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Chair: Ms. Marilyn Gladu



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• (1830)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 28 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website, and the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

Today our committee is resuming its study on sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces.

For the benefit of the witnesses, comments should be addressed through the chair, and if you want interpretation, there is a button at the bottom of your screen where you can choose English or French.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly for our translators, and when you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I now welcome our witnesses, who will begin our discussions with five minutes of opening remarks, followed by questions.

First of all, we have Major-General Steven Whelan, who is the acting commander of military personnel command and chief of military personnel; and we also have Mr. Kin Choi, the assistant deputy minister for human resources.

We're going to begin with Mr. Choi. You have five minutes and you may start.

[Translation]

Mr. Kin Choi (Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources, Civilian, Department of National Defence): Thank you.

Good evening, Madam Chair and committee members. Thank you for the invitation to participate in this discussion in my capacity as the assistant deputy minister of civilian human resources for the Department of National Defence.

I have been a member of the public service for over 29 years, having held a number of positions in a variety of departments. The national defence team is a large, complex organization that includes public servants and military members and that extends across Canada and abroad. The team has 18 different collective agreements that encompass approximately 70 occupational groups, including administrative support, technical trades, defence research

and scientists. Most of these groups are represented by the 10 different unions with which we work.

In my role as the assistant deputy minister of civilian human resources, I'm largely responsible for four core functions: compensation, healthy workplace, diversity and inclusion and labour relations, which affect approximately 26,000 public service employees.

[English]

My team oversees a number of areas relating to people management, including staffing, learning and development, classification and organizational design, labour relations and compensation. As well, we are responsible for developing and implementing plans, policies and programs to recruit, develop and retain diverse individuals to ensure the Canadian Armed Forces are supported at home and abroad. In all aspects of our work we are committed to upholding the defence team's values of ethics, integrity and the well-being of our employees.

Though important steps have been taken to address the overall health and well-being of the defence team, clearly we have much work to do to effect enduring change. It is imperative that we continue to pursue this change in order to rebuild an environment of trust, respect and accountability reflective of the Canadians we serve. We will listen to all perspectives and make informed decisions to ensure that our core values lead to this meaningful change.

Finally, in my capacity as head of human resources for our public service employees, I take my responsibilities as functional authority for workplace harassment, discrimination and implementation of Bill C-65 very seriously to ensure fairness and due process, regardless of rank or position.

I acknowledge that there may be questions related to ongoing complaints; however, I will be unable to address the specific nature of these cases, as they are addressed through the independent process and recourse mechanism currently available to complainants.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: That's very good.

Now we will have Major-General Whelan for five minutes.

Major-General Steven Whelan (Acting Commander Military Personnel Command and Chief Military Personnel, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members, for inviting me today to participate in this committee discussion in my capacity as acting commander of military personnel command for the Canadian Armed Forces, a position I have held for just about a month.

The military personnel command is responsible for the management of many of the personnel policies that support all members of the CAF, both full-time and part-time, as well as their families. This includes: recruiting, basic training, professional military education, health services, strategy, career management, compensation and benefits, support to families, transition services, history and heritage, and honours and recognition.

In essence, the role of military personnel command is that of an important enabler for the Canadian Armed Forces. We recruit, develop and support all of our members so that they can be their very best in their service to Canada.

Like many of my colleagues who have appeared before this committee, I have over 30 years of service, and in that time, I have observed an evolution of our organization.

The CAF of today is not what it was when I joined in 1990. I see a more diverse force at every level, and it has made us better. Our differences make our team and our culture stronger, more effective, and more resilient, both at home and abroad. While there has been so much positive change, I know and we know that there is still a great deal of work that needs to be done to make the Canadian Armed Forces a more welcoming and safe environment for all of our members. I know we have great people and great leaders at all levels who are committed to making the forces better, and I am one of them.

All members must be able to trust that the CAF will be there for them throughout their careers, from recruits to veterans, from cradle to grave. CAF members must know that the institution is there to support them at the beginning of their careers in basic training and in our military colleges. CAF must be there for them during their careers, through merit-based promotions and our health services to foster their career aspirations, and at the end of their careers to be there with our transition services to ensure a positive adjustment out of uniform into civilian life. Every person must feel part of our team at every stage of their career.

I know our culture needs to continue to change so that we can reach our full potential as an institution in the service of Canada and continue to reflect Canadian society and its values. To energize that culture change, every member of the defence team, military or civilian, must treat their teammates with respect, dignity and honour.

We all agree we need to strive to be more equitable, more diverse and more inclusive. We also need to work to regain the trust that has been lost from some of our teammates. To do so, we need to first listen and learn, and then act upon those recommendations. These issues don't just affect select individuals; they impact the entire defence team. We recognize that our culture needs to change and we're committed to making that happen.

Madam Chair, thank you for your time. I look forward to answering questions.

• (1835)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will begin our first round of questions. We'll start with Ms. Sahota for six minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Major-General Whelan, you just spoke about being in this role for about a month or so. Could you provide details of the circumstances under which your predecessor was removed from his position, and how you became the acting commander in this position?

MGen Steven Whelan: My previous job was the deputy commander of military personnel command. Within the military structure, when a leader is unable to perform his duties or is absent, the deputy commander steps up.

In the case of my supervisor, I'm unable to comment on the current status of Admiral Edmundson, as I am not privy to those details. What I can say is that sexual misconduct has no place in the Canadian Armed Forces, and when an allegation is made, regardless of the rank, there is a process to be followed that has to respect all stakeholders.

At this time, I'm unable to give you any further details, other than that I have been appointed by the chief of the defence staff and have willingly stepped forward to take command of the organization at this time.

• (1840)

Ms. Jag Sahota: You also said in your presentation that the Canadian Armed Forces is better than it was before. We had sexual misconduct in the 1990s and we see it today. We've had witnesses come before us over and over again to tell us their stories. They tell us that investigations weren't conducted and evidence was lost. We still don't have 25% female representation in the Canadian Armed Forces.

What makes you think it's better now than it was before?

MGen Steven Whelan: The words I used were that the Canadian Forces are better now than when I joined in 1990. When I joined in 1990, there was no such thing as diversity. There was no such thing as policies for people. There were no policies for family. There was a running joke: "If we wanted you to have a family, we would have issued you one." There were no support networks for families. There was no mental health support. There was no discussion of inclusivity. We didn't have harassment policies when I joined the Canadian Forces, which was a year after women were allowed to join any trade in the Canadian Forces.

From my perspective, notwithstanding that we do have these issues, the forces are still better now than when I started in 1990, 30 years ago.

Ms. Jag Sahota: You spoke about there being no place for sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces. We would agree with you. That's why we're here discussing how to change the culture so that this doesn't happen to women anymore.

As the most senior military member responsible for military personnel, how would you reassure all those in uniform that the generals and admirals leading the Canadian Forces will act with honour and integrity, embodying the highest level of military professional conduct, when former chiefs of the defence staff General Vance and Admiral McDonald, as well as your predecessor Admiral Edmundson, are all currently under investigation for behaviour that is diametrically opposed and runs counter to everything they swore an oath to uphold?

MGen Steven Whelan: That's a great question, and it's a hard question. That's why we're having these conversations right now. We have to figure out what we need to do to make the profession better than it is and make the institution that I think Canadians want.

I'll make a comment about what culture is and how I see it coming together in terms of how you framed the question.

The culture is really what we value and how we curate it in the Canadian Forces. I accept the criticism that senior leaders have allegedly acted contrary to the behaviours they rejected while they were in uniform—and some are still in uniform—but the fact of the matter is that this culture is what we value, so there are no easy solutions right now.

I'll steal a line from one of my leaders, who is responsible for recruiting and training. She said to me, “General Whelan, we're not living up to the better values of our profession,” and I think she is absolutely right. Our culture—

Ms. Jag Sahota: Can there be a culture change if the senior leaders I listed are not held accountable?

