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Chair

Mrs. Stella Ambler

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• (1800)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP)): Good evening. Welcome to meeting number five of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women.

I want to let committee members know that Michèle Audette, who was to be our first witness, was called away on a family emergency and sends her apologies. I'm sure I speak on behalf of the committee when I say that we are thinking of Michèle and her family. I'm sure that at some later date Michèle will request an appearance before the committee.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming. We have Mr. Hassel joining us by video conference.

I'm going to ask you to take approximately 10 minutes to give your presentations. I'll give you a signal to wrap it up. Then we will have questions from the members. Their questioning time includes your response time. In the first round of questions, it's seven minutes for questions and answers. Just keep that in mind when you're responding, that you're taking up time around the questions. The members will encourage you to elaborate, if they wish.

I'm going to start with Ms. Rhoad from Human Rights Watch.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad (Researcher, Women's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch Canada): Good evening. My name is Meghan Rhoad. I'm a women's rights researcher with Human Rights Watch. I'm here with Liesl Gertholtz, who is the executive director of the women's rights division at Human Rights Watch. Our colleague, Samer Muscati, is also present today.

We would like to express our gratitude to the committee for extending this invitation to speak on this very important subject. We would also like to recognize the traditional Algonquin territory in which we are present.

Human Rights Watch is an international organization that documents human rights abuses around the world and advocates for policy changes to ensure respect for human rights. Our involvement in the issue of violence against indigenous women and girls in Canada began when Justice for Girls, a Vancouver-based organization that advocates for the rights of girls in British Columbia, submitted a briefing paper to Human Rights Watch in November 2011. The paper described human rights violations against indigenous teens in northern B.C. and requested that Human Rights Watch investigate.

In the summer of 2012, Samer Muscati and I proceeded to conduct such an investigation, with facilitation by Justice for Girls, and indigenous women advocates and experts, Mavis Erickson and Sharon McIvor. We conducted five weeks of field research in northern B.C. examining how the Royal Canadian Mounted Police treated indigenous women and girls both as victims of crime and as suspects. We travelled Highway 16, often referred to as the Highway of Tears, where at least 18 and possibly more than 40 women and girls have gone missing or have been murdered over the last several decades. From Prince George to Prince Rupert and as far south as Williams Lake we visited communities devastated by loss, where the absence of answers in many cases has exacerbated decades of tension with the police.

In total, we conducted 87 interviews. We talked with indigenous women leaders, tribal chiefs, domestic violence counsellors, homeless shelter staff, youth outreach workers, court workers, and on an informal basis, current and former police officers. Most importantly, we spoke with 50 indigenous women and girls themselves about their experience with the police.

On the basis of that research and our analysis of policy information provided by the RCMP, Human Rights Watch published a report entitled, "Those Who Take Us Away: Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada", which I believe has been distributed to you tonight. The report, published almost a year ago, documents a deeply fractured relationship between the RCMP and indigenous women and girls in northern B.C. It documents not only how indigenous women and girls are under-protected by the police, but also how some have experienced outright police abuse.

According to our interviews in B.C., women who call the police for help following domestic violence or sexual assault may find themselves blamed for the abuse, are at times shamed for alcohol or substance use, and risk arrest for actions taken in self-defence. Likewise, despite policies requiring active investigation of all missing persons reports, some family members and service providers who had made calls to police with such reports said the police failed to investigate promptly.

Further, Human Rights Watch documented abusive policing of indigenous women and girls: young girls pepper-sprayed and tasered; a 12-year-old girl attacked by a police dog; a 17-year-old punched repeatedly by an officer who had been called to help her; women strip-searched by male officers; and physical and sexual assault of women in custody.

For many of the indigenous women and girls we interviewed, the abuses and other indignities visited on them by the police had come to define their relationship with law enforcement. At times the physical abuse was accompanied by verbal, racist, or sexist abuse. Concerns about police harassment led some women, including respected community leaders, to limit their time in public where they might come into contact with officers.

The situations documented in our research, such as a girl restrained with handcuffs tight enough to break her skin, detainees who had food thrown at them in their cells, and a detainee whose need for medical treatment was ignored, raise serious concerns about tactics used in policing of indigenous communities in B.C., and about the police officers' regard for the well-being and dignity of indigenous women and girls.

We do not contend that the information we gathered proves a pattern of routine systematic abuse; in fact, we recognize the honourable service of many police officers who work hard to protect communities in the north. However, when incidents of abuse take place in the context of an already tense relationship with the police, they have a particularly harmful, negative impact. They leave women and girls feeling that they have nowhere safe to turn.

• (1805)

Not surprisingly, indigenous women and girls report having little faith that police officers, who are responsible for mistreatment and abuse, can then offer them protection when they face violence in the wider community.

I will now turn this over to my colleague, Liesl Gerntholtz.

Ms. Liesl Gerntholtz (Executive Director, Women's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch Canada): I would like to move now to the recommendations we have made in the report, which we would urge this committee to consider.

First, police accountability is a necessity for the safety of indigenous women and girls. Meaningful police accountability requires independent civilian investigations of all allegations of serious police misconduct, including allegations of sexual abuse.

Our research showed that when police abuse happened or when the police failed to provide adequate protection, women, girls, and their families had limited recourse. Fear of retaliation for filing complaints runs high in the north, particularly for women and girls who live in small communities, who are homeless, or who have had multiple contacts with the criminal justice system. They could lodge a complaint with the Commission for Public Complaints against the RCMP, but the process is time consuming and the investigation of the complaint could, and often would, fall to the RCMP itself or to an external police force. The CPC's primary role was to monitor the processing of complaints by the RCMP, and the RCMP ultimately determined what remedial action would be taken.

While the passage in June 2013 of the Enhancing Royal Canadian Mounted Police Accountability Act resulted in some reforms, including the replacement of the CPC with the new Civilian Review and Complaints Commission, CRCC, which has expanded investigative powers, we do not feel this goes far enough. The law still does not obligate the RCMP commissioner to heed the recommendations of the CRCC, nor does it remove the CRCC from reporting to the Minister of Public Safety, a move that would have enhanced the body's independence. Moreover, although serious incidents are to be referred to provincial investigative bodies where these exist, the law does not foreclose the possibility of the RCMP investigating itself.

Even in a province like British Columbia where an independent civilian investigative body has been established, this system will not ensure proper investigation of all serious allegations of misconduct. British Columbia's Independent Investigations Office, IIO, which began operations in September 2012, is mandated to conduct criminal investigations regarding police-related incidents involving death or serious harm. Serious harm is, however, defined in such a way as to exclude sexual assault. Consequently, it is highly likely that even with the new federal law, sexual assault allegations against RCMP officers in B.C. will be investigated by police officers either external to or with the RCMP.

Second, the gravity of the crisis of violence against indigenous women demands a national inquiry. We were heartened by the establishment of this committee and we look forward to the results of your work. At the same time, our conviction that an independent national inquiry is necessary for addressing this violence has grown stronger over time. There is still so much that we do not know about the scope and the dynamics of the violence, as well as the police response to it. Recently published research indicates that the number of missing and murdered indigenous women across Canada may be over 800, but comprehensive data collection efforts are hampered by the fact that there is currently no precedent for the standardized collection of ethnicity data by police forces in Canada.

An independent inquiry could also examine in depth the range of complex economic, social, and historical factors that contribute to this violence. The need to address the problem at this level is painfully visible in northern B.C., where billboards warn women and girls of the dangers of hitchhiking but where many have few alternatives when they need to get to a doctor, go to court, visit family, or attend to any number of pressing needs. Apart from the clear infrastructure gaps, which have been known about for years, this speaks to the need for a larger discussion of the economic and social dynamics that put women at risk.

The desire to move forward and take immediate action is understandable, and indeed a national action plan is called for, but the action should be informed by a comprehensive independent inquiry with the full participation of all stakeholders, including individual indigenous women and girls, family members of victims, indigenous community representatives, women's rights advocates, law enforcement, and social service providers.

A national inquiry would represent a major undertaking, but the safety of Canada's indigenous women and girls is at risk, and has been for far too long.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

• (1810)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thank you very much, and thank you for a succinct presentation that stuck to the time limits.

We'll now go to Mr. Hassel from the Zebra Child Protection Centre.

Mr. Hassel, the floor is yours for 10 minutes.

Mr. Robert Hassel (Chief Executive Officer, Zebra Child Protection Centre): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and honourable members of the committee.

My name is Bob Hassel, and I'm the chief executive officer of the Zebra Child Protection Centre in Edmonton, Alberta. I'm fairly new to this role, having just taken over about a month ago. I'd like to thank you very much for allowing me to speak to you about the centre and about the very important issue of violence against indigenous women.

