence are complex and many. I noted several. It may include being homeless, poverty, residential schools, mental health, historical bias, trafficking of women, lack of education, and so on. You summarized that by saying it was a systemic problem.

I do not want to deny the importance of any of these factors of violence against women, but are there one or two factors that are predominant or more critical? I know that each case is different, as are the circumstances.

Ms. Michèle Audette: I also ask these questions of the women I meet on a daily basis during my travels. The problems in an extremely isolated community will not be the same as in a much more urban one, but the violence is deeply rooted. In some regions, I'm told that substance abuse and mental health are major problems. In those communities, the use of speed and other synthetic drugs increase the rate of violence.

In other regions, violence might be related to living in an environment that includes smaller and smaller land areas. So we're

talking about communities that are much more urban, like mine, Uashat-Maliotenam, which is split in two. The problems are different because of racism and discrimination.

I would like answers as well. Unfortunately, we have to take into consideration geography, the location, basically, the reality.

Mr. Robert Goguen: So, even dividing it between urban and rural regions is not helping you in your analysis.

Ms. Michèle Audette: What do you mean? I'm sorry.

Mr. Robert Goguen: Are the predominant factors in urban areas different from the predominant factors in rural areas?

Ms. Michèle Audette: That's why it's important not to apply the policies uniformly.

Mr. Robert Goguen: Yes.

Ms. Michèle Audette: We have to have this flexibility. To ensure success, you need to take into account the reality of the region. If there is racial discrimination or racism in the region, preventive measures need to be put in place. If addiction is a problem in other regions, then Health Canada has a role to play.

[English]

Mr. Robert Goguen: Your co-witness mentioned on a couple of occasions the Sisters in Spirit. Everything I've heard about this program seems to be somewhat positive.

The reason I ask the question, Madame Audette, is that I guess one of the objectives of this program was to try to determine if there were any identifiable root causes. I think there was funding of \$5 million over five years. Was this in any way successful? Were there good things that came out of this program to actually identify some of the causes? If so, could you share them with us?

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: I'll let Irene, who is the director of that program, respond to that.

Ms. Irene Goodwin: There was a lot of good work. Of course, we have a number of reports that were generated from the Sisters In Spirit project. A lot of analysis was done. We were able to break down the various differences with respect to the provinces. Some western provinces, for example, have a higher rate of missing or murdered. As our president indicated, this could be due to racism. In another area, let's say in the eastern area, where the statistics aren't as high, it may have been due to reporting issues. There is no quick and fast answer.

However, the Sisters In Spirit project did in fact generate a lot of material that was not known before. If there was any good and positive outcome, it was the generation of this information that actually brought to the platform and the awareness of many people the issue of the extreme violence that aboriginal women and girls are experiencing, and the numbers of missing and murdered, which hadn't been recorded prior. If there was any value—and I know you might be saying, “Well, what is \$5 million?”—this information itself is the true value. No dollar value can be placed on these lives.

Certainly the Sisters In Spirit project did generate a number of resource materials. We communicated with a great number of families. We travelled right across Canada to talk about the various issues. I would advise the committee to look at the various fact sheets that we generated by region to see what the differences are. We do know that, for example, about 87% of the aboriginal women and girls who did go missing were mothers. Certainly this research pointed to the fact that there is a continuing need to examine what's actually taking place there. If we're talking about root causes and addressing the potential impacts in the future, we really need this information. This is a valuable project in terms of the research it generated which didn't exist previously.

When we're looking at what's going on moving forward, we need to continue this type of research. As our executive director stated, the last two projects, Evidence to Action I and Evidence to Action II, don't continue this type of research, but that doesn't mean the issues haven't continued. In fact, more questions have resulted. Just looking at the children, for example, what are the needs of the men who now find themselves to be single fathers? That's a different type of needs assessment which needs to take place.

We also need to know what happens to the children of these mothers who have gone missing. Have they been placed into the child welfare system, and is this creating a roundabout cycle? How many of them, in turn, become victims of this type of violent crime? We do know from some of our very basic research, which we weren't able to publish, there is a cycle in which a mother would go missing, and then the daughter would go missing years later. In some particular family lines, several individuals have gone missing.