MGen Steven Whelan: Anybody, regardless of rank, absolutely has to be held accountable. There is a process in place that energizes and applies itself when these allegations take place, and that process is in play at this time.

Ms. Jag Sahota: How would you change the culture, then? Operation Honour was a failure. What would you do differently?

MGen Steven Whelan: That's hard to say in a 30-second sound bite, but what I can say from a military personnel perspective is that I can at least initiate the changes to things and processes that are under my authority.

For me it starts with people. It starts with making sure that people start by respecting themselves. I don't need training courses and professional development programs to tell people this and to enforce the rules to make sure they respect people. However, what I can change in the Canadian Forces are some of the functions I'm responsible for. We need to change the face of Canadian Forces recruiting, both who does it and how we do it, because Canadians need to see themselves in the faces of the recruiters and in the lived experience of those recruiters if they think they want to join the Canadian Forces.

• (1845)

The Chair: That's very good.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor for the next six minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Major-General Whelan, thank you for your service. I also want to thank Mr. Choi for his commitment to finding solutions.

My first question is for the two witnesses. I want to focus on the victims and survivors. Given the many people you must work with in the Canadian Armed Forces and in the Department of National Defence, what steps have you taken to increase the confidence of survivors and to ensure that every workplace is respectful and safe?

Major-General Whelan, you can go first, and Mr. Choi can respond after you.

[*English*]

MGen Steven Whelan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll make a general comment about trust, then if we want to go deeper, we can.

How do I win back the trust of the survivors, the victims, our teammates who are questioning whether the leadership is serious about leading the Canadian Forces? I've learned in my 30 years that it's really hard to get people to trust me, but I've also learned that it takes one second to lose the trust of our teammates. I know that trust has been broken with our teammates, and that loss is devastating to me, and that was reinforced to me when I listened to the testimony on Tuesday. I have a daughter who's 22 years old and considering joining the Canadian Forces. It was like a punch in the gut, and I still feel it even right now as I'm speaking.

Our whole team is watching us to see what we're going to do, and that's what we're doing. I take that responsibility very seriously. We are listening, and I think that's what we need to do initially—hear our members—because I don't think we've given them the voice they have asked for. I have been listening, and I'll tell you that some of what I hear is ugly and it's uncomfortable. I'm still processing it, but I'm committed to trying to make a difference as we move forward.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Choi, would you comment?

Mr. Kin Choi: Madam Chair, I think a really important point has been raised by General Whelan, which is that we have work to do to build trust.

While we have myriad programs already in place across the public service, and national defence public service employees are part of that, I think the tone needs to be set at the top. We have to look at how we're building our executive cadre, how we're providing them with support and training, providing them with the right compass and direction in what we expect from them as leaders. I think we're on that path right now, but a lot of work remains to be done.

Thank you.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

General Whelan, you alluded to this a bit. We've heard extensively how the fear of reprisal creates barriers for survivors wanting to come forward. How can we better protect the safety of people who come forward while also respecting their confidentiality?

MGen Steven Whelan: First of all, reprisals go against everything we are in the Canadian Forces. No defence team member should ever feel unsafe or alone in an organization that talks about teamwork the way we do. I saw the stories last night and I listened and I'm sorry that my teammate who was listed in one of the media articles has felt afraid to be named.

Reprisals have no place in the Canadian Forces. Leaders who engage in reprisals have no place in the Canadian Forces. We owe that support and that respect to those who trust us, the families and members who trust us for their own safety. Essentially, reprisals are about the use of power, not the abuse of it.

One of the things we need to do is to focus on what leaders understand to be their boundaries and whether they understand their responsibilities. I am an infantry officer and I was brought up to understand that leadership is a privilege that must be curated.

Thank you.

• (1850)

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, General.

Mr. Choi, do you have anything that is related to reprisals to add to that?

The Chair: You're on mute, Mr. Choi.

Mr. Kin Choi: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I had technical difficulties with the translation. I couldn't hear. I was trying to slip back and forth. Can the question be repeated, please?

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Choi, I'm just asking if people have a fear of reprisal. What do you think about respecting the people who come forward so that there is a sense of respecting their confidentiality?

I only have about 10 seconds here.

Mr. Kin Choi: Thank you. I'll go very quickly.

I think that in the main that's a natural consequence, that fear, especially in large organizations. I think there's an opportunity to re-think how we do labour relations and provide that trust and support so that privacy, confidentiality and procedural fairness are entrusted within the system.

I apologize for the technical difficulties.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: No problem. Thank you.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to start by congratulating you, Mr. Choi and Mr. Whelan, on your testimonies and your work in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Choi, I'll begin by asking you what you know about the Privy Council Office. This is about understanding what steps the Privy Council Office can take, even in cases of sexual assault. Is this part of its mandate? As we know, the ombudsman had the responsibility for the investigation transferred to the Privy Council Office.

Can you tell us more about this organization?

[*English*]

Mr. Kin Choi: Madam Chair, I'm not an expert with PCO machinery and how it's worked. I've had a relationship with PCO and I've worked with senior personnel, but I would refrain from providing any expert comments on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: So you can't tell us what the Privy Council Office or the minister lacked in terms of information to conduct the investigation.

[*English*]

Mr. Kin Choi: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That's not something I was personally involved with, so I would not have anything to offer.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: My question is for Mr. Whelan or Mr. Choi.

What do you think of "The path to dignity and respect: the Canadian Armed Forces sexual misconduct response strategy" and how much do you trust its effectiveness?

Can you speak briefly about this, Mr. Choi or Mr. Whelan?

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to start with Mr. Choi, and then we'll go to the general.

Mr. Kin Choi: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm optimistic and I'm hopeful that we are at an inflection point in time in which the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces can make significant changes.

The Chair: General?

General, you're on mute, or we can't hear you very well.

Shall we suspend briefly while the clerk looks into the technical issues with the general?

• (1855)

MGen Steven Whelan: Madam Chair, can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes. Now we can hear you.

MGen Steven Whelan: I will attempt to answer the question quickly.

How confident am I? Here's why I am confident and encouraged. We're actually having some meaningful discussions on cultural change. We are listening to people at all levels, from the top down, across, and up and down in the Canadian Forces. We have accepted the flaws of Operation Honour and are moving forward with successes.

There's an incredible conversation going on at this point on support to victims. I am encouraged by the defence-wide and the nationally wide conversation that is occurring about how we can make our profession better. I am encouraged. There is a pathway forward.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you.

We learned that Lieutenant-General Wayne D. Eyre, the acting chief of staff, requested an *aide-m moire* on how to handle complaints against the leadership of the Canadian Armed Forces.

As an officer, can you tell us about the process for handling complaints against the leadership of the Canadian Armed Forces? You've already touched on this briefly. However, I'd like you to again describe the process for reporting sexual assault or sexual misconduct to the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service.

What do the victims know about this? Perhaps certain things can be improved to ensure that they know more about the process and what steps they can take.

[English]

MGen Steven Whelan: I am not an expert in the field of military police or sexual misconduct reporting, but to your question in terms of senior leadership allegations, the system is based on a process that is applied evenly to all members of the Canadian Forces, regardless of rank. The issue of the product that General Eyre had asked for was essentially an *aide-m moire* or something that he could have in order to ensure that he was very clear on the process. I think it's clear that we haven't seen these kinds of allegations in the past, and therefore we wanted to ensure that there was no sense that there was a special process being applied to senior leaders.

In terms of reporting and victim support, if I receive an allegation, I have a choice to bring it to the military police. I can choose, depending on the severity of the allegation, to make an assessment and assign it to a unit-level investigation. I always have the opportunity to consult with our legal folks. If need be, I can consult with the SMRC and Dr. Preston to assist me through my decision-making process.

The Chair: Very good.

We'll go to Ms. Mathysen for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to both witnesses.

I'm really hopeful after hearing from you, Mr. Whelan, and specifically your words that "leadership is a privilege that must be curated." You're talking about taking that responsibility, taking that on, and really listening. I think this is key.