I thought it would be important to start with a brief history of our child advocacy centre, what we do and what we represent. Before our centre opened in 2002—we were the first centre of this type in Canada—a child who disclosed any type of physical or sexual abuse was treated the same way as an adult. They went into a police facility, and quite often they had to tell their tragic story of what happened to them numerous times before the case would even get going. Things were disjointed. Information was disjointed. There was great difficulty in building a case for justice.

That has changed. Thankfully, that has changed. Zebra, our centre, is away from a police facility. We're a stand-alone centre. We're in a place where a child can feel safe and protected. You probably can't see what's around me here, but everywhere in our room we have blankets, stuffed toys, etc., to make our children comfortable. They need to feel strong comfort when they come into our centre.

We also are a multidisciplinary team. We work with a community of professionals within this centre. We have the Edmonton Police Service, Alberta children's services, crown prosecutors, and a child-at-risk response team, which has social workers and police constables working together for that first intervention. We have professionals who do medical and trauma screening and we have volunteer advocates.

Our program provides a continuum of support to children and their non-offending caregivers through the entirety of the investigative and judicial processes. We create individualized support plans for appropriate community referrals and connections that are in the best interest of both the child and the family.

We also recognize that no one agency or profession alone is fully equipped to prioritize the well-being of an abused child and balance community needs. The shared efforts of several organizations will yield the best results.

Discovering the truth behind suspicions and allegations of child abuse is a time-consuming and complex task. Balancing the needs of the child with the needs of the justice system requires a special set of skills and knowledge, as well as sensitivity. We're fortunate that our collaborative approach creates a network of support that lends strength to the child during the entire investigative process, and also lends strength to law enforcement and the legal agencies behind it.

We sincerely believe this is a best practice, a leading practice. I believe there are now 26 child advocacy centres across Canada. I know that Calgary Police Service recently partnered and opened one up within the last year as well.

On our team we have child advocate volunteers. We have approximately 40 volunteers who help the centre run. We have seven full-time Zebra staff, and that includes me. We have Alberta child and family services. They've supplied two investigators and six social workers. With law enforcement, we have twelve detectives and six constables, who, as I said before, work with our social workers, with supervisors attached to that—a staff sergeant and two sergeants.

Just this week I was told that the RCMP will be joining us in our centre, which is fantastic, for a trial period of one year. That will help us get to the rural environment and hopefully spread the type of programming we have so that we can get out into the smaller agencies and areas.

We have Alberta crown prosecutors, mental health and medical personnel, and two dogs that we use to help with the interviews.

What's important to note is that we all have our own mandates, but we work together with the common goal of making the centre an appropriate place for the kid, where the kid can tell their story as to what occurred. We start the day with a multidisciplinary meeting. We support the team, we support the families, and we support the non-offending caregivers as well by providing trauma counselling and whatever we can do to help them get through this. Then, of course, working with the court system, hopefully we'll ensure that we deal with the offenders in an appropriate way.

I think I'm getting close to my time here, but I have some statistics to share. In 2012 we had 669 clients come through our centre, and 21% of those clients self-identified as indigenous people. In 2013 we had 861, so a huge increase, and 14.5% of those clients self-identified as indigenous people.

I'd like to thank you for allowing me to give those opening remarks. I know that one thing you're looking at is front-line assistance and prevention. When I look at that, I have a few ideas and a few things I've written down, and I've also talked to people, about what we would like to see.

● (1815)

While I still have a little bit of time here, I'll say that one of the main things is that in policing, in crown prosecution and in child protection areas, we're always looking at extra resources and at whether we are using our resources effectively.

I'm so happy that the RCMP have joined this centre with us, because I really believe we're doing a bit of a disservice to our rural areas by not having the same collaborative, multidisciplinary team approach that we have in Calgary and Edmonton. It would be of real benefit if we could get this out to some of our community partners. I know this is starting. There are some smaller areas that are starting with centres such as ours, where they will be working with a multidisciplinary team approach. I think it would only benefit the children who we work with.

Thank you very much for allowing me the time to tell you about our centre and what we do.

● (1820)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Great. Thanks, Mr. Hassel.

Now we'll go to a round of questions.

We'll start with Mr. Saganash, for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

First of all, I want to thank our witnesses for their statements. The committee always appreciates their cooperation as it examines this issue that is particularly troubling not only for aboriginal people, but for all Canadians.

Your presentation is greatly appreciated, on this side at the very least.

I must also commend the truly excellent work done by Human Rights Watch on these issues. I read the report you produced several times. I also want to thank you for the French version I just received.

I listened to your presentation very carefully, and I have several questions. I would like to begin with something less difficult, I hope. Mr. Hassel can certainly join the discussion.

In previous presentations, we heard about the federal Family Violence Prevention Program. Are you familiar with that program? Can you give us some examples of projects funded through that program that could be effective models for the communities? If you

know of some effective models that were submitted through this program, what were their main features?

My question is for all three witnesses.

[*English*]

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: We did review the domestic violence response policies of the RCMP as part of our analysis. We did not do a study of the level of services for domestic violence prevention in northern B.C.

I can also say that as we were doing our research, certainly the scarcity of resources in rural areas came up quite frequently. I don't believe we can point to a particular model of program, as that really wasn't the focus of our research.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Mr. Hassel, do you have some comments?

Mr. Robert Hassel: Yes.

Likewise, at the Zebra Child Protection Centre, we're mostly focused on child sexual and physical abuse and really aren't working with the domestic violence piece, although from my previous job, I do have a little bit of knowledge of some of the national programs that the RCMP are running.

I do know that the Edmonton Police Service have a model that they use called a domestic violence intervention team. Not to speak for them, but I'm well aware of their team, where they have a social worker and a police officer working together, as well as with victim support areas. They work on not only prevention, but also after the fact, when this does occur in domestic violence, to try to break that cycle of violence to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

I'm sorry I can't comment on it more, but I know they have been reasonably successful. I sure would be happy to point you in the right direction or to people you could speak to from that service.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: My question is for the Human Rights Watch representatives.

You just mentioned a recommendation from your previous report, regarding the need for an independent national public inquiry. I fully support that recommendation. I think that the entire universe is favourable to that recommendation, except for a certain group in Parliament.

You said this in your statement today:

[*English*]

“An independent inquiry could also examine in depth the range of complex economic, social, and historical factors that contribute to this violence.”

[*Translation*]

Could you provide us with more details on that point?

I am from a northern region where development is quite recent; it began in the 70s, and with it came certain consequences: with development came violence, especially violence against women.

I'd like to hear more about that from you, if possible.

[English]

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Certainly.

What we were hoping this would get to is a theme that was recurring in our interviews in the north. Service providers as well as indigenous women and girls themselves would raise the spectre of the residential school system in Canada and the intergenerational effects that has had. There is an association with homelessness, with suicide, with alcohol use, with depression and trauma. Some of those factors need to be considered in terms of ensuring that women and girls have the most options open to them in terms of pursuing a livelihood and generally for their safety.

In addition, in terms of the economic issues, as my colleague alluded to, in the north where so much of the controversy has surrounded the highway and hitchhiking, there has been quite an emphasis on making people aware of what the dangers are, but that has little effect if they can't do much to avoid them.

We think that a greater examination of, for example, why the dropout rate is higher for indigenous girls, is just part and parcel of discussing why there is this violence happening at such a disproportionate rate to indigenous women and girls.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): I'm sorry, but I have to interrupt. We're out of time for Mr. Saganash. Some of the other questioners may expand on that issue.

Mr. Dechert.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for being here this evening and for sharing your expertise with us.

I'd like to start by asking Ms. Rhoad from Human Rights Watch a few questions.

You said you interviewed 50 women and girls in your study in B. C. I assume they were families of victims.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Some of them were. Some of the women and girls were victims themselves of police abuse.

Mr. Bob Dechert: You interviewed the families of victims and the actual victims.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: That's right.

Mr. Bob Dechert: That's very interesting.

In terms of the various causes of the disappearance of women that you were researching, what role did domestic violence play in causing the women to go missing, in your view?

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: That's a good question.

Where domestic violence came up in our interviews, a lot of it was with respect to women who had tried and failed to get a response through the RCMP to domestic violence, with that being responsible for a general alienation, I think, from the police force.

In terms of the disappearances that we heard of, I can't think of a single one that was directly linked to domestic violence.

● (1830)

Mr. Bob Dechert: As you may know, this committee heard the testimony of many families of victims at our last session in December. Your report, which was published I think last week, "World Report 2014", unfortunately doesn't mention that. I guess you weren't aware of it at the time you wrote the report.

What we were told by many of those victims' families was that the women who were missing had been abused by either a family member or a spouse, a partner. In a number of cases, it was the understanding of the victims' families that the murderer was actually that domestic partner, or that in other cases the women ran away from their communities to get away from the domestic abuse.