There's certainly a need for continuing research. If there's anything we could put forward here, it would be to encourage governments to take a better look at what the missing pieces are. The Sisters In Spirit project identified a lot of factors that come into play, but there are too many to mention here. I know that Michèle started on them. Poverty is a big one, as is homelessness. There is also the lack of education, and the lack of employment opportunities. Sometimes it has to do with the geographic location.

We also have issues regarding educational policy, for example. If a young person in a remote area has to go into a neighbouring non-aboriginal community, that young person may not have the necessary skills to go into that community and survive in that environment. We do know that a lot of our girls as well went missing when they moved from remote communities to an urban environment, either for education or for employment.

A lot of these facts and this kind of data were not known prior to Sisters In Spirit.

• (1920)

There was a lot of anecdotal evidence, but no peer statistics that actually said, "Look, this is what's happening out there". There's certainly value in the Sisters in Spirit project that generated that type of research. We have moved forward with trying to action that research with the Evidence to Action projects and generate those kinds of tools and resources that can begin to address the kind of situation we're facing.

Certainly the work really points to the need for continuing research and continuing analysis as to what's going on. I think we've only uncovered the tip of the iceberg in terms of this particular work with that project.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: Could I comment?

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: I think even with NWAC and what happened with Sisters in Spirit, the focus was on missing and murdered aboriginal women, and that was warranted because of the sheer numbers. The Native Women's Association has changed our department name. We now call it violence prevention and safety. Because we got the funds for Sisters in Spirit, we focused on the missing and murdered, which is the extreme of violence. Now we have to bring it back to look at the high rates of violence in the communities and in the home. I think that's what the committee wants to look at too. Your goal is the root causes of violence. Are you looking at it from that aspect, or is it at the other end of the spectrum?

It's important that we bring it back to the preventative part as well. In the aboriginal community, it's the normalization of violence. There's not enough prevention. NWAC, as I said, was so focused on that. We were mandated to look at the missing and murdered, so we sort of left that by the wayside. We want to now look at that, as well as the missing and murdered. The two are related, but you're addressing one very extreme and one where you could start to look at the preventative aspect.

When we look at the root causes of violence in communities or in the home, it's poverty. Look at divorce rates. One of the main reasons couples get divorced is financial. You can imagine that when you live in poverty day in and day out, it generates a lot of negativity.

Young people now are exposed to violence in the media, but they're also exposed to lifestyle, the life that everybody lives that they don't live. They live in a shack. They might have running water. They don't even have a bedroom. They're exposed through television to a life where everybody has a car. Do you know what I mean? All this generates feelings of frustration because they have no money to do things and no places to go.

The committee has to look at that. The two are related, but they're different.

• (1925)

The Chair: Thank you.

Over to you, Madam Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Thank you very much.

To the witnesses, thank you for coming. Thank you as always for your almost therapeutic approach to this huge topic, where you bring hope and concrete suggestions. We thank you for that. We thank you for all the work you've done.

We want to make sure that you give us some homework for the summer, the things you think we need to have read by the time we come back in the fall. I hope at that time you will give us a test regarding all of the recommendations in your fact sheets.

The workbook that was produced from the wonderful conference you held in April in Edmonton was extraordinary. We were very blessed that the Library of Parliament took it upon themselves to send our analysts. So thank you for being there. I hope that all who couldn't be there might be provided with a copy of the workbook, which I think really sets the tone for the work we need to do together.

I also thank you for remembering the women and girls that have been lost, and the families who now have this big hole.

My questions will be mainly about how we can work together, in terms of making sure we're always focused on the human face, as you said; how, as we do our work, we can continue to keep up to date on the women lost on a weekly basis; keeping a focus on the families; and the need for a special event. I don't know what your advice would be around the October 4 vigil—whether there would be a way to receive them as they come to the Hill. If you have some advice about that and about travel—in the motion the committee is prepared to travel and if you had advice for the committee as to whether that should be the Highway of Tears, or whether you feel the testimony in the previous studies has been done—we hope for your wise counsel.

As well, we are going to need to work together in terms of how the witness list is drawn up. As you say, it's not only about adding people to the witness list but how it's organized in our work. I would welcome your expertise as to who would be the better witnesses for each of the three areas and what would constitute a better panel. I am having a bit of trouble with the format of three witnesses for one hour each. Look at how the time has flown this evening. We have just the three of you and almost two hours has gone by already.