I'd like to ask both of you, though, about the bureaucracy within the Department of National Defence and within the armed forces, the CAF itself, when we talk about the recognition of that leadership and holding people to account at all levels, from the first ranks up to the highest of senior leaders, and that responsibility. Is it also true that in that responsibility we can't turn away from some of these stories, and that not listening and not hearing and refusing to hear causes a lot of the problems as well?

MGen Steven Whelan: I will make an attempt to see if I can respond. That's a really complicated question about leadership and how we integrate process into the profession.

The profession is a.... It's hard to put a hand around it, because we operate on values and an ethical framework. Of course, what we have here is seemingly leaders who are supposedly representing this framework and these values and they're not living up to it. Rightly so, the victims are calling out these leaders. The process is fully engaged on holding all leaders accountable to investigate these kinds of allegations. I think in the fullness of time, as these investigations mature, we will see how that process engages itself when we see these allegations occur.

Just from a military personnel command perspective, one of the other processes is the administrative review process, which I am responsible for. That is also another mechanism to determine outcomes of conflicts and people issues. There are multiple mechanisms that the Canadian Forces has at its disposal in order to bring justice to victims who bring forward allegations.

• (1900)

Mr. Kin Choi: Madam Chair, I'll try to build on General Whelan's comments.

I think throughout the public service and where we find ourselves in 2021, there's a real opportunity to look at how labour relations are constructed. I think it's still very much an industrial relations era model, so it's a bit adversarial. We've been making improvements by working with our unions on this. I think it's time for us to turn things around so that people are at the very core, at the centre, of how we solve issues, and we provide a personalized sense of their well-being throughout the process, versus an adversarial process in which we move up the ladder in terms of grievances.

I think there are opportunities for us to do this so that we can support people no matter what level or part of the organization they may be in.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: We've certainly heard that hierarchy and command structure often get in the way of people feeling confident enough to challenge and speak out against what's happened. We've also heard in this committee—I've referenced it before—that there's this disconnect between those at the top, who say things are all right or are improving or are moving in a certain direction, versus the stories that we've heard. You've referenced them again. The stories that we heard even two days ago in this committee.... Someone emailed me after we heard from the provost marshal. They said that as long as those investigators hold military rank, they can push in directly messaging and in interference, and the higher the rank of that individual, the more that comes into play.

We've talked a lot about independent structures. Do you believe that those independent structures are key to the investigation for ensuring that people are treated fairly within both the armed forces and overall military?

MGen Steven Whelan: Madam Chair, I'll take a shot.

There is value in an independent structure. Whether it's a structure for reporting or a structure for looking at the Canadian Forces, I think all of those options need to be on the table.

In terms of the feeling that perhaps there is an interference by Canadian Forces leadership in the uniform or the chain of command, I think it speaks to something that I will be taking on as a role in trying to bring more of the human attributes into leadership development than the bureaucracy or the technical or theoretical aspects of what we have as our leadership models. We need to actually bring human qualities back into leaders, bring in empathy and have people understand what the other person has gone through as they try to lead people.

I go back to the first rule I learned on my first day, which is that leadership is a privilege. For me in particular, the options are on the table for independent structures, but I think it's about focusing on making better leaders and growing them earlier in their careers so they can be who we want them to be when they become senior leaders.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Now we go to our second round of questions.

Ms. Alleslev, you have five minutes.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Choi, you said that reprisals are a natural occurrence, yet you need to have procedural fairness in order to ensure that this culture changes. However, it was on your watch that someone in your chain of command made the complaint on behalf of someone who reported to him and then felt reprisals because of it. He submitted his own harassment complaint for those reprisals and was subsequently blamed externally for the harassment of his subordinate when it wasn't him. He has spent five years grieving and trying to make his way through the process.

Is that how you would characterize procedural fairness?

• (1905)

Mr. Kin Choi: Madam Chair, I wasn't able to hear the first part of the question, just the last part. I assume it was addressed to me. I believe the question is around Mr. Boland, if I picked up all of that.

As I said in my opening remarks, I can't speak to individual cases. From a procedural fairness perspective, I can offer that when we get complaints on the public service, employees are represented by their union. There are clear processes set out that we follow in looking at the nature and severity of the complaint. There are situational assessments that we go through that are done by labour relations. If they meet certain criteria, which are well established by Treasury Board guidelines, then there may be an investigation.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you, Mr. Choi.

Who do you report to, Mr. Choi?

Mr. Kin Choi: I report to the deputy minister.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Who assigned you the task of assessing Mr. Boland's complaint against the deputy minister?

Mr. Kin Choi: The deputy minister received the complaint and I was asked to look into it.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: By whom?

Mr. Kin Choi: Once I receive it, it's part of my duty, so I looked into the nature of the complaint. I checked in with our legal counsel and provided options to go forward in how it would proceed.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you.

Then subsequently, you dismissed the complaint against your boss, the deputy minister, on February 19, 2021. Is that correct?

Mr. Kin Choi: After we went through a review of the process and—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: It's a yes or no, Mr. Choi. Did you dismiss the complaint against your boss?

Mr. Kin Choi: I believe technically it's not whether or not it was dismissed; it was whether or not it was founded or not founded, and in this case it was not founded.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: But you made that determination about your boss. As the functional authority for civilian human resources, you have the responsibility for all procedural and behavioural wrongdoing on behalf of the deputy minister, so you're saying that includes reviewing the deputy minister's behaviour. Is that correct?

Mr. Kin Choi: While I am the functional authority, I exercise that functional authority with the support of both my staff, who are professionals in labour relations, as well as legal counsel.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Yes, but ultimately you're the authority and you've dismissed a claim on your boss. Is that correct?

Mr. Kin Choi: Again, I am not privy to talk about a specific case. If we are looking—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I didn't say what case. I said just in general.

Could you table for this committee the document that says that a subordinate is granted the legal authority to review, investigate or dismiss a complaint against a superior or a peer within the same chain of command?

Mr. Kin Choi: As I said, as part of the process as the functional authority, I would take in all the information of a complaint, the nature of it, seek advice from legal counsel—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Is there a document that says a subordinate has the authority to clear a superior?

Mr. Kin Choi: I receive my delegation through a functional delegation authority that's assigned to me.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: But my question was this: Can a superior delegate to you to absolve the superior of anything?

Mr. Kin Choi: In my role, as I am delegated overall for the activities and programs and services of human resources on the civilian side of the Department of National Defence. I have the authority to look at issues as they come in, and we treat all the issues without regard for rank and level in providing advice and determining whether or not harassment has taken place.

● (1910)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Can you confirm that—

The Chair: I'm sorry; that's your time.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Now we're going to Ms. Zahid for five minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to both General Whelan and Mr. Choi for appearing before the committee today.

Mr. Choi, in previous testimony a witness alleged that the Deputy Minister of National Defence had broken the law. Did the deputy minister break the law?

Mr. Kin Choi: In my professional opinion, and looking at the various cases and through legal counsel, the deputy minister, to the best of my knowledge, has not broken any laws.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Mr. Choi.

General Whelan, given that education, training, health services, recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration, and operational trauma stress support centres, just to name a few, fall under your purview, can you please discuss the current gaps and the steps you are taking to address them?

MGen Steven Whelan: That exercise is ongoing right now, so at least in military personnel command, we're looking at all the systemic and institutional frameworks that provide the support to people across the Canadian Forces, with a view to looking at where the strengths are and the gaps at the same time, so that we can reinforce where we are strong and address where we are weak.

We are looking at a number of areas. I can speak to two off the top of my head.

Notwithstanding the great work they are doing for Canadians across this country, when health services are not doing that, they're trying to work on how to rebuild and modernize Canadian Forces

health services for the future, which is a monumental task. We know how difficult health care is in this country.

Then I would probably speak to the transition group, which was stood up as an entity in December 2018 to look after our ill and injured, but they are now assuming more and more responsibility for not just ill and injured. Over the next four years they will be taking on the release and the support and transition functions for all members of the Canadian Forces. It's a work in progress.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Some witnesses who have appeared at this committee have said that when it comes to sexual misconduct, survivors have experienced many negative effects on their mental health and physical well-being. What have you done to ensure that Canadian Armed Forces members have access to trauma-informed services?