I am wondering if you found anything similar in your research. It's kind of curious that the families of the 12 victims, the families from across Canada who we heard from, didn't have a different story than the ones you spoke to in British Columbia.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: We certainly did hear about domestic abuse, absolutely. That was something that came up multiple times in our interviews, but again, we did not hear of it as the impulse for someone to go missing.

In part, I think that could be because some of this may involve women who left the north, went to Vancouver, and maybe disappeared from there. Certainly, that's a huge issue unto itself, the Pickton disappearances, etc., and maybe that would emerge more strongly in this. But again, I don't remember that particular set of facts presenting itself.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Okay. I'd like to switch to another part of your testimony.

You spoke about the police response to reports of missing persons. We've heard that the aboriginal police forces and the provincial, territorial, and RCMP forces have improved their operations and their procedures with respect to missing persons. The RCMP now have a national missing persons bureau and a national missing persons database that is accessible by all police officers; so they seem to have been taking steps, in recent years at least, to address some of these issues.

What struck me with regard to the victims' families we spoke with or listened to in the last session was that many of them expressed that they had not received much information from the police and from the justice system, including during the investigation right up to the time of a charge being laid, in cases where there were charges laid, and through the prosecution process. There was a frustration that they were somehow kept out of and not allowed to participate both in the investigation process and in the prosecution process.

Did you hear any of those kinds of comments from the people you spoke to in British Columbia?

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Absolutely. That was something we heard a number of times. I think part of the tragedy there is that if the police are diligently doing their work, they should get credit for it. Improved communication with the families is absolutely essential to disabuse them of their beliefs about inaction.

In some cases, though, families were talking about having made phone calls to police to try to get updates and not seeing a response. I do think it's a mix of actual inaction and then not communicating about what is happening—

Mr. Bob Dechert: I'm sorry to cut you off.

That is very consistent with some of the things we heard as well, a lack of communication.

You know that the federal government is currently contemplating a victims bill of rights which would address some of these issues. Is this something you would suggest be included in a victims bill of rights, that victims have the right to be kept informed through the investigative process, through the prosecutorial process? Would that address some of the issues that you heard in B.C.?

● (1835)

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Absolutely, I think that would be very important.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Did you hear anything about sentencing?

We heard from a number of people that when there was somebody who was prosecuted for a murder, they got a very light sentence. A number of people said, "He got away with murder." Did you hear anything like that when you spoke to people in B.C.? They said they were losing faith in the justice system because they thought the sentences weren't appropriate.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Not that I can immediately recall. That could be because we were focused really on the investigative phase and not the prosecution. Certainly, I have heard there are still concerns about the sentence that was given to Judge Ramsay in northern B.C. That's the only thing that immediately comes to mind.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Fair enough.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thank you, Mr. Dechert, we're well out of time.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Ms. Bennett, for seven minutes.

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

First, I want to thank the committee again for hearing from the families. I think it really changed a lot. It really is important to hear from them. A couple of the families that we had heard before were unable to come in December. Their story is one of this not being taken seriously, the investigation not being taken seriously, or the disappearance of young women being labelled as inevitable, and they didn't see a search happening, didn't see anybody really looking. I think one of the stepdad's we heard from in October said that they didn't even talk to him, so who did they talk to. I think there was a feeling of breakdown in trust.

What you've described here in terms of your recommendations.... We don't have very much time left in this committee, so we really would love you to tell us what you want to see in our report.

Police accountability obviously you'd like in the report, but that's sort of after the fact.

Obviously, the relationship is broken in these places. What would be your recommendation to repair the relationship? What kinds of

things would communities have to do to build back a trusting relationship because of what has happened?

The other piece is we've heard that people aren't out on the Highway of Tears for no reason. Maybe they're fleeing domestic abuse, but we've even heard that some young girls are out there fleeing abuse of foster care. It's not just doctor's appointments. Did you hear anything about foster care?

Also, we would like you to help us by saying what you'd like in the report, and how you would repair the relationship, because that's very much the substance of your report.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: I have a few quick points.

One is I commend the committee for hearing from the families. I do think that's so important. It would also be wonderful if the committee could hear from some women and girls who have experienced mistreatment by the police. That would be terrific.

On foster care, really quickly, yes that came up repeatedly, in part because of the relationship of foster care to the Judge Ramsay situation and how some of the young girls who were exploited were in foster care. We also heard about disappearances from foster care, including one where the initial reaction of the police was, "Why are you calling us? This is not our business." In part that was because they were considering this particular child as high risk, where actually their policy says the exact opposite, where if someone is high risk, that's all the more reason to begin investigating immediately, not to sideline it. The approach there was sort of they saw this as one of, "Well, of course she's gone. She's disappeared, but she'll come back," or whatever.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Or she had run away.

● (1840)

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Yes, exactly. It's not that kind of disappearance.

Quickly, for repairing the relationship, I think accountability actually is the first thing, even though it's post.... We started to see there was a glimmer of hope in some of the community leaders' eyes about there being a new Independent investigations office in B.C. It would be interesting to know what they think now that the office has been in operation. That, in and of itself, was starting to restore a little bit of faith that they could have a relationship, because they would know that if something went wrong, officers would be accountable.

I would also suggest greater training on first nations history. That is a component of RCMP training, but we were hearing from service providers who had witnessed or participated in some training, and they said the most effective ones were those held in person where they were able to have dialogues with officers. Sometimes those were voluntary meetings, so they weren't sure they were getting the officers they really needed to reach.

We certainly have further recommendations in our report, but I think this is another point where the national inquiry comes in. That would be an opportunity to build trust with the police.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The government has put in place a national action plan on trafficking, but you are calling for a national inquiry. You say that a national action plan on violence against women, particularly missing and murdered indigenous women can't be absolutely effective unless there's an inquiry first to find out what happened.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Yes, that is our position. We noted that a number of countries raised the issue of the need for a national action plan on this when Canada was reviewed before the Human Rights Council this past spring. Our feeling is that if there is going to be an effective plan, it does need to be informed by a fully inclusive and participatory process that involves all the stakeholders.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Did Australia do that first? They have a national action plan, but did they have a public inquiry?

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: I couldn't tell you. I do not know.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Is their plan working?

Ms. Liesl Gernholtz: Australia has had a number of processes that have attempted to understand better the relationship between indigenous people, including women and girls, and law enforcement. There have been a number of processes over the past decade. It's debatable whether they've been successful. There's a sense that there has been some level of trust restored in law enforcement. In Australia it wasn't just the police who were implicated in abuse.

Probably most people would acknowledge that in order to have an effective national action plan that has targeted recommendations that are going to address the issues, it is important first to understand exactly what the issues are and how the community defines those issues. That's why we've recommended that this process be inclusive and participatory, so that there is a range of stakeholders, including the RCMP, so that we can fully understand how these issues are seen and what a national action plan needs to address.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thank you, Ms. Bennett.

Ms. Brown, you have seven minutes.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

In 2011, I was part of the status of women committee here on Parliament Hill. We undertook a study on violence against aboriginal women. We wrote a report. It was presented to Parliament. I don't know whether you're familiar with it.

During the course of that process, I did a little bit of my own investigation in order to inform myself. When I started my research, I discovered that more than 120,000 reports had been done on that issue.

First, have you used any of those reports to inform yourselves? I'm sorry that I haven't had a chance to read your report, but has that been part of what you have done to inform yourself? What more can we learn when we have 120,000 reports?

I note that you said you've spoken directly with 50 indigenous women and girls, and specifically about their experiences with police officers. I note that we have had—just from counting them right now, because I didn't remember how many there were—more than

100 witnesses with the committee investigation. We also spent \$120,000 criss-crossing the country meeting with aboriginal women, going to the communities, and speaking with aboriginal women in their homes.

I guess the reason I'm puzzled about another report is that in the witness statements we had from the families when we met with them on December 9, Bernadette Smith from Winnipeg said:

I just want to say thank you for listening and inviting us here. I really hope that you take what we're saying, what we're sharing, and you put it into something, but not into a report. I'm tired of reports. I'm sorry. It's report after report that sits on a shelf somewhere. I want tangible action. I want something to come out of this that you're going to take and you're going to actually put into place so that we're not increasing these numbers.

If we have 120,000 reports, another inquiry means 120,001 reports.

Where does that lead us? Why isn't it that we want to get to action? We want to change the direction of these things. We want to stop the violence against aboriginal women and to put in place concrete measures that will help these communities move forward.

We listened to a witness back in November who identified that domestic violence was so much a part of what they were experiencing, and that the time had come when it was no longer acceptable. She talked about uncles raping nieces. My question to her was, when was that acceptable?

If that's what we're going to put into another report, how does that help us move forward and get out of this terrible situation in which we find these women and children?

• (1845)

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Your question is one that's on a lot of people's minds, including a lot of people in B.C., as they've just financed the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry. They're wondering what more would come from a national inquiry.