I would hope that you would work with the chair and the clerk and the analysts to give us your very best recommendations. We have put in our witness list but perhaps you could help organize this for us. I think that if they're helter-skelter all over the place, we're not going to get the stories and the narrative in a way that is in keeping with the work you've already done.

I also think that in your Evidence to Action...I would like us at some point to deal with the role of government, what works, what doesn't work, what costs money, what costs too much money, what costs nothing at all. In a national action plan, how would you get this interface between all the work that's been done on the ground and what government needs to be doing? We are always thinking about the recommendations that would come from here.

One other area that we heard a bit about was the Oskayak youth conference. Madam Goodwin was talking about young women and girls fleeing foster care and that's probably not been well done in Parliament. There's the huge effect of what happens if someone has to flee abusive or violent situations and that begets the cycle....

● (1930)

Other than with three appearances at the committee, do you have any thoughts on how you think we could work together between those appearances?

[Translation]

Ms. Michèle Audette: I will also let Irene speak.

I think it is important that the committee chair and I dialogue as often as possible about this. I am game for exchange and dialogue. Perhaps I will have to disagree with her, and it is healthy and normal to disagree, but I want to feel that I am a stakeholder in the process where we are addressing issues of human dignity and human lives.

It is currently easier for us to meet with other ministers on other issues. In fact, I meet with two ministers every two weeks to discuss very specific topics with them.

[English]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The other piece around the families, how do we as a committee get out to the families to let them know that we want to hear from them, even from the ones who've never been able....

What kind of communication strategy would you have for us to be able to find and hear from families?

[Translation]

Ms. Michèle Audette: Ms. Bennett, I must first tell you that we don't have the financial or human resources capacity to meet with all the families. It would be pretentious of us to tell you it's what the families want. So it is important to be cautious.

However, we do have a network of families who are willing to testify. It is up to you to invite them, since it is your initiative. It's a federal government initiative that is welcomed by some groups, including the Native Women's Association of Canada. It's up to you to invite those families, and we can support you in that exercise.

It would be interesting to invite them for October 4, 2013. That's a very good idea, because a lot of families will be here on Parliament Hill and in other areas, as you mentioned. However, the request must come from your committee. We would be pleased to help you with that. As long as I am president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, I cannot claim to speak on behalf of the families, but I will support you if you send them an invitation. You should send them an invitation. You will see that these people are remarkable.

● (1935)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Over to you, Ms. Truppe.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here as well.

Irene, you talked about the Sisters in Spirit initiative. It certainly sounds like that \$5 million was money well spent.

You mentioned something and I wasn't sure if I heard right or not. I think you said that you found many of them went missing after they moved from a rural to an urban area. Did you say that?

Ms. Irene Goodwin: Yes.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: I was surprised at that. I would have thought it would be the other way, or that it would help them to move into an urban area.

Claudette, you mentioned that you don't support trafficking and prostitution. I want to let you know that we certainly don't support that either. In fact, you might already know this, but our government passed Bill C-310, an anti-trafficking bill. It was an amendment to the Criminal Code to provide for stiffer sentences for extraterritorial offences. We have a very hard-working colleague on our side of the House who is always advocating against trafficking. I'm glad to hear that as well.

I'm not sure who mentioned that there was a lot of work done and a lot of reports, and you found out a lot of information on the missing aboriginal girls. Since 2006, the government has provided \$205 million for the family violence program, so I'm assuming it didn't come from there.

Was that funding from Evidence to Action I and II or was that funding from somewhere else?

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: Could you repeat that last part—the \$25 million, you said?

Mrs. Susan Truppe: No, I was saying that I know there was \$205 million that was with the family violence prevention program, I think since 2006. I'm assuming that's probably not it.

When you talked about all the work you were doing and the studies and everything, would that funding have come from the Evidence to Action I and II or was it from something else?

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: No, all the money we have received to address violence, to my knowledge, and I have knowledge of what goes on at NWAC, has been from Status of Women Canada funding, through Evidence to Action I and II, and Sisters in Spirit prior to that.

We did apply for funding from Justice Canada and Public Safety Canada, but we were denied.

That's where we are. We continue to submit proposals, but those are the facts. That's where we got money in the past, since 2005, I believe.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Great. So Status of Women is giving you some for the different initiatives. It looks like you have done really well with what you've had.