MGen Steven Whelan: That's a very timely question, Madam Chair.

We are in discussions, at this point, on assessing how we can better serve victims who suffer sexual misconduct arising from service. Those conversations are maturing. I have great confidence in our health services enterprise. By default, their job is to determine a program of care for whatever the injury might be.

I'm confident we have the mechanisms to address their concerns and injuries, but we are in conversations and discussions to see what more we can do to provide support to victims of sexual trauma.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: There is now data available regarding Canadian Armed Forces members reporting sexual misconduct. How will you use this data going forward, as changes are implemented?

MGen Steven Whelan: If I recall—and I don't have the stats top of mind—one of the statistics speaks to sexual assault during basic training. Everyone has a right to feel safe during basic training or any training. We owe that to those who serve their country. We need to look at that.

I had a discussion today to prepare myself. I spoke to the CO of the actual recruit school and of the two military colleges, and I have some of their notes here.

It starts with leaders across the Canadian Armed Forces having zero tolerance for it. We have to ensure that leaders enforce the message, that they live and lead the behaviours we want from troops, whether they are wearing their uniform or not. We need to make sure that the leaders, the trainers and the students actually have a better understanding of sexual assault.

● (1915)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Whelan and Mr. Choi, I don't know whether you'll be able to answer my question, but can you elaborate on the consequences for a military member who has been convicted of sexual assault by the military tribunal?

[English]

MGen Steven Whelan: I regret that I can't answer that question with certainty. That is a question for the Judge Advocate General. It's a legal question, and it's probably very situationally dependent. I wish I could give you more than that.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: How about you, Mr. Choi?

[English]

Mr. Kin Choi: My answer would be very similar to Major-General Whelan's. It's not an area of my expertise. I believe the Judge Advocate General would be better placed to answer that question.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: In your opinion, what issues should the committee address in this study? What changes should be made to address the issue?

Can you describe to the committee the sexual assault issue and outline what you think must be changed?

[English]

MGen Steven Whelan: Where things need to change is in people's understanding. Their knowledge and their education and how well they are able to understand the topic need to change.

Previously I was making reference to ensuring that leaders, trainers and students actually understand what sexual assault actually is. I'm not sure that people do understand that. That is probably one of the first starting points.

The other thing is that we need more data and more research. We do have the mechanisms in the Canadian Armed Forces to seek out the data and the understanding and the academic aspect, but we would certainly welcome outside advice to be able to move that particular agenda forward.

The Chair: Very good.

Ms. Mathysen, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Several of the witnesses in our past meetings drew our attention to the fact that a lot of the supports aren't available to them due to language, their location or their posting. One woman was on a ship, where there are limited resources and personnel, of course, but some of the witnesses also specifically spoke about the need for adequate child care and the huge barrier they face because it isn't provided to military personnel.

Could you both address what you're actively doing to ensure that women in the armed forces equally can serve by being provided those services they need, and child care specifically?

MGen Steven Whelan: I agree with you. We are very well aware that child care is a contributing element to women serving in

the Canadian Forces. In fact, 34% of women have indicated that child care is one of the elements. It's not the only element, but it's one of them, and it's near the top.

We have recently undertaken some work to figure out what it would take to be able to deliver a child care capability in the Canadian Armed Forces. That work is ongoing; I don't think it's mature enough to be able to present at this stage, but we are looking at it.

I think the advantage here—if there is anything, if there is a silver lining—is that COVID has acutely pointed out the challenges that women face in a pandemic environment. What we are trying to do is leverage those lessons in order to help establish some of those capabilities for our members in service who need them—

• (1920)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Sorry, but just before you get to that, would it be fair to ask if, once you actually get to a mature place of being able to report that, you could send that data and that information to our committee?

MGen Steven Whelan: It won't be up to me to determine what the mature level of it is, but we'll certainly take that on notice and we'll provide that if we can.

The Chair: Excellent.

Now we'll go to Ms. Sahota, who is splitting her time with Ms. Shin.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Major-General, it seems like the big boys at the top are circling their wagons and trying to protect each other, so I'm going to ask you this. In order to address the sexual misconduct culture that exists in the military and that we've seen can exist as low as the Royal Military College all the way up to the chief of the defence staff, do you believe that we should be addressing this from our most senior level and making our way down, or should we try something at the entrance level and allow the senior leadership to go unchallenged?

MGen Steven Whelan: That's a great question, Madam Chair.

I'll give you the infantry officer answer: We need to attack all levels at once.

However, at some point, as I think I said earlier, the beginning of a career is important, and we need to grow good people—good leaders, good followers—from the get-go. That certainly doesn't take our eyes off serving leaders who still need that professional development and still need that accountability. One of the things we are hearing from our members in our listening sessions is that they want leader accountability.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Then leaders need to take the responsibility?

MGen Steven Whelan: Absolutely.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Go ahead, Nelly.

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Thank you.

I'd like to thank Major-General Whelan and Mr. Choi for being present today. I know that we're discussing a very complex issue that requires a certain level of risk and courage on your part to appear before a committee in full public exposure, but those of us who have been placed in appointments of authority are held to a higher account and more scrutiny than the average individual, so thank you for being here.

As I've been listening to the different witnesses speaking throughout these committee meetings, there have been a variety of filters around sexual misconduct in Canada's military. There have been some very poignant testimonies from victims, from women who have learned essentially to navigate the toxic culture to follow their aspirations, and the minister himself has continued to purport that there needs to be a cultural shift, yet cultural shift can't happen unless there's personal accountability, and that is what I'd like to ask you about today.

I know that especially in the military, loyalty is very important, but sometimes pressured loyalty causes people to act against their conscience or their better judgment. Before processes can be effective, we need to understand the human condition that triggers people to do what is right or wrong, so without disclosing specific details of incidents, could you, beginning with Mr. Choi, share if you were ever forced to act against your conscience?

Mr. Kin Choi: Thank you for that question.

It's a very complex environment, as has been stated. I believe that, as leaders, we have to go into the ambiguous zones and be willing to take things on.

I can share with you that throughout this ordeal I personally have stepped in and supported people to provide them with support to speak their minds and to offer their stories. I think leaders at all levels have to be prepared to do that. Regardless of the system and process, we have to be leaders by demonstrating and leading with our hearts as well.

● (1925)

Ms. Nelly Shin: Was there ever a time you had to go against what you thought was right?

Mr. Kin Choi: I think we have many discussions throughout our governance process. I have spoken my mind in areas where I felt we needed to make changes, and we've had good discussions so that we can make some changes.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Sorry; for time's sake, did you feel that they were effective or that there could be some mechanisms that could be more conducive to allowing, especially civil servants like you, empowerment to do what is right without fear of reprisal? Are there any processes that could be put in place to make it easier for you to do what is right?

Mr. Kin Choi: That's a very complicated and very good question.

I think there are a lot of mechanisms that are already in existence for public servants, be it the ombudsman, the public sector integrity commissioner through public service disclosures through ADM(RS) and a myriad through staffing and so on. I think in many ways it can be confusing and makes the choices very complicated. I think we need to actually streamline it and make it easier for complainants.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Sorry; you kept saying "complicated"—

The Chair: Sorry. You're at the end of your time.

Now we'll go to Ms. Vandenbeld for the last few minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I'll focus my questions on General Whelan.

Thank you very much for being here this evening.

A lot of what we have been talking about, and you mentioned it today as well, is making sure there are trauma-informed supports for those who've experienced sexual misconduct. Then the next step after that is to make sure we're preventing it. That's when we talk about the culture change and getting rid of the toxic masculinity, and the processes that are in place to try to prevent the negative experiences that men, women and non-binary and transgendered people may feel.

However, it's more than that. Your position is also to create a welcoming, inclusive and positive environment where every single person, including women joining the Canadian Armed Forces, can thrive.