We don't need just another study. We do need something that will lead to concrete action. I think the value of an independent national inquiry is that it would be politically independent.

Beyond that, the success of the inquiry certainly would depend on how fully it allowed for the inclusion and participation of the families of indigenous women and—

Ms. Lois Brown: Are you telling me that out of 120,000 reports that are already done...? These have not been done by government; these have been undertaken by independent organizations, some of them individuals, some of them research projects that have been done for universities. Is another report going to satisfy moving forward?

In your report you've said, "Many of the killings and disappearances were between the 1960s and the 1990s, but 39 percent occurred after 2000." That means that 61% of them occurred before 2000. Was there ever a request for a national inquiry when it was the fact that 61% of these had been done before?

We have all of these reports sitting on shelves, and nothing is being done with them.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: I can't say whether there was a request at the time that happened. Those numbers, I should note, are from the Native Women's Association of Canada, and their data collection stopped in 2010 when their funding ran out. It may well be that more cases have happened since then. The numbers could be greater and the balance between what happened in the last—

Ms. Lois Brown: This is your report.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: I understand, but—

• (1850)

Ms. Lois Brown: That's from your report, so those numbers are as current as they come right now.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: I'm not disputing that's it's what in our report, but what I'm saying is that the numbers are incomplete. That's because the data collection was unable to be continued. They did not get further funding for data collection, and police forces across Canada don't collect comprehensive ethnicity data on victims, so we don't know what the balance is between lives lost from 1960 to 2000 and from 2000 onward.

Ms. Lois Brown: Was there a call for a national inquiry before 2000? Is that something that—

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: I do not know.

Ms. Lois Brown: —Human Rights Watch put forward?

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: No. Our engagement—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: NWAC money was—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Sorry, Ms. Bennett, but you don't have the floor.

You have only five seconds, so please continue.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: We did not engage on this issue before 2011.

Ms. Lois Brown: Good.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thank you, Ms. Brown.

Ms. Mathysen, you have five minutes.

We're now in the five-minute round, so the questions and responses will have to take place within five minutes.

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

To the witnesses, thank you for your presentation. I appreciate it very much.

I have to say there have been all kinds of recommendations, in fact, over 100,000 recommendations. I was on the status of women committee in 2010 when we engaged in that travel across the country. We talked to women. We talked to them about what was happening to them. We talked about solutions. In regard to those solutions, they said that there has to be action.

The 2011 report was less than reassuring, and we haven't seen any of the action that you many of us have been talking about, so let's get down to action.

One of the things we're talking about is a national action plan that would provide an investment in front-line services and shelters on reserve. When we went out in 2010, women said, "We are abused. We're in danger, and there is nowhere to go." They said there was a housing crisis on reserve and there was nowhere they could be safe. They had to travel hundreds of miles, with their kids, into a strange community in order to feel safe.

In terms of that and that plea for support, should there be a national action plan that does provide those front-line services and shelters on reserve, to make sure that women and girls experiencing the violence get immediate support at home with their community and with those who would make them feel safe and comfortable in place? Is that a possibility in terms of what this committee should be recommending?

Ms. Liesl Gertholtz: I think that's a part of what this committee should be recommending.

I want to really refocus what this discussion should be about and what our research was about. Our research was not about the missing and murdered women. It was not about the high rates of domestic violence among aboriginal women and girls. We don't dispute that those are both enormously important problems. Our research looked at a very critical component of how one responds to both of those issues, and that is, first, the failure of the RCMP to provide protection and support to victims of domestic violence, victims of sexual violence, and victims of all forms of violence against women. It then also examined the smaller number of cases wherein the RCMP are in fact perpetrators of abuse.

In terms of the work we have done all over the world, responses to domestic violence require a comprehensive response. It requires all of the things that you and others have mentioned, but it also requires, critically, that the police play their role, that there is a level of trust between the police and the communities, and that victims know they can go to the police for support.

What this report clearly illustrates is that the women and girls we interviewed—who are victims, not families of victims; we interviewed victims of human rights violations—don't know, or believe, or trust that if they report cases to the RCMP, those cases will be investigated and will be taken seriously, and that they will get the protection they need from the RCMP.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you. In fact we heard some of that in the tour across the country in 2010.

You've called for a national inquiry. One of the other things we are concerned about is a public awareness and prevention campaign. If indeed there was this national inquiry, would it lend itself to creating that awareness, and hopefully the prevention campaign, so that we could indeed end violence against indigenous women and girls?

● (1855)

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: I think a national awareness campaign in conjunction with an inquiry, or later with an action plan makes a lot of sense. The one thing I would emphasize, as we've said before, is that it has to go beyond raising awareness. We do need to address the underlying factors that make indigenous women and girls more vulnerable to violence. We can't simply tell them not to hitchhike, or tell them not to put themselves in dangerous situations, when there really is no other recourse. Addressing the systemic inequality needs to be a piece of that.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: And give them the resources that they need to create their own solutions.

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Absolutely.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Ms. Mathysen, you have five seconds.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: One of the things that we also heard was that these women know what they need in order to end this violence and our obligation is to make sure that is provided to them.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Great thanks, Ms. Mathysen.

Mr. Strahl, for the final round.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

We heard from Shawn Atleo the national chief of the AFN, a fellow British Columbian. When he met with us, he said a couple for things. He said:

I want to be very clear with all of you tonight. The families who have lost loved ones—mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends—are not asking for more study to delay moving forward on what we know needs to happen.

He went on to say: I believe we know what the solutions are.

I asked him, and I'll ask you because you alluded to it, in British Columbia millions of dollars were spent. There were very high hopes for the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry regarding missing women on the downtown eastside. From my perspective as someone who lives there, it completely fell apart. The law enforcement, victims' families, the legal community, no one was satisfied with it. It was demanded. It was set-up. It was proceeded with. They went through with it, and at the end of the day no one was happier as a result.

I know it's not quite the same, but given that experience in British Columbia, what do you think went wrong there, and why would a national experience be any better?

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: I think where the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry in B.C. really fell apart was on the initial arrangements around how civil society would be able to participate. There were a number of groups that were granted standing, but then were unable to participate because there was no funding for legal representation. There was a very out of balance situation where there were many legal representatives for police officers involved, and there was one representative for indigenous interests, and one legal representative for the interests of the downtown eastside. In fact the representative for the indigenous interests ended up resigning, because she was having such difficulty putting the issues that were of importance to her constituency before the commission.

I would say the critical thing for a national commission of inquiry would be to learn from the B.C. example and to make sure that all stakeholders are not just invited to the table, but are made to have real access so that they can actually be there at the table.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Okay, thanks.

On page two of your testimony you mention that women calling the police for help following domestic violence or sexual assault may find themselves blamed for the abuse, shamed, etc. I'm assuming you've done some work in non-indigenous, non-aboriginal communities. How does that compare? I would assume there are other women, non-aboriginal, who have a similar experience. I don't know how you do that with colloquial stories, but do you have any evidence that it is significantly worse, or similar, based on other factors? Could you talk about that?

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Certainly.

Yes, absolutely, there is a lot of room for improvement in domestic violence in many of the contexts that we work in across the globe. In doing the interviews in British Columbia, certainly some of the service providers we talked to said, "Yes, in general, we're not satisfied with how the police respond to domestic violence", but there's a—

● (1900)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Regardless of aboriginal—

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: Yes, regardless. However, with aboriginal women and girls, there's an additional level of discrimination in how they are treated. The first question always asked is, "Were you drinking?" There are certain ways in which the treatment of indigenous victims was distinct from the otherwise still not perfect treatment of domestic violence victims.

Mr. Mark Strahl: This will be my final question. You talked about building trust. How do you think that a national inquiry, which would no doubt have plenty of examples—exactly what you've said—build trust between policing, and you mentioned the RCMP, and indigenous communities?

Ms. Meghan Rhoad: There was this weird paradox in some of our interviews where women were very afraid to talk to us for fear of retaliation for complaining. At the same time, once they did talk, it was clear that they thought this was normal and that it was perfectly acceptable in their communities for them to be roughed up by the police on a fairly regular basis.

I think by having a national inquiry that included that issue, you would be sending a strong message that this is not acceptable, that this is not the state of play that we're going to allow to continue. Validating the experiences of indigenous women and girls through a national inquiry and the gravity that kind of process brings is very important.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thank you, Ms. Rhoad.

That concludes this round of questioning.

I want to thank our witnesses.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Madam Chair—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Just let me do the thanking first, Romeo, and then I'll recognize you.

Mr. Hassel, I want to thank you for taking the time to join our committee. I know it's a little more awkward by video conference, but I want to thank you for participating today.

Ms. Rhoad and Ms. Gerntholtz, I want to thank you again for appearing before the committee.

Before I suspend for five minutes, Mr. Saganash, you have a point of order.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair.