The almost \$2 million for Evidence to Action II, which was to strengthen the ability of communities, governments, educators, including the Canadian Police College, post-secondary institutions, as well as elementary and high schools.... It was to address the root causes of violence against aboriginal women and girls.

Did you undertake any types of activities and training to share this information with aboriginal women and girls? How did you get it out to them?

Ms. Claudette Dumont-Smith: I'm going to ask Irene to speak to that. We did a lot of work in that area. She just finished another interim report, so she'll give you the answers.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Great. Thank you. It's her baby.

Ms. Irene Goodwin: One of the big pieces that came out is the community resource guide. Within this resource guide is a number of tool kits. I think there are 10 tool kits in it. There is a number of mechanisms in there. There's also a particular piece that addresses the root causes.

Most certainly this type of tool and resource is being utilized by a wide variety of people. We were surprised, when we did our reporting and looked at the number of people who are accessing it, by the broad range. We have the RCMP in one area utilizing this particular tool and resource to train their cadets, and we also have educators—secondary and public school teachers—who are using this particular resource for informing their student populations, and in particular native studies. We also have victims services looking at this tool. They all use it differently. It's a very, very big resource with a lot of supplemental pieces.

We constantly are asked for additional pieces to augment that. For example, policing agencies want an accompanying training manual, or teachers want question and answer sheets to quiz their students. These are the kinds of secondary pieces that we don't have covered within Evidence to Action I or II, but certainly looking forward we can identify how we can move these particular tools and resources forward.

Part of Evidence to Action II, and this may answer some of the questions that were raised earlier, is that we do convene families yearly. We have an annual family gathering. This might be a mechanism the committee might want to resource to be able to meet families.

We, of course, do the annual October 4 vigils. Again, we're just starting supplementary planning on that process and are trying to figure out what that day will look like. We're still in the early stages. We would welcome conversations with this committee to see how you can get involved in that process as well.

● (1940)

Mrs. Susan Truppe: It's like a teaching tool for various organizations to teach the girls and women.

Ms. Irene Goodwin: Essentially the ETA project provides moving the research component that was derived from the Sisters in Spirit project into action, hence the title of the project, Evidence to Action. All of our work and materials is to get those particular research pieces out to various segments of the Canadian population. I think we're doing a fabulous job. We've certainly had a lot of increase in demand. In fact, the demand for products has exceeded our printing and translation—

Mrs. Susan Truppe: That's great.

Ms. Irene Goodwin: We've burned our materials on to CDs. When we couldn't afford CDs, we moved to USBs. So the demand—

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Great. You sound very enthusiastic.

Ms. Irene Goodwin: When you begin a project, you try to think of all the variables that might come through. What we didn't anticipate, which we talked about earlier today, was that the amount of demand would increase as the awareness increased. If there's a positiveness that has taken place, it's that we know awareness is increasing and demand is increasing. We need to figure out real mechanisms in terms of getting this material out to people and to better resource what we do have.

One of the other aspects we do with the Evidence to Action project is community engagement workshops. One of the most successful workshops we have done—and you may have already heard about it—is the faceless dolls project. Essentially, we tried to create a particular item, like our “artivism”, so that rather than just sitting there hearing about a particular issue, people could actually be involved. We received a lot of positive feedback. That particular project itself was designed to create 600 faceless felt dolls. I don't know if anyone has seen pictures of them. They are very touching when you see them.

We're working on developing legacy pieces now. We have finished that particular project, but we continue to receive requests from people and communities to continue this project. Now we're creating a legacy piece.

We'll actually be doing a little bit during National Aboriginal Day. Creating those types of activities to increase awareness is part and parcel of what we're doing with that particular project.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

Am I done?

The Chair: Yes.

It's over to you, Mr. Saganash, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*The member speaks in Cree*]

[*English*]

Was that okay?

A voice: Well done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: First, I would like to thank all three of you for your testimony, which I believe is very important.

Ms. Audette, you launched an appeal that resonated with me. Your call asked that this time be different. This call is also a reminder for us because if there is one subject that should be treated in a non-partisan way, it's this one. So it is a reminder for us.

I would like to talk about the national action plan. It's important, but a national action plan has its own challenges, including how to develop and implement it. Perhaps we can come back to that, if we have time.

My first question has to do with the role you want to play within this committee. I listened attentively to what you had to say. You

spoke about working together. That resonates very much with me because that's our party's slogan.