I heard child care mentioned. I know that's very important, and support for families. I know there's a Seamless Canada initiative looking at health and well-being as a total well-being, including the kinds of training that people can have, the mentorship of women at every step of the way throughout their career to make sure they have that kind of mentorship, and what we do in terms of recruitment and retention. I know that's a big question.

It's not enough to stop the problems; we also have to make sure we build a better environment and create a positive solution.

Perhaps you could talk a little bit about the work that's ongoing, and has been ongoing for some time, in those areas.

MGen Steven Whelan: I will try to round up a few of those. I'll start with Seamless Canada.

Seamless Canada is a wonderful Canadian Armed Forces organization or body that is working with provinces and territories to help families who are mobile across this country to remove the barriers that come with asking Canadian Forces members to uproot every few years. We have a wonderful relationship with the provinces, and they are working very hard to help families navigate provincial and territorial support agencies as the Canadian Forces moves them. I think that is very positive.

In terms of strategies, you will see in the fall of 2021 the creation of a Canadian Armed Forces retention strategy. We haven't had a retention strategy in a number of years. I think it's important to understand that this strategy is actually going to work very hard to ensure that those people who don't feel well represented see themselves in all of those support mechanisms the Canadian Forces has available to them.

We're talking about women's health. That's where you're going to see discussions about child care. That's where you're going to see providing uniforms and clothing that are appropriate to women. It's where we're going to collect data to understand how we can support women more. It even includes the dress committee. While it might seem trite as we discuss hair and makeup, it's not just for women, but for members of the Canadian Armed Forces who feel that this is important to their identity.

There's a tremendous amount of... I'm only touching the top of the iceberg here.

• (1930)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: How much time do I have?

The Chair: We're pretty much at the end of our time. Let's leave it there.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Chair, on a point of order, I want to confirm that Mr. Choi will table that document that grants him the authority to review, investigate or dismiss a complaint against the deputy minister or a peer in the same chain of command.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Choi, if you can direct that document to the clerk, that would be great.

I want to thank our witnesses, because your testimony was excellent and very helpful to us.

We'll suspend briefly while we do the sound checks for the next panel.

• (1930)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1930)

The Chair: I want to welcome our witnesses for the second panel. We have retired Lieutenant-General Christine Whitecross and Major Kellie Brennan. Each of you will have five minutes to greet the committee and make your opening remarks.

We will begin with you, Lieutenant-General Whitecross.

Lieutenant-General (Retired) Christine Whitecross (As an Individual): Thanks very much, and good evening.

My name is Chris Whitecross, and I recently retired from the Canadian Armed Forces in December 2020 at the rank of lieutenant-general.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak today on what I consider to be an important issue facing the Canadian Armed Forces today and into the future. It's important, I believe, because how we treat people is not just a measure of our values but of our operational effectiveness as a military force.

As someone who grew up in uniform, having spent over 38 years in the Canadian Armed Forces, I am disheartened and angry on hearing some of the witness statements that have come out even as late as this week.

I look forward to responding to your questions with the hope that we can collectively come up with some concrete steps forward.

Thanks very much. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: That's very good.

Now we'll go to Major Brennan for five minutes.

Major Kellie Brennan (As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair, for this opportunity, and thank you to all the members of the committee.

I would like to introduce myself. I'm just one woman who has served in the infantry for the last 30 years, since 1991, but I give voice to all the women who need to speak up. I'm a soldier who served, and that service, for me, has left what I call battle scars. I was the subject of many intense and unfair power dynamics throughout my career.

I'd like to outline four truths.

The first truth is that human rights violations are still ongoing in the military. After 30 years, it's not an omission; I think that it's human rights violations to women. Women want to serve their country with pride, and they want to hold their heads high and contribute. Women want to be free of an environment where they are questioned or catcalled or mistreated, or looked down upon and seen as prizes and trophies and assaulted.

I think I need to explain how it feels to go to work every day with a knot in your stomach, how it shapes the way you walk down a hallway, the way that you then perceive men.

The second truth is that women are often penalized when they come forward. They're in fear of what will happen, how it will happen, who will do what. Women are often looked down on or shuffled out of positions quickly if they speak the truth. The guilt that women feel also puts them in a prison where they are made to feel shame, and that's by the very institution they are committed to serve and still want to serve.

The third truth is that the military justice system needs reform. It needs reform in how we conduct military investigations and how we often revictimize the women who have the courage to come forward. My focus would be on education, and making sure that the person who investigates can lay the charge, can bring that evidence to court and not just refer the charge, meaning that the people who are entrusted with an investigation are the people who can effect the change. We also have to know what that looks like for women: What is justice for women?

The fourth truth is that leadership needs to be a part of the solution, at all levels. The days of leaders using this as leverage, when somebody has done something incorrect and they use that against that person to then gain leverage, need to end. The chain of command needs to accept that there has been failure. For 30 years I've served its failure, and that failure is a very hard admission to make.

In closing, I'd like to reaffirm the most important point to this committee: that women are not statistics, but humans who have been violated by the very service that they believe in. I encourage you all, as parliamentarians, to give us a voice, as you have, and enable this change.

I truly thank each one of you. I have never been among a group of women such as I have today. In infantry, I'm always one of one, so today is a very special day for me, and I thank you all.

• (1935)

The Chair: Thank you so much. Thank you both for being here.

We're going to start our first round of questions with Ms. Alleslev. You have six minutes.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the witnesses, and in particular Major Brennan, for the courage she has shown by becoming public and by being here today.

We can't fix what we don't know, and without the information we have no ability to move forward. I want to also remind her that she has parliamentary privilege. There should not be reprisals for being here today, because we called her.

Have you been contacted by the Canadian Forces national investigation service as part of the investigation into the allegations against General Vance?

• (1940)

Maj Kellie Brennan: My chain of command reported to the military police and started an investigation. It wasn't the other way around.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Have they contacted you for your statement as part of the investigation?

Maj Kellie Brennan: I was interviewed for two entire days, six hours on each, and deposited information with the CFNIS as evidence and testimony.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Did General Vance ever instruct you to lie about your relationship?

Maj Kellie Brennan: Madam Chair, yes. It's recorded, and the CFNIS has all of the recordings of him directing me in what to say, what not to say, how to say it, what to exclude, to perjure myself and to lie because—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Did he ever threaten you?

Maj Kellie Brennan: Was there a threat, meaning bodily harm? No.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I mean whatever you perceived as a threat—reprisals, consequences....

Maj Kellie Brennan: Definitely. He gave me very many consequences if I did not follow his orders, Madam Chair.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Could you give us an example?

Maj Kellie Brennan: One of the ones that I especially couldn't figure out was that I was going to be questioned by his spouse, who's a lawyer, and questioned over and over and over again if I didn't say the right thing—that somehow she was going to come and see me and question me. He said that I was not to mention certain things about our relationship, our personal lives. The consequences were always the same: that I had to stay silent.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Did you believe that you didn't have the ability to say no? Is that correct?

Maj Kellie Brennan: I didn't have the ability to say no. They were orders. He would speak at length until I agreed. "A one-way talk" is what we call it.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Do you have physical evidence or any kind of evidence of his inappropriate relationship with you?

Maj Kellie Brennan: Madam Chair, I have deposed that with the CFNIS: recordings, emails, texts and testimony.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: In your interview with the media, you stated that other senior personnel were aware of the abuse of power that General Vance exhibited toward you. Do you have knowledge that any of them have been contacted as part of the investigation into the allegations against General Vance?

Maj Kellie Brennan: I have no knowledge. Since I deposed my testimony twice in February, the only thing I've received are two update emails that simply said they were still on the case. No other information has been given to me.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Are you concerned that perhaps the investigation is not being taken seriously and that it is deliberately being undermined or delayed?

Maj Kellie Brennan: Madam Chair, I bluntly asked the CFNIS if they had the mandate to investigate and they had the powers to lay charges. They would not answer me. The answer was no, because, as the CDS told me, he was untouchable. He owned the CFNIS.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Are you concerned that despite two days of depositions, there's a possibility that you won't have your day in court, so to speak, and that he won't be held accountable?