At least two or three times during Ms. Brown's intervention I heard her talk about 120,000 reports that have been made. At least two or three times she specifically mentioned 120,000 reports. I want to allow her to correct the record. That is not the case, obviously. I know she's against having a national independent public inquiry, but she doesn't have to exaggerate, I believe.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Mr. Saganash, I'm going to interrupt there. That's not a point of order at this point.

I wonder, Ms. Brown, since you did cite 120,000 reports, if it would be possible to provide the committee with the source for that, or a list of the reports.

Ms. Lois Brown: I'll do the Google search again and get that for you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): That would be welcomed.

Mr. Dechert, did you have a point of order?

Mr. Bob Dechert: No, Madam Chair, I was just going to point out that I don't think it was a point of order.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): I got there before you.

Again, I thank the witnesses.

I'm going to suspend for five minutes so we can set up for the next witnesses.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

• (1905)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): We will now reconvene, please.

I want to welcome our next set of witnesses. Ms. Pate is here from the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. Ms. O'Sullivan is from the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

I'm sure you were in the room, but I'm just reminding people to keep their presentations to about 10 minutes. When members pose their questions, the first round will be for seven minutes and that includes the member's question and your response.

Ms. Pate, the floor is yours.

• (1910)

Ms. Kim Pate (Executive Director, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies): Thank you very much to the committee for inviting us.

I also want to start by acknowledging the traditional territory on which we have the privilege of being, which is unceded Algonquin territory. Every day of the last 30 years that I have had the privilege and responsibility of walking in, and more importantly walking out of, federal penitentiaries and provincial and territorial jails, local police lock-ups and juvenile facilities, the colonial legacy that is the reality for our indigenous peoples is brought home.

I start this way because it is very much, in our view, linked to the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women. It's very much linked to the lack of entitlements that women in particular, and indigenous women even more so, have experienced. It's in my lifetime that enfranchisement has happened for indigenous peoples. It's in my lifetime that we have seen any discussion of violence against women taken seriously. It's been in my working lifetime that we've seen issues of the racist and misogynous treatment of indigenous women by police, by correctional authorities, and by most state actors. I think it's no accident therefore that today we're still having these discussions.

I first started working on the issue of missing and murdered women back when our sisters in the downtown eastside were raising it, particularly the Aboriginal Women's Action Network and then the Native Women's Association of Canada, and many other indigenous groups who started to raise the alert.

What I had not initially linked it to but very quickly did was that a number of the women were women we already knew. It is no accident that in our prisons, particularly our federal penitentiaries, more than 34% are indigenous women, and yet they represent as a group less than 2% of our Canadian population. It's not because they pose the greatest risk to public safety. It is very much linked to their marginalization and victimization and therefore is also linked to the manner in which we criminalize and institutionalize in particular imprisoned people.

One of the ways this became very clear to us was that when some of the first victims for which Robert Pickton was prosecuted were identified, they were women I knew from prison.

Much was made of the fact that they were women who may have experienced violence on the street and from the state and at the hands of people they knew. Not a lot was made of the fact that they had also experienced the violence of the state in terms of the lack of support services for those who were survivors of residential schools, as was identified by our Native Women's Association and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in their work on the Arrest the Legacy project and by the efforts that the Native Women's Association has made in the Sisters In Spirit reports. Nor was a lot linked to the fact that we had then abandoned people to social services and child welfare systems that were also operating with fairly racist assumptions, including assumptions that weren't necessarily supportive of women.

It's partly that legacy that contributes to our having more indigenous children in the care of the state now than we did even at the time of residential schools. It also contributes to the violence that women experience on the street and the commodification of women and girls.

We're in a moment in which we have an opportunity to do a number of things.

We do support the call for a commission of inquiry, not because we want another report. In the area that I work in, we see many, many reports. I wouldn't necessarily say that those reports are bad. But one of the things that an independent commission of inquiry does, in much the same way independent commissions of inquiry have always done, is to bring to light for the Canadian public what is happening and to make very clear that what is happening should not be happening and to allow for a non-partisan means of addressing the issues that need to be addressed.

• (1915)

A commission of inquiry does not have to be only a report. A commission of inquiry can lead to action. I would suggest that an independent, well-resourced commission of inquiry, combined with a number of important recommendations about police, court, and corrections accountability, is also vital.

We also need to be looking—in the next year, the government will have to—at the whole issue of the role of misogynist violence in pushing women into a position of being increasingly commodified. The sexual commodification of women, particularly indigenous women, has been very real for many years. We have tended not to look at it as a separate issue, despite the fact that we know that many women, in the context of the virtual elimination of national standards around needed social services, social assistance, and health care, have been forced to end up literally on the street, in our prisons, or dead.

In a context where we have no province or territory where people can survive on social assistance, in a context where we have a country where far too many reserves don't even have drinkable water, and in a context where we have far too many reserves that don't have adequate accommodation, schooling, or social supports of any kind for children, women, and all community members, it's not accidental that in fact we see more of those individuals at increased risk of both fleeing those situations or being forced out of those situations.

I agree that we need adequate resources in those places. Those are actions that could be taken in the form of national standards. I believe it is the responsibility of all members of Parliament, their fiduciary and legal obligation, to ensure that those kinds of standards exist.

In short, I agree that families want action. Families that I know, women that I know, want action.

I'll give an example of a very concrete action we're involved with right now that links to this issue. When I was in Nova Scotia in November, and when I was doing work in conjunction with a task force on sexually exploited and trafficked women and girls with the Women's Foundation, one of the things we became aware of was that many indigenous communities in the Atlantic region are fearful

about the new shipbuilding business going into the Halifax area. The elders and the women in the community are already signalling that they know that this will “invite”—the term that others used—or likely draw a demand for the sexual services of many young women.

I commend to you the work that the Native Women's Association has done in this area. The research they have recently done shows that most of the young indigenous women who end up on the street being traded for sexual services often start between the ages of seven and twelve. The families and communities from which those young women come in Atlantic Canada are very fearful that they will likely see more demand for that kind of sexual commodification of their women and girls in the coming years.

We are calling upon not just the private sector, for instance, in the form of the Irving shipbuilding family who will be going in there, but also government resources, federal, provincial, and municipal, to be allocated to ensure that women and girls have other opportunities and do not continue to face the marginalization, the victimization, and the resulting criminalization and institutionalization that is increasingly their legacy, particularly if they are indigenous women and girls.

We do call on the need for front-line services on reserves, adequate housing, guaranteed livable incomes, and adequate social services, and the need for violence of all forms to be taken very seriously, including sexual violence, not just in the family, not just in a domestic sphere, but also in the context of the increased commodification of women and girls.

• (1920)

I thank you very much, and I look forward to your questions.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thank you, Ms. Pate.

Ms. O'Sullivan, for 10 minutes.

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan (Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime): Good evening, Madam Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the important issue of violence against aboriginal women in Canada.

I too wish to acknowledge the traditional lands of the Algonquin Nation, where we are meeting today.

I would like to begin by providing you with a brief overview of our office's mandate. The Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime was created in 2007 to provide a voice for victims at the federal level. We do this by receiving and reviewing complaints from victims, by promoting and facilitating access to federal programs and services for victims of crime by providing information and referrals, by promoting the basic principles of justice for victims of crime, by raising awareness among criminal justice personnel and policy-makers about the needs and concerns of victims, and by identifying systemic and emerging issues that negatively impact victims of crime.

The office helps victims in two main ways, individually and collectively. We help victims individually by speaking with victims every day, answering their questions and addressing their complaints. We help victims collectively by reviewing important issues and making recommendations to the federal government on how to improve its laws, policies, or programs to better support victims of crime.

I have been invited here today to discuss a very important issue: violence against aboriginal women in Canada. As you all know, violence against aboriginal women is far more common than among the rest of the population. Women are facing violence at alarming rates, and in my opinion, Canada must take swift and decisive action.

Today I would like to share with you some of the specific aspects of this issue that our office has looked at and the recommendations we have recently shared with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights during their recent visits to Canada.

The first item I would like to discuss is the potential for a national commission of inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada and the subsequent or concurrent development of a related action plan. I support the call for the creation of this commission and action plan.

Research shows that simply being an aboriginal person in Canada significantly increases the likelihood of experiencing violent victimization. In a study where all other factors were held constant, the odds of being the victim of a violent crime is approximately three times higher among aboriginal people. Available statistical evidence further paints a picture of aboriginal women's lives being particularly marked by vulnerability to violent victimization, especially domestic and/or sexual violence. In 2009 the General Social Survey conducted by Statistics Canada revealed that aboriginal women are about three times as likely to be victims of violent crime as non-aboriginal women. Further, 79% of aboriginal women respondents to the survey stated that they had been victimized by a male, with additional studies showing that on average, one-quarter to one-half of aboriginal women were victims of sexual abuse as children compared to a 20% to 25% average rate within the non-aboriginal population.