You also spoke about partnerships. That also resonates with me. But we don't all see partnerships the same way.

You also mentioned formal dialogue and clarifying the NWAC's role. You mentioned it and clarified it. Is our recognition of you as an expert witness enough? Were you expecting a formal agreement between our group and the committee? I am trying to understand. If I've understood correctly, Ms. Goodwin also spoke about—

[*English*]

input into part of the development of the final report.

[*Translation*]

That includes a number of things.

● (1945)

Ms. Michèle Audette: Mr. Saganash, I can see your lawyer's side coming out.

It's clear for us. How many times have we been disappointed in many areas, with respect to certain files, because the roles and responsibilities of each party haven't been made official? We are calling on you today. We would like an official agreement in writing and have it respected so that there is no disappointment, no misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

Yes, this partnership means that we can have a dialogue and an exchange between adults, experts and elected representatives to find better solutions. I hope to see this relationship, which will allow us to do something new, set out in writing. It would be very different from other committees.

I would also like to feel this time that it will not be partisan. Mr. Saganash, you expressed that idea very well. Our values make us want to make changes for families and women. It's very important. We hope to have a contract that will link our organization and MPs who represent the various regions of Canada.

As for an action plan, Mr. Saganash, it is extremely important that we feel that there is a political will. The MPs of the Conservative majority who are here could perhaps raise the awareness of their minister colleagues who can play a role. As the former associate deputy minister responsible for the Status of Women Secretariat, I call this advancing things. You have the capacity, so use it.

One very important aspect of this action plan is to do something very different. How many times have we criticized you, regardless of the government in power, in the past 20 years? We have said that you have not consulted the first nations, the Métis or the Inuit, and that you sought their enlightened consent even less. This time, let's prove that we can do things differently. The Native Women's Association of Canada should participate in developing the action plan. I guarantee you that if I feel this way, we will work side by side while I am with the Native Women's Association of Canada.

[*English*]

The Chair: Five minutes go by quickly.

It's over to you, Ms. McLeod.

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

Thank you so much for the conversation we're having tonight. I really appreciated the chair talking in terms of how formal that relationship is going to be.

I just have to say that I know we're talking about very difficult things, and maybe this is not going to be something we get to until we get further on in our report, but just a week or two weeks ago, I was at the BDC E-Spirit awards. Students from across the country went to Kamloops. It was fantastic to see the youth, the enthusiasm, the mentorship, and to see the business plans they were putting forward, knowing that these youth were going to be taking them back to the communities.

I see things that have been happening. We heard from different departments. We've heard of some of the work being done with Sisters in Spirit. I have to hope and believe that we're doing some things a whole lot better than we were doing in the sixties, seventies, and eighties.

What are the things we're doing where we're making good progress?

At each meeting so far, I've really been concerned about this whole area of statistics, and I'd really like to probe that.

Ms. Goodwin, you were saying you were having some significant success in terms of methods you use in terms of aboriginal status for the victims of crime. Perhaps you could talk a bit more about how you manage to gather the statistics, because I certainly know that Stats Canada and other groups have significant challenges there.

• (1950)

Ms. Irene Goodwin: First of all, we're not collecting or doing any type of research, so we're not generating new statistics with the Evidence to Action project. A lot of the statistics that we have generated are from the Sisters in Spirit project. There is an increased need to continue doing that type of work, to better look at what's going on. Our president could probably speak more about the various successes we have noticed.

There is an increased educational component among aboriginal youth. They are the biggest demographic. They continue to have various socio-economic challenges.

What we do now in collecting information comes very much from our needs assessments with families. Earlier I mentioned the family gathering. Part of that process is about dialoguing with the families. We also do life stories. Recently, to respond to the new technologies, we created digital life stories. I don't know if anyone has seen them, but they're a very powerful means of getting our message out. They tell about the challenges families have and the situations they find themselves in. They tell how a loved one went missing or was murdered. From this kind of work, from the stories of the families, we are now moving forward in getting the type of information we need.

I want to emphasize again that our current project does not do research, so that's a limitation. The final report might mention that there is an ongoing need to continue this type of research and generate new statistics.