Maj Kellie Brennan: I definitely feel that there will not be justice for me. In all honesty, that's okay, because if my speaking out can change everything for other women to come forward and change our policies, that's okay with me, because I was the first one into the infantry when we were allowed to join and I knew I was taking a hard road.

• (1945)

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

Now we'll go to Ms. Hutchings for six minutes.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses here today. Thank you for your strength in your past, thank you for the strength here today and, most importantly, thank you for your service.

Lieutenant-General Whitecross, you've had an extensive career, serving both internationally and domestically. What was the culture like in the early stages of your career, and where is it now, and how do you see it moving forward?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: I've publicly stated that the culture of the Canadian Armed Forces when I joined.... Let's remember that I joined in 1982, almost 39 years ago. The culture then was a little different from now. I joined an occupation that had only just allowed women into the ranks, and they were ill-prepared, to be honest, in allowing women to come, but I can't say I experienced all the heartache that Major Brennan has expressed.

It would be no secret to say that it wasn't easy in the first number of years. The introspection I have done of late tells me that perhaps in those early years I could have done a little more, but I didn't, and we can get into that if you're really interested.

Throughout my 38 years of service, I have seen a change in the grander number of Canadian Armed Forces men and women who now work in uniform across the country and internationally. I honestly believe that the great majority of military folks are integrity-based and want to do the best job they can. That doesn't alleviate the fact that there are still problems. These problems need to be addressed, and they need to be addressed quickly and as effectively and efficiently as possible. Also, we need to take really great care and really listen to those who have been affected by this insidious behaviour. I think that's the only way we can go forward.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Thank you for that.

Major Brennan, you touched on education. I've been involved in the discussions across the country from coast to coast as we develop the national action plan to end gender-based violence. We hear at every meeting—and we've heard at this committee—how important education is, especially education with men and boys. Do you know if that's part of the early training at CAF?

Maj Kellie Brennan: There is no segregated training for young boys. Courses are given, just as every other course is given at CFLRS, where I was posted. They highlight this education for them like any other course. It's not specific to boys or girls or young men or young ladies who join.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Thank you for that.

Lieutenant-General, you talked a bit about the international lens. What factors should we consider for CAF members deployed outside Canada? How can we best address and prevent sexual misconduct in that context?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: Madam Chair, I don't think we can differentiate in Canadian Armed Forces individual behaviour, whether they're inside or outside Canada. The values we uphold here in Canada have to be distinctly upheld, and probably more importantly in the international theatre, because I honestly believe people really do look to Canada for a value system that isn't necessarily in place everywhere that we deploy.

It sounds almost counterintuitive that I would be saying that, given the situations of the last number of months. The reality, however, is that Canadian Armed Forces members are expected to exhibit high morale and high ethics whether they're in Canada or international.

• (1950)

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Thank you for that.

Lieutenant-General, I live in a very large rural riding, as my colleagues often hear me say. Do you see any difference between rural and urban behaviour of military members, or does that not come into play? You just said that everybody's behaviour, whether internationally or in Canada.... Do you see any difference in behaviour patterns between urban and rural?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: I don't think I ever looked for it, so I would never have presupposed somebody was from a rural or urban area depending on the way they treated people. The bottom line is that you've got to treat everyone with dignity and respect, regardless of where they come from and regardless of whether you're working within the confines of Canada or externally. Seriously, that was never part of my psyche.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Major Brennan, just to get back to my earlier question regarding gender-based violence, is it the case that there's not a lot of sexual misconduct training in the early stages of any CAF career?

Maj Kellie Brennan: There's not specific misconduct training, no. That is missing. We could have discussions regarding prevention and enlightening new recruits to what it could be like and how to protect themselves. That would definitely help.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you

Ms. Larouche, you now have the floor for the next six minutes.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank our two witnesses, Ms. Brennan and Ms. Whitecross.

It was very enlightening to hear you talk about your respective experiences, which, as you said, are very different, in the Canadian Armed Forces.

I'd like to start with Ms. Whitecross.

In your opening remarks, you said that you heard shocking things in the testimonies over the past few weeks. I'd like to know which things were particularly shocking to you.

[*English*]

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: I have been paying attention to the committee proceedings for the last couple of weeks and I was absolutely dismayed.... That is not a good word; I was almost sick to my stomach on the testimony I heard Tuesday evening of some current and retired members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

The situation that has happened since February in terms of our very senior leadership of the Canadian Armed Forces and the allegations against them have all been a complete surprise to me, and very, very disappointing.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: So you didn't know about all this.

Do you believe that there's a form of omerta or code of silence in the Canadian Armed Forces with respect to sexual misconduct? In your opinion, what accounts for this silence?

[*English*]

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: I am certainly not surprised that sexual misconduct exists. As the committee is probably aware, I led the strategic response team on sexual misconduct after the Deschamps report in 2016. Honestly, I had the honour to meet with thousands of Canadian Armed Forces men and women across the country to discuss this behaviour and to discuss the value system that the Canadian Armed Forces upholds and expects of every single member of the Canadian Armed Forces. In so doing, I had been privy to many disclosures that were heartbreaking. Many of them were old, granted, but some of them were not. That was really a watershed moment for me. I may not have personally experienced such behaviour throughout my career, but to listen to people that have been literally gut-wrenching, to say the least.

Yes, I'm surprised what's happened in the last couple of months, but am I surprised that this behaviour exists? No, I am not. That's why I am pleased we can hopefully continue with the dialogue and get some tangible measures to get us back on the right track right away.

• (1955)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Ms. Brennan, you testified about your assault and you spoke a great deal about a power dynamic issue. You also spoke about being under a great deal of pressure and receiving many threats. Do military members face any other barriers when it comes to reporting sexual misconduct by a superior?

Maj Kellie Brennan: Thank you for your question.

In terms of the abuse of power and threats against women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, there's a boys club culture. To bring up a misconduct issue and have it heard, you have to go through the chain of command. Women stop talking because they're worried about the impact on their careers, their workplaces and their colleagues. They don't feel protected and they don't feel comfortable going to their superior because that person is their boss.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: This constitutes one of the flaws in the process for reporting sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces.

I imagine that there are others. You spoke about the intense questioning that you endured for two days.

Maj Kellie Brennan: The reports are made to the military police. This isn't the ideal setting for a woman to speak about the matter for the first time. It's difficult to speak about the matter. The victims aren't accompanied by a resource person who could be there for them.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Brennan, I don't know if there's anyone streaming data at your house, but the Internet connection we have is spotty, so if you can get them to stop streaming, that would be great, if there is anybody doing that.

Meanwhile, we're going to go next to Ms. Mathysen.

I forgot to say this to the folks at the beginning, but thank you again for your respectful tones in this sensitive subject.

You have six minutes, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I truly appreciate the witnesses who have come forward who spoke about the honour it is to be here, but it truly, I believe, is our honour to speak with you today and to hear what you have to add to this difficult subject.

Major Brennan, you mentioned the two days that you were interviewed, the six hours. One of the things that we heard before was that often it's intimidating and that women who come forward aren't provided with other women interviewers.

Were you provided that opportunity, or did you ask for it?

Maj Kellie Brennan: Madam Chair, I think that I was only interviewed by male resources, and when I noted this to them, it felt like I had to drag back up 25 years ago when I was a police officer and think about what I should be telling them as mentoring them, because I had to mention many, many things to them during the process.

It was not fair. For a person who didn't know the process, I think it would have been harder on them [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

• (2000)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: They didn't provide you with that opportunity. They didn't say they would find someone, a woman, to work with you in this situation; they just ignored that. Is that correct?

Maj Kellie Brennan: No. They mentioned that their many years of service meant they were very capable of doing it.