However, while these statistics are alarming, they are not sufficiently comprehensive. Unfortunately, in Canada there exists a gap of reliable data on the true scale of violence against aboriginal women. Data contained in the General Social Survey, some of which I have shared with you, are limited only to certain violent crimes, sexual and physical assault, robbery. The General Social Survey does not capture homicides. Normally, the Homicide Survey would assist in filling in the gaps here, but the Homicide Survey only collects socio-demographic information when it is known. As a result, in about half of the cases, the aboriginal identity of a victim is reported by police as unknown.

Together, our current data collection practices don't enable us to have a full and clear picture of the scope of this problem. As I am sure members are aware, the Native Women's Association of Canada's Sisters in Spirit initiative did some work in this area. Their initiative, driven and led by aboriginal women, worked to conduct

research and raise awareness of the alarmingly high rates of violence against aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

As part of this, Sisters in Spirit conducted ongoing research that gathered statistical information on violence against aboriginal women. As of March 2010, the research concluded that there were more than 582 cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada, many of which were not formally reported to law enforcement agencies. These figures demonstrate an extreme vulnerability to violence among aboriginal women and girls and a reluctance to report victimization to police.

Beyond the statistics are the reasons behind them and these, in my view, are key to truly understanding the issue in order to effectively address it. We need to look more closely at the factors related to the increased rate of victimization. Where have the systems broken down? What are the root causes, and what further supports or resources are necessary to address them? We don't have the complete answers to these questions yet. This, in combination with our lack of comprehensive data, highlights the need to better understand the causes of this vulnerability, as well as the crucial importance of developing informed strategies for prevention and appropriate response.

● (1925)

Informed strategies should be ones developed with the aboriginal community itself. To be effective, any inquiry, plan, or strategy developed must defer to the leadership, knowledge, and expertise that only Canada's aboriginal community can provide.

While there recently has been a provincial commission of inquiry in British Columbia, the commission focused on missing and murdered women in the province of British Columbia and was not specific to aboriginal women and girls, nor did it explore the multiple factors that have led to significant violence against them.

Clearly, the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women is not unique to British Columbia; it is a problem national in scope. A national commission of inquiry would allow for the voices of Canada's aboriginal women and communities to be heard, respected, and considered in processes and structures designed to address their needs. In this way, strategies for preventing and responding to this crisis could be specifically tailored to the needs of aboriginal women and rooted in understandings of the social and economic conditions that have contributed to their vulnerability.

The Government of Canada has an important leadership role to play in preventing and responding to the crisis of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. As such, in my view, the initiation of an inclusive national commission of inquiry on Canada's missing and murdered aboriginal women, with a corresponding commitment to implementing the commission's recommendations, would be an appropriate and necessary next step.

In addition to the creation of a commission of inquiry, the creation of a missing persons and unidentified remains index, or MPI, is of importance to the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women. Currently, unidentified remains fall under the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial coroner's offices. This means that DNA comparisons are only an option at the respective provincial and territorial level, which prevents DNA comparisons and/or matches to unidentified remains from occurring across all provinces and territories. At a time when cross-border travel and even trafficking is more and more common, this can prove to be a serious barrier to solving or advancing cases. A missing person's index would provide the capacity to compare the DNA profiles of missing persons with unidentified remains. This would ultimately strengthen law enforcement's investigative capacity by providing a tool for this comparison, important work not only within a province but across Canada.

Support for a missing persons index has been shown by the Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials. The committee, whose establishment was mandated by the federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for justice, conducted a review of issues related to the high number of murdered and missing women in Canada. The committee released its report and recommendations in January 2012. Included within it was the recommendation that "jurisdictions support further consideration of the feasibility and utility of a missing persons index". There has also been considerable support for the creation of a national missing persons index from the Canadian public, law enforcement, victims groups, parliamentarians, and various levels of government.

In the interests of time, I will not share the details of this support here now, but I would be more than happy to speak to it further during questions. As you can imagine, with such strong support from such diverse groups, it is difficult for the families and loved ones of missing persons to understand the delays in developing this important index.

I have had the opportunity to speak with victims and victim groups, who have articulated a sincere and determined hope that the development of a missing persons and unidentified remains index be given the priority it deserves in order to alleviate the suffering that many families of missing persons face not knowing what may have happened to their loved one.

For this reason, my office on numerous occasions has made recommendations to the Minister of Public Safety that the development of these indices be given a high priority and that jurisdictional issues be resolved on an urgent basis. To date, legal, privacy, and jurisdictional concerns continue to be cited by the Government of Canada in its response to the office's recommendations as the primary impediments to the implementation. We understand that cost may also be an issue of concern.

Finally, I would like to briefly mention the importance and duty we all have to ensure that the programs, services, policies, and laws that we have in place for victims of crime be sensitive and adaptable to the needs of aboriginal victims.

Recently, I had the opportunity to make a series of videos of victims and victim advocates sharing their views and experiences in order to help raise awareness of victim issues. As part of the series, we had the privilege of having Dr. Dawn Harvard, interim president

of the Native Women's Association of Canada, speak about the needs and experiences of aboriginal victims.

In the views she shared, Dr. Harvard recounted the story of an elder aboriginal victim who, after seeking assistance and struggling to write out a victim impact statement, was told that the statement was not on the correct form and that she needed to go home and do it again. Dr. Harvard also shared with us the realities of lower literacy levels in smaller communities and how government services that require Internet access or the completion of complex forms can pose significant accessibility barriers for aboriginal victims.

While the majority of victim services in Canada are provided at the provincial level, I do think it is worth noting the importance of considering these needs when it comes to the service and programs we offer at the federal level.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for its consideration of the above issues and for its work in examining this important issue.

● (1930)

As discussed, I support the creation of a national commission of inquiry into the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women, as well as the national missing persons and unidentified human remains DNA index. I encourage the committee, in its work, to emphasize the need for the federal government to provide accessible, appropriate services and programs to aboriginal victims of crime.

I thank you for your time and welcome any questions you may have.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thank you, Ms. O'Sullivan.

We'll go to the first rounds of questioning, which are for seven minutes.

I'll start with Ms. Ashton for seven minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you to Ms. Pate and Ms. O'Sullivan for joining us today on this very important study we're doing.

Ms. O'Sullivan, I want to begin with you.

There was a forum hosted by your office in April 2013 that identified the importance of having culturally appropriate services. In particular, participants identified that, "there is a high specific need for culturally shaped services for Indigenous people". I'm wondering if you have any initiatives to support culturally specific programming for victims, and obviously, particularly with respect to indigenous people. If so, could you describe them? Or perhaps you're working on this area right now. Please let us know.

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan: As I indicated as the federal ombudsman, the majority of direct services for victims of crime in Canada are the responsibility of the provinces and territories.

When we hear of a lot of the immediate needs of victims of crime, such as... I'll make this comment, because it got talked about. I was fortunate enough to be here for the previous presenters. When you talk about the needs of victims of crime, a lot of the needs they have and the need to be respected is about their treatment within the criminal justice system.

When we talk about needs, obviously there's an entire continuum. Obviously, prevention is hugely important, because if prevention works, we don't need the rest of this. If prevention doesn't work, we have to look at early intervention, and then, unfortunately, when a crime happens, there's the court system, and there are post-conviction and post-release. For many victims—I also had the privilege of reading some of the transcripts—as you will hear, the needs are lifelong.

We looked at direct services. It really is the majority of them that are offered. I have had the privilege of going across this country and speaking to many different victims, including at the forum. One of the things the forum really brought out, and one of the things that we felt was important, and I think it's reflected as well in my comments, was to involve people from the aboriginal community in the development of that forum, in the development of the themes that were there.

As I indicated, around the eight themes we do have some very powerful videos that are available on our website in which victims are speaking directly to what some of those needs are.

There are many different programs, many services, and many examples throughout Canada, but the majority, as I say, would be offered at the provincial and territorial levels.

One of the things that we do use our voice for, however, is to get that message out about what those needs are. It was spoken about again very much around this table: the need to be informed. I have to tell you that the need for information for victims, and it being culturally appropriate... I'll use one example from Dr. Dawn Harvard. I have had the privilege of speaking to victims from aboriginal first nations, Métis, and Inuit as well. In recognizing the cultural...I'll just give one simple example.

I had the privilege of going up to Iqaluit and going to the women's shelter and meeting different people. Some of the victim support workers who worked there talked about their culture and fact that while we go to a court of law and say, "This is the person who did this", they say "maybe". It's a learning experience for me. In order to really understand, I had the privilege of listening to some grandmothers, who talked about the fact that there are two different dialects of Inuktitut and many different languages, and who also said that some of the words in the criminal justice system that we use regularly don't exist in their language.