One of the issues that we encounter, particularly with our community engagement workshops, is that we continue to use the data from the 2010 Sisters in Spirit report. Many people are dissatisfied with that. They want new and updated information, and it's a challenge for us to provide that. We can provide anecdotal statistics, but we need a more proven mechanism. We have had recent conversations with Statistics Canada on how we can move forward. That's the preliminary work in this area.

Ms. Michèle Audette: This summer there will be a meeting of the Council of the Federation, where all premiers will meet here in Ontario.

We had a discussion last week with the minister responsible for status of women in Ontario, Madam Broten. I told her that economic development for aboriginal women is one of the keys. This summer we have to focus on getting all the premiers to make a statement saying that they will put money aside for aboriginal women.

Also, as poverty is one of the root causes, my dream is to have a micro-credit fund. If we were able, in five years maybe, to help women, and also—

• (1955)

The Chair: I'm sorry to cut you off, but I want to make sure that Ms. Duncan gets the last five minutes.

Ms. Michèle Audette: Okay. I'll tell you later.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): No, they will have the last five minutes. I'll just try to introduce the...

I'm so impressed by your eloquence and your wisdom, and mostly by your patience and perseverance. I want to thank you. You are three incredible women, and all the women behind you are as well. You have continued to persevere in trying to be a partner in this.

I've listened to a lot of what you said between the lines, and I think the really important lesson for this committee or task group—whatever it's called—is how you will be made partners.

I throw out to you and to the committee the suggestion to think about a process that I was fortunate to be a part of in Alberta, before I was elected. It has nothing to do with this, but I was involved with the Clean Air Strategic Alliance. It operates by consensus. It is co-chaired by a senior representative from industry, a representative from the public, and a senior representative from government. It includes at the table federal and provincial government representatives, first nations, Métis, and public representatives. Every report and every decision is made by consensus.

I thought I would mention that idea; it might be nice to try a different model.

One thing that might be important is the protocols for hearing testimony, particularly from the families. You might want to speak to that. It appears to me that families of victims may be more comfortable sharing their stories if you are here as the representatives of aboriginal peoples.

Although I think the first important discussion is about how this discussion is going to proceed, a subject on which you have shared many valuable ideas, there is one topic I want to throw out to you, given the topic we are supposed to be talking about.

I'm sitting in for Niki Ashton, so I went through the previous proceedings. In all the discussions, there has not been any discussion about the perpetrators of the violence. I founded a rape crisis centre in Edmonton and wrote and talked a lot about the myth that it's the bogeyman in the bushes. It's often the woman's partner, friend, date, or anybody. I'm particularly troubled because from what I have learned from your stories, a good number of the perpetrators are not aboriginal people.

Also, the direction given to the residential schools commission was to go out and educate everybody on what happened and about the role we have to play to address it.

I would really like to hear from you, or even have your feedback, if you think that this would also be an important aspect of the work to be looked at. We can't solve this if we simply do a thousand and one initiatives for the women and girls who are victims of this violence and then not also work on the other side, that long-standing legacy of a bad attitude towards aboriginal women and girls.

Ms. Michèle Audette: We have to remember that many years ago, our own men were denying that it was a reality in our communities. Today we notice that we have more and more aboriginal men supporting our fight on this matter.

There are many solutions, but because of time constraints I will just say that we need role models, men and women, and we need to make sure that they are talking to their brothers and saying that there is zero tolerance for violence within our communities.

As to the way we treat the perpetrator, we have to respect that some first nations wish to have control of their justice system. We

have to respect that. In my view, a good relationship and partnership would ensure that, if Atikamekw Nation wished to have control over justice, of course respecting human rights, we have to acknowledge that. If some want something else....

Do you understand what I'm trying to say, that it's not *mur à mur*?

Regarding the protocol for the families, I reiterate that you need to have them here for a day or half a day.

I was invited to meet the Zonta Club in Sault Ste. Marie not long ago, where 250 people were in attendance, of whom 30 were aboriginal. I asked them the simple question as to how many of them had lost a mother, a sister, a cousin, or a daughter, and 29 aboriginal women stood up. I asked the same question to the Canadian women who were there. Out of the 220 others there, only one stood up.

That was only in southern Ontario. Can you imagine what the picture is across all of Canada?

We have a big task, and I want to make sure that this is not a one-shot deal, but that we will really work together. Believe me, we will make a change, if that partnership is well understood by all of us.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

• (2000)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much. Merci beaucoup.

On that note, the meeting is adjourned.

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