When stated that the resource was going to be a male to provide me support, I noted to them clearly that had they named the other person behind the desk—they were pointing at something—who was a female, I would be welcoming to that, but I was not going to enjoy having to explain myself to another male.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I've heard that oftentimes, even for just regular discipline and the consequences within everyday activities, women are challenged harder and are punished more and that even if they hold rank, it is constantly challenged.

Would you agree to those statements in terms of your personal experience?

Maj Kellie Brennan: In my personal experience, no matter what rank you hold, it's never equal to.... In my profession and in my personal experience, I didn't ever hold as high a rank as any male counterpart, whether it was that they don't salute me or didn't respect it if I had something to say. I lived that daily.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In terms of the supports around you—the senior leaders and your senior leadership—did you ever receive any support in response to that lack of respect shown to you?

Maj Kellie Brennan: I would have welcomed a mentor to teach me how to be a strong woman in the military. Unfortunately, there really aren't that many women who outrank or who've made it up to general, even in the infantry. I think that is to come.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I would say that you are a strong Canadian Armed Forces woman.

Lieutenant-General Whitecross, you were the commander of the strategic response team of Operation Honour, which has now concluded. There have been a lot of comments about its successes or failures, and ultimately failures. What do you think can be learned from that, moving forward, as the CAF restructures and tries to go forward after Operation Honour?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: Madam Chair, I wouldn't necessarily say it was a complete failure. Back in 2015 when we did Operation Honour, we certainly don't know what we'd do today and we don't understand.... I think we underestimated the amount of effort, the amount of work and the actual detailed work that's required to change a culture. In hindsight, it probably would have been of tremendous benefit if had we brought in some organizational culture experts to help us frame that.

Some of the work that had been done, whether it's the policies or some of the training.... We had mentioned some of the training. Perhaps Major Brennan wasn't aware of it, but we have instituted training at all rank levels. It has been fairly recent, granted, so that means there's a lot of work to be done. It's not just individual training; it's senior leader training and professional military education. It's bystander training and a whole bunch of other things.

Having put that aside, yes, we can't throw away all of the foundational work of Operation Honour. We have to build on it. What we really need to do, in my humble opinion, is bring in some external experts to really help shape where the next phases are going.

The Chair: Now we'll go to our second round of questioning.

Ms. Alleslev, you have five minutes.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Major Brennan, in your last comments you said that General Vance considered himself untouchable. Could you give us an idea of what he meant by that? Did that include, say, Minister of National Defence Harjit Sajjan?

• (2005)

Maj Kellie Brennan: Madam Chair, I can only speak from what I know. When I worked at Downsview in Toronto with Minister Sajjan, who was then Major Sajjan, we both worked for General Vance. There was a different dynamic.

Afterwards, General Vance always told me that he always had him under control. Those were comments to me personally. I can't discuss their working relationship because I was not privy to it.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you.

Did you have any sort of perspective on any of the other senior officers who perhaps would have been around him at the time? Did he feel that, in part, the law didn't apply to him?

Maj Kellie Brennan: In my experience, in many different areas, the law does not apply to him. He doesn't....

On a personal note, he fathered two children with me. He's not responsible to pay or to have those children under his responsibility. It's all up to me. He's excluded himself from a lot of portions of Canadian society that we hold as responsible. I think it has just become a habit with him.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Oh, my goodness, that must be very tough on you.

You said, and I was discouraged to hear it, that you believe that justice won't come for you, but thank you for doing what you've been doing.

You also mentioned that there were others in those six hours of testimony over two days. It wasn't just General Vance. There were other senior leaders who were complicit, either through their inaction or through things that they actually did against you. Are you concerned that they won't be held accountable either?

Maj Kellie Brennan: Accountability for their actions will take a court of law or a charge. That is not my goal. If that happens, that will happen, but that's not the reason I'm doing any of this. I want people to understand the leverage, the power dynamics that play into this, how leaders grow and use information to then become stronger. That's what I experienced.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Perhaps this could be viewed almost as an epic battle between the existing culture and the culture that we want to change it to. Do you believe we can collectively defeat the boys' club if none of those senior leaders are held accountable for their actions? Does that not risk, at the end of the day, their being able to say, "See? We won, and we've protected the status quo"?

Maj Kellie Brennan: I think that in the military, we win; that's what we're trained to do. I think that winning is breaking the silence. In all honesty, if every woman can speak her truth, that is a win. I think that is justice.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Could you tell me what position Major Sajjan had at Downsview when you worked with him?

Maj Kellie Brennan: To my best recollection, he was a special projects officer.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: What position did General Vance have?

Maj Kellie Brennan: He was the COS. He was the chief of staff of the—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: And you—

Go ahead; sorry.

Maj Kellie Brennan: Sorry; we call it a division now, but it was LFCA headquarters back then.

The Chair: Very good.

• (2010)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Now we'll go to Ms. Sidhu for five minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to both of the witnesses for joining us this evening, and for their many years of service to this country. Thank you for your courage.

I know this is a difficult and sensitive subject, so I want to tell the witnesses that if there are questions that they feel uncomfortable about, they can choose not to answer.

My first questions are to General Whitecross. Can you discuss your experience at RMC? Do you have any recommendations for CAF and DND to prevent sexual misconduct and harassment?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: I did not go to the Royal Military College, except for my master's program. I went to the sister university, Queen's, so I don't have any experience back from the early 1980s as to what it would have been like while I was there.

I can tell you that when I was the chief of military personnel prior to going to NATO, I was responsible for the Royal Military College and had a couple of opportunities to look at how leadership was being developed, the academic program and a number of other issues. There had been and there continues to be some positive work happening, not just on the sexual misconduct issue, but on a number of different HR issues, particularly mental health as well, and providing mental health supports to the officers and naval cadets. That's where my experience lies.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: What type of training, including in the cadet curriculum, especially on the mental health perspective or any other training...?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: I'm sorry, Madam Chair; I am not up to date on that. I'm sure Major-General Whelan could get that information for you.

I can say that in the last couple of years, there have actually been mental health experts who are physically positioned right at the military college, to my understanding, so that they can provide an immediate resource to any of the officer cadets or the staff who may be having any issues.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Were there any recommendations from the response team on sexual misconduct, which you led, that have not been implemented?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: To prepare for this appearance, I've been reading some of the reports from the last little while. Obviously, when I was in NATO, I wasn't particularly into the details of what was happening here in Canada. However, I estimate that probably the majority, if not all, of the recommendations that we put through at the time have been addressed.

In addition to that, a whole slew of new ones came through from the people who led the strategic response team after my departure.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: What recommendation would you like to make now?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: I have a couple, to be honest.

All of the foundational work needs to be fully maintained. We need to work on the policies. We need to work on training, education and all that stuff that's already been talked about.

I also believe that it's time to set aside the thought that the Canadian Armed Forces could probably deal with this internally. They need to seek resources elsewhere to help themselves out. If that means an independent review, an independent investigation arm or an independent judiciary—whatever—we need to be looking at that. I am not convinced the answer can come from within at this particular moment in time, because we have lost a lot of trust, so I would really encourage that.

There is a congruency between treating people with dignity and respect and being a war fighter. Some people don't believe that, and I believe there is no place for them in the Canadian Armed Forces. I think we need to be very clear about this. We need to be clear about the expectations and what we will and will not put up with.

There are a number of other things, but I know my time is limited.

The Chair: Very good.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

• (2015)

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to assure our two witnesses that they have our full respect.

My question is for Ms. Whitecross.

Do you believe that the military's internal investigation process is flawed? Let me explain, and you can correct me if I'm wrong. In an interview with the CBC, you urged victims of sexual misconduct to come forward. You said that there was a misunderstanding in the armed forces' chain of command about the reporting process and the people whom the victims can contact. You also listed some options.

Can you tell us about these options? What would be the best course of action for a victim seeking justice? What are the chances of success?

[*English*]

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: I believe my comment in the CBC interview was that there is a misunderstanding within the rank and file, within the uniformed members of the Canadian Armed Forces, about who they can go to.