Those are just some examples I've had of people sharing. We have created a national framework of information, dialogue, and exchange. We want to ensure that we include aboriginal people in the development and in the recommendations we make from our office, but again, the majority of those direct services are the responsibility of the provinces and territories.

• (1935)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Ms. Pate, you spoke about your significant experience in this field. What's come up many times here is the lack of capacity that organizations have to advocate on behalf of indigenous women, indigenous people, and women, and the trend of pretty severe cuts that organizations have faced. Some organizations simply no longer exist.

I'm wondering if you could speak to that in terms of how it connects with this issue and the voices that perhaps we're not hearing, both in terms of addressing the issue and in terms of prevention and finding solutions.

Ms. Kim Pate: It was part of why I mentioned in the context of an inquiry why that can be valuable, because many of the groups that have historically existed, including one that I mentioned, the Aboriginal Women's Action Network, don't have resources. Most of the groups that have been doing equality work in this country, particularly women's groups, have been literally wiped out in terms of being able to continue to do that work.

We have worked together for at least three decades with the Native Women's Association of Canada, and they are stretched to the limit. We are stretched to the limit. What brought it home all the more—not exactly on this issue, but it's very much linked—was the fact that 91% of indigenous women who are federally sentenced have histories of violence, have histories of physical and sexual abuse. It's not accidental that they end up in the system, because there aren't resources to support them.

Neither is it accidental that they are not believed. Take the Jamie Gladue decision: every witness who was aboriginal at her preliminary inquiry was first asked what beer they drank.

The assumptions and the racist attitudes towards particularly women in this context are real. I mean, part of the reason I knew the women whose remains were found at the Pickton farm was that people didn't believe they were really missing initially. You also heard the stories that Meghan talked about when she was presenting earlier. That's a very common theme.

The examples I was trying to conjure up here were not just of the more recent cases here in the south, but also in the north. Sue has talked about a number of women I know whose cases were thrown out, including people who were victimized by people who are now well recognized as multiple predators. It was presumed that because they were drinking, or because they had been on the street, they were easy prey, and it was fair game that they be attacked.

The resources of the state are limitless to deny responsibility and to defend against indefensible actions. While it's not directly on this point, I think it's linked that every time we try to raise an issue around these sorts of things, we're met with the phalanx of lawyers that are the Department of Justice.

As an example, we just went through the Ashley Smith inquest. We're about to start into another inquest of a woman who was also sexually exploited and was missing for a period of time. When her family found her—they found her because she was in prison—she'd been in not safe conditions before that. She died a year ago, and we're about to start into that inquest.

This is at a time when we know—it's just been revealed through an access request by a media person—that \$5 million was spent by the government on the Ashley Smith inquest by just the Correctional Service of Canada.

I just think the resources are limitless to defend against indefensible actions. I think if we really want proactive action, we need to put the resources into some of the things that will prevent people from being victimized, that will support them once they are, and that will prevent them from being criminalized as well, particularly indigenous people, because they're more likely to end up being.... The only system that can't say no to them is the current justice and prison system.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thank you, Ms. Pate.

Ms. Truppe.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Thank you both for being here and for your expertise in presentations.

I'm always proud of the work our government does for women and girls across Canada in terms of violence against women and girls. Earlier this week, the Minister of Justice and the Minister for the Status of Women announced government support for a Girls Action Foundation project. Building bridges for female youth is a national partnership project that will address intimate partner violence and increase access to justice among marginalized young women. It's funded through the Department of Justice. It's a pan-Canadian initiative designed to improve access to justice for marginalized young women and girls who are victims of partner violence.

Ms. O'Sullivan, I know you've done a lot of work in this. In your opinion, how could this initiative have a positive impact on young aboriginal girls who are vulnerable to becoming victimized?

● (1940)

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan: The government has undertaken many different initiatives, for which I certainly commend the government, but I think we're here today just to look at....

In terms of a national inquiry, an inquiry would give us an ability to understand the scope of the problem. As I said in my earlier testimony, the data aren't sufficient. An inquiry would allow us to identify those underlying causes so that we can address them and prioritize them. We can also give an opportunity for the recommendations in the action plans to be reflective and inclusive of their lived experience and knowledge.

When you ask me that question, I would say this. What I have seen across the country is that no community is the same. The different communities will have different resources, different capabilities, and different challenges. We often talk of the north in terms of challenges. As we know, there are, I believe, about 53 fly-in communities. For some victims, the whole criminal justice system has to fly in and fly out, and when they do, there are no resources left to them.

You ask me how this could benefit.... In our country there are many communities, and there are some phenomenal initiatives that are going on in our country, but we have to take this big picture look

in order to ensure that we have a solid foundation on which to build as we go into the future.

There's the example you've given, and there are many other examples in this country. Again, I know there are many I could look at and have funded. I think we really do need to ensure that the voices of the families and the victims are very much involved in that foundational piece in order to be able to prioritize.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

You also mentioned that recently, in order to help raise awareness of victims issues, you had the opportunity to make a series of videos of victims and victim advocates sharing their views and experiences. This was briefly touched on in the previous hour with Human Rights Watch Canada as well. On awareness issues, I just want to find out, again from your expertise, how you think raising awareness of this would help. What awareness would you like to see?

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan: For having an opportunity for Canadians to see and to examine exactly what all of these issues and priorities are, I think an inquiry is one way, but another way.... About a week and a half ago, I had the privilege of attending a symposium on confidence in the Canadian criminal justice system. They talked about awareness being important. One of the issues was that how we treat people and how we support people within the criminal justice system is directly linked to their confidence in it.

We've heard a lot of people talk here today. Awareness is one piece, but how we're going to treat victims.... They're going to come forward if they trust and respect that the agency they are coming forward to is going to listen to them, that they're going to be believed, supported, and informed, and that they're considered, that they matter. This is something you build. It is a relationship that communities build. That's going to continue to take a lot of effort on our parts in order to ensure that victims truly get the supports they need.

When we look at the general population when it comes to sexual assault, for example, we know that a large majority of sexual assault victims do not report for many different reasons. The more we can build healthy and safe communities that are going to allow victims to feel informed, supported, and considered, and to feel that they matter and are protected...because you have to be able to know that you're going to be safe when you come forward with that information.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: In terms of the victims being aware of their options, do you think that's important?

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan: If somebody is going to have a right, they have to know that they have that right—

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Right.

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan: —and they need to be informed of that.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Do you find that a lot of individuals around the aboriginal community are not informed of their rights, or of how they can seek help if they're not getting help?

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan: The criminal justice system is complex and complicated.

First of all, when somebody does want to come forward because they've been a victim of a crime, they are either going to find out from somebody else in that community what happens when they do go forward.... That's why I go back to how people are treated and how they find out if they should go forward. It's a critical piece.

You've hit on something very important, because in order for somebody to know what their rights are, they have to be informed of what they are; otherwise, they are not going to be able to exercise them.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Could you identify some of the issues that might be unique to victims of crime who are aboriginal?

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan: Yes.

Obviously, for example, language, culturally appropriate, the level of victimization we've seen, the vulnerabilities we've seen in the studies.... What we're trying to look at are some of those core pieces that an inquiry would help us to really build on. We know about—and I think Kim has spoken quite eloquently to this—some of the challenges they face, particularly the women, the aboriginal women. There's a lot that goes around this in terms of sometimes getting a comment like “Have you been drinking?” Many people, many victims, have concurrent issues. We're all well aware of that. It goes with victimization, in many cases.

When victims do come forward, we need to be able to ensure not only that they can be believed and that the system can come in to support them, but also—I used that one brief example from up north about understanding—different languages mean different things. As I said, if you've never been in the criminal justice system, it's a very scary place to be. It's very complex and complicated, so an ability for them to be informed and to be supported, and to have some advocacy for them as well....

• (1945)

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

Am I still okay?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): You have about 35 seconds.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Do you think that victims services should be tailored to fit certain cultural communities, or do you think a victim is a victim regardless of what community they come from?

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan: It needs to be culturally appropriate, and those supports need to be in place.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): You have 20 seconds.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Good, I have one question for Ms. Pate.

Ms. Pate, there are opportunities to address violence against aboriginal women and girls at every stage of the justice system. I just want to know what steps you believe we should take to tangibly improve the system's response and the relationship between justice professionals, which would include the police and aboriginal people.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Ms. Pate, a very brief comment.

Ms. Kim Pate: I won't repeat what I already said, but it needs to be highlighted that the reason Human Rights Watch chose the title of

the report, “Those Who Take Us Away” was, to pick up on Sue's point, that was their language, what they called the police. It's telling that it wouldn't be who you would go to if you interpreted or understood these people to be people who were taking you away. There are some fundamental issues there.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thanks, Ms. Pate.

Thank you, Ms. Truppe.

Ms. Bennett, for seven minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thanks very much.

First, both of you again have called for a national commission of inquiry, and in spite of the parliamentary secretary's quoting Shawn Atleo, it is important that we get back on the record that the AFN has also called for a national commission of public inquiry, as has NWAC, all the premiers, etc., so you're in good company.

Why this panel is so important is what we hear across this country is that people seem to care about victims' rights, unless the victim is indigenous, and then all of a sudden they are blamed. That includes those who aren't with us, and it's only their families now who have been victimized by this loss.

When we began this committee a year ago, the rate of murder clearance across Canada was about 84%. At that time the rate of murder clearance fell to 50% if the victim was indigenous. This is appalling to Canadians to understand it could be that different. What we have heard is somehow the investigation or the follow-up is not of the same quality because the victim, the murdered or missing individual.... It was viewed to be inevitable because somebody worked on the street or had problems with addiction or those things, and so they didn't actually follow it up properly.

What has been your experience how we would explain the differential for being able to solve these? Without solving them, we can't really prevent it, and without solving them, the families have no closure, have no real trust in the system, which begets and begets.

Can you explain how this can be so different if the victim is indigenous?

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan: I don't have the information that you're asking me on the percentages, but I will say this. Every victim that I talked to across this country said, “I don't want what happened to me or to my family to happen to anyone else.” They need to know that their loss or their harm is going to result in change. This is why it is so important that we have a forum, such as an inquiry, that is going to allow us to examine these and listen to those families and to have Canadians, all of us, have a piece to play in this.

We need to move forward and to be able to make a difference, but we need to do that based on listening, based on hearing those stories, based on including them, so when we look for those solutions, they are involved and they are the ones that we're hearing from.

To answer your question, if we want to see the solving rates go up, we want to see that people will come forward and trust the systems, they need to be included in those solutions and in the development of those plans.

I did have the privilege of attending the Edmonton conference that AFN and the Native Women's Association hosted. It was a very powerful time to listen to the voices that were there. They did have the discussion on the national action plan and what should go into that. We have all read what they have put forward. There are opportunities for us to continue to build on that.

I can't answer your question about what the difference is in rates of solvability and what were the instances around that because I don't have that, but I can tell you what has to happen in this country is we do need to make sure we have a solid path forward that includes the aboriginal people in the solutions.

● (1950)

Ms. Kim Pate: I think the differential is very much based on inequality. If you start out in a less equal position, you end up in a less equal position, even though the law is supposed to apply equally.

In terms of the economic disadvantage, the sexual disadvantage, and the fact that we don't have violence against women and girls taken seriously, whether in individual violence or not, despite efforts being taken by various parties and governments, the only time it seems to get attention paid to it is when it's an attempt to "responsibilize", if I can use that term, the victims; that is, they have to learn ways to avoid being victimized.

If we took that approach in any other area, it would never be accepted. We wouldn't take that approach to property violence or to other areas. I use the example, when I'm talking to law students in my classes, that if we treated violence against women, in particular violence against indigenous women, the way we treat property violence, people would be up in arms. We would see a drastic change, because it would impact people who have greater power in terms of personal resources and influence to actually change it.

The more marginalized you are and the more unequal you are, the less likely it is you'll have your needs taken care of, and neither will you have your victimization taken seriously by the state. A woman or a girl who reports that something has happened, in a community where it has never been taken seriously, where the police have always been an intervention that harms as opposed to assists, has that legacy.

The reality is that we need more exposure of that. There's a presumption that everybody is equal and everybody has equal application and protection of the law, but I can tell you, after 30 years of doing this, there's no way that is true. If that were true, we would not have the jails full of indigenous people. We would not have the jails full of poor people. We would not have women being the fastest growing prison population in a context where we know that's not who we're at greatest risk from.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): You have 30 seconds, Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The word you used was "responsibilize".

Ms. Kim Pate: Yes. We and the Native Women's Association of Canada did a piece on the hyper-responsibilization of indigenous women and girls.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: That's about blaming, i.e., it's their own fault.

Ms. Kim Pate: It's putting the responsibility on them to get themselves out of a situation of being victimized and marginalized and oppressed.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thank you very much.

The final question will go to Ms. McLeod, for seven minutes.

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

Witnesses, thank you for your testimony this evening.

Since we met last time, there has been a very significant court decision, which Ms. Pate alluded to. I'm not sure we necessarily have to remain silent to that in this committee in terms of our conversation about it and some thinking about it in terms of recommendations that this committee has that comes out of it.

Certainly I see that you're part of the Women's Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution, which is composed of seven groups. Could you speak to the issue of prostitution and aboriginal women from your organization's perspective? You hear people say that it's harmless, but I'd like your organization's perspective as we go forward with the issue of grappling with that decision over the next year.

Perhaps you could make some comments for me on that.

● (1955)

Ms. Kim Pate: In 2008 our organization changed our position from being a position of decriminalization across the board to the position we have now of calling for the decriminalization of women and girls always, and the continued indictment of the buying and selling of women and girls.

Part of the reason we came to that position is the law.... I worked on some of these initiatives. We had argued for decriminalization at a time when the decision was made not to decriminalize, at a time when the law was asymmetrically applied against women. Women would be charged and prosecuted and jailed for selling their bodies, but you wouldn't necessarily see the law applied to men who bought them.

I know there are men who sell, and they tend to age out more than women do, and there are women who buy as well. But overwhelmingly, the majority is....

When the law was made so-called "gender neutral", what we saw was the development of John schools and diversion programs for men, but women still went to jail.

We also saw, over that period of time, the evisceration of the social safety net, the elimination of the Canada assistance plan which I alluded to. We saw the increased marginalization of women and the increased economic, social, and legal inequality of women.

Our position is not just about prostitution, but it is very much that we need a guaranteed livable income. We need adequate social services. We need housing initiatives. We need educational supports and initiatives. We need health, and particularly mental health initiatives. That is what is needed in order to ensure that women aren't in positions where they're increasingly at risk of having no other option but to sell their bodies to support themselves and/or their children.

Where they don't have those options, or where they choose those options, they should never be criminalized.

What we know is that in communities where we have seen the decriminalization, we are seeing the increased commodification, and the increased demand for the commodification of women. In a context where we're seeing the increased sexual commodification of women and girls despite legal equality—and I say “legal equality”—those women and girls are increasingly at risk of being in those positions. We see, for instance, people being trafficked in communities to meet demand where those services have been decriminalized across the board. We still continue to see those unequal positions, in fact, exacerbated by the notion that women should be sexually available to men at all stages.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Is the Nordic model something you see as one...?

Ms. Kim Pate: The Nordic model is one of the examples. There are certainly....

One of the issues we're talking about is looking very much at a Canadian initiative. The Nordic model has with it many more of the social services and supports in place than we currently have in Canada. It would require a shoring up of the various supports that need to be in place, first and foremost.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: This actually segues a little bit into another point you made. I appreciate that some of the elders might feel some concern, for example, with the shipbuilding industry and what that impact might be, but hopefully in the 21st century it's also going to be an opportunity.

I was a nurse and I worked in a number of aboriginal communities. There were some carpentry programs started and some electrical apprenticeship programs. Some of the most successful graduates were people who had very difficult backgrounds, women who then became very gainfully employed. I hope that rather than it being a concern—and again, I appreciate the past

sometimes creates that worry—with job training, some programs will provide, just as you're talking about, that opportunity for some women in the aboriginal communities that are located nearby to have some great opportunities.

Ms. Kim Pate: We agree, hence the reason we're trying to intervene there, because that would be a much more productive way, and that's what we have encouraged to happen. However, we are painfully aware of what happened in Fort St. John in particular, and what that is creating in terms of an incredible demand, a huge male work base that is brought in, and the huge demand for an influx of women to be made sexually available to those men. That's what we don't want to see repeated in Halifax or any other community, quite frankly.

I would agree that a far better approach would be to have that kind of training. Again, with the notion that women are not necessarily treated as equally in this country—usually men are privileged in those positions—I would support all initiatives to privilege and support women having opportunities in those areas.

● (2000)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Ms. McLeod, you have 30 seconds.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: It was interesting. I was talking to a young aboriginal about this particular study. Unfortunately, she still uses her thumb to hitchhike. Before she gets into a car, she actually takes a picture of it with her camera and tweets it. I thought it was very interesting. It's not ideal. It's sharing that with other young girls who are hitchhiking, but she at least takes a safety measure. I thought in the 30 seconds I had I would share that little story.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder): Thank you, Ms. McLeod.

I want to thank both of our witnesses, Ms. Pate and Ms. O'Sullivan, for coming.

Before the committee bolts out of the room, I have one little piece of information. It's a reminder that next Thursday we have witnesses for one hour. In the second hour, we'll start the process of providing the partial drafting instructions to the analysts. It's a reminder to come prepared to do that in the second hour.

I want to thank the committee for allowing me to step in while Ms. Ambler is away.

The meeting is adjourned.

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