There are a lot of different support networks available, whether through the chain of command, the MPs, the military police, the medical folks, the SMRC or the ombudsman. There are a number of them. However, I do maintain that reporting is the number one issue that has to be addressed. People need to feel confident that they can come forward and that their concerns are going to be addressed, not only in a dignified and very sustained way but also in a very quick and responsive way. If this means we need to increase the number of people they can see, perhaps through an external organization of some sort, we really need to consider that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Ms. Brennan, when you were stuck in that unfortunate situation and you couldn't say no to Mr. Vance, what recourse did you have? Were there any options?

How can this type of situation be prevented in the future? Can you provide some recommendations?

Maj Kellie Brennan: Thank you for your question.

I want to suggest something new. At this time, you can't refuse to serve as the superior of another military member in the chain of command. However, I think that, with the benefit of hindsight, you should be able to refuse to serve as the superior of another member.

This would make a difference for many people. We know that we shouldn't be the superior of a military member with whom we have or had an intimate relationship. We know that this undermines the judgment of the person in authority and prevents them from being a good leader for the other member.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: I want to thank our witnesses.

[*English*]

The Chair: Now we will go to Ms. Mathysen for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Major Brennan, we have heard in past testimony that there were women who couldn't find justice internally and had to take external measures. You yourself said that you may not find justice. Could you expand a bit on that? Do you see that sometimes the only way is an external system?

Maj Kellie Brennan: I definitely see that going outside of the military a lot of times feels more comfortable, more natural, because talking to your chain of command about personal issues is not a comfortable thing to do, so definitely, I think that option is.... I think that it should be an independent body where people can go, if you want to name a police force to investigate, because these crimes are Criminal Code of Canada crimes. These are violations of human rights; they are not within the military. They're not within the NDA, and the NDA's section 129 is misconduct.

Therefore, I definitely see this being outside of the military. Military people are still Canadians who have violated the Criminal Code of Canada and should be tried there.

• (2020)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Interestingly, we consistently hear about that challenging of the chain of command and that it's just not done. In terms of your specific circumstances, you alluded to this before, but in terms of that control, that power, we've heard a lot about power and about not understanding what the responsibility of that power is.

In your specific circumstance, could you talk a bit more and expand upon what you're talking about in terms of the power that General Vance had in your unit and over the people in his command?

Maj Kellie Brennan: Power dynamics for me, and what I want to illuminate, is that it's something that you walk up.... Sometimes they call it "the black robe" or "the boys' club". It just means that there's a circle, and you're not in it. There's a power, and you are not part of it. You are powerless within that. If you do one thing in other areas of your career, that's where you're going to feel it—on your PR, on your evaluation—and that's why it's bigger than you.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: That's why—

The Chair: Very good.

We will go now to Ms. Sahota, who is splitting her time with Ms. Alleslev.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Major Brennan, you said earlier, and I quote: "I definitely feel that there will not be justice for me." That's not the Canada that any of us stand up for, let alone you in putting the uniform on for us.

I'm going to ask you if there is anything you want to say to General Vance for what he put you through, and to the Canadian Armed Forces, which has allowed such activities and the culture to run rampant?

Maj Kellie Brennan: I honestly would just like the truth. I have no goal. I have no aim. I just want the truth. That's what would satisfy me: the truth.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Alleslev.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Lieutenant-General Whitecross, you gave the impression that this gives you a change in perspective on perhaps the breadth, depth and scope of what the Canadian Forces is facing. I wonder, if you were in your position again, what you would do differently. Is a culture change going to take more than processes? Will it also need to have accountability by those who have behaved inappropriately, as well as oversight of those individuals?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: If I were still serving, I think my focus would be on maintaining the momentum that has been created in the last couple of months to ensure that we do hold accountable those individuals who have broken the law or conducted themselves in a way that is contrary to what is expected of a Canadian Armed Forces member.

I am not completely unconvinced that won't happen. I feel for Major Brennan. I feel for her. I feel for the situations that she and many of her colleagues have been through. I do not believe that the majority of Canadian Armed Forces women—or men, for that matter—are participating in this insidious behaviour or are victims of this type of behaviour. I shouldn't use the word "majority", but I would say certainly not all are. I would say that we need to maintain the momentum that has been created in the last couple of months. I think this is a watershed moment.

I mentioned this in the past. This is something that you cannot let go, and we must not only maintain the foundational work that is required but also hold people accountable, of all ranks, and that includes for microaggressions. When people say things that they think are funny, we need to tell them that those things are not funny and that in fact they are crossing the line. I think we need to be far more vocal about these little things so that they don't start to grow.

As Madam Deschamps said, you create a sexualized culture that allows small things and then that morphs into very large behaviours that are completely contrary, and I think we need to address them right at the beginning.

Sorry for the long answer.

● (2025)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: We heard from another witnesses who said that this is too important to get it wrong, and that if we don't get this right, there will be an even greater loss of confidence that we can get anything right. That's why I was asking if you agree with that. As you said, it starts with little things, but it is about individuals and their behaviour and about being held accountable as much as it is about processes. Would you think that's fair?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: That's absolutely fair. It is about people. Behaviours and a respectful work environment are about how people treat people, and if they aren't living up to the values that we as military folks espouse, then I think they're in the wrong business, regardless of whether they're in the military or anywhere else. This sort of behaviour shouldn't be accepted at any stage.

Thank you.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go to the final five minutes with Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much.

Major Brennan, I want to thank you so much for your courage in speaking up. I do very much believe that your speaking up and the chain of events that has happened since are making a very big difference, and I want you to know that. I'm really sorry you have to relive all of these things again in your testimony today. I know that is something that's very hard to do.

There was just one thing that you said in your testimony that I wouldn't mind getting clarification on. You said you worked with Minister Sajjan in Downsview, which, I believe, is in Toronto. What year was that? Could you just clarify the testimony on that?

Maj Kellie Brennan: I was posted in in January 2006 and I left in April or May 2008. It was during that time. I would say that he came in after I did. I don't know the exact dates when he was posted in or posted out. I would have to look at the records.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Okay. It's just for the record. I'm not questioning you. I just know that Minister Sajjan also testified and verified that he has never worked in Toronto. He was a reservist in Vancouver and he did his workup training in Edmonton. I'm not questioning; I just wanted to try to get some clarification so that we can figure out exactly what happened there.

That's not the reason we're here today; we're here today because we want to make sure that what happened to you never happens again to anybody.

That's my other question, Major Brennan and General Whitecross. How do we prevent this kind of thing from happening in future? Are there things we can do differently right now that will create a situation so that this kind of thing simply doesn't happen? It's important to get support for survivors, which we've talked about, but we want to stop it in the first place.

I'll start with Major Brennan and then I'd like to hear from General Whitecross.

Maj Kellie Brennan: I think if I had to give one nugget of what we could do to change, and what would have helped me and many women whom I've spoken to, it would be that obedience does not mean silence. If a woman is hurt and wants to speak out of turn, I don't think she should be silenced and told by the chain of command to stop acting like that and get over it: "You chose the hard career—adapt and overcome."

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

General, would you comment?

LGen (Ret'd) Christine Whitecross: There are two aspects to why we want to treat people well. There's the social imperative, I'll call it, which is just the common sense and right way to treat humans. There's also the operational imperative, which is that we cannot be an effective operation or military force doing some very dangerous work if everyone in the organization doesn't feel as though they are a part of the team and they are being respected and are able to be as good a person as they can and bring to the team as much as they can.

Having said that as a marker, I would say that one thing we need to do, which I believe a number of you have already mentioned, is to hold people to account. People also need to report. We need to make sure that we're not creating an environment or maintaining an environment where people are afraid to come forward. We need to create the environment where a dignified and respectful workplace is the norm.

Thank you.

• (2030)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Very good.

Thank you to our witnesses. Thank you for your service, for your bravery and for making a difference in this study that we're performing.

Committee members, I will remind you that we resume on Tuesday for our rural communities and unpaid work final panels.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adjourn?

Seeing that it is, have a great night. We'll see you Tuesday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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