



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 075

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Monday, June 19, 2023

Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Monday, June 19, 2023

• (1105)
[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good morning. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 75 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 June 23, 2022.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members. Since we're all the usual members, I will just give this reminder: English, French, turn off your mikes, all of those good things.

Is it okay that I skipped all that? If you guys don't know what I've said in the last 74 meetings, well, golly gee—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: —we really have a problem here.

This looks to be our last official meeting of the status of women committee for this session, and I just want to say congratulations. We have done some amazing studies together. I feel like we're going into the summer knowing that we've done everything that we could do, whether it's on abuse in sport, violence against women, mental health resources, all of these different things when we talk about women. I'm just so grateful to be amongst all of you.

Thank you to the staff for always preparing us and having us all here on time, especially.... I didn't get a chance when I tabled the report on Thursday to also thank our former clerk, Alexie. I forgot to thank her, so I'll make sure I do that. She did a great job on that report with us. Danielle joined us just when the chaos got started, which was fun for her.

I'm going to get into the business now.

The committee will proceed to matters related to committee business. I open the floor for discussion.

[Translation]

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

You received by email a motion that I would like to propose to the committee today.

That it be reported to the House that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommends that, given:

a) human trafficking is a gross violation of human rights and dignity,

b) every iteration of human trafficking is a form of modern slavery including labour trafficking, sex trafficking, and forced marriage,

c) there is a horrific and primary impact on victims, many of whom are women and children,

d) human trafficking is one of the fastest growing crimes with International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are 50 million people in modern slavery today, compared to 40 million in 2016; and

that the Government of Canada adopt a zero-tolerance approach to human trafficking in all its forms in Canada and globally.

Madam Chair, this request comes from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, of which I am a member. It is within the committee's mandate to examine this issue. A zero-tolerance policy is increasingly being discussed.

In April, I visited the Canadian Human Rights Museum, in Winnipeg, for two days of reflection on human trafficking and modern slavery.

I invite the committee to think about this. Bill S-211 was adopted recently. It is a start, but we could do more. Our committee includes MPs from various parties, of course, and this is a non-partisan request. Its sole purpose is to send a strong message of zero tolerance.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass it over to Anita.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, Andréanne, for bringing forward this really important motion.

I think, on the surface of it, this is something that we would instinctively and absolutely say is evident. The issue that I have with it is.... We had a lot of witnesses talk about the definition of human trafficking. Several witnesses also said that they don't like the term "human trafficking", so one of the things I would be concerned about is putting forward a motion that says we have zero tolerance for something that is not actually defined. It's something that we heard quite a bit.

We have a report coming. There will be a lot of recommendations in that report. We haven't even seen the draft of the report in the committee, but I think we have opportunities to put in some of this when we do our final report.

However, I would be a little bit concerned. As much as all of us, of course, are horrified by what has happened to these women and girls—and I think, in our colloquial way of speaking, we would say that we are all absolutely against this and have zero tolerance for this—I don't think we can put it in a formal motion, because it isn't defined.

The Chair: Andréanne.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: This is a non-partisan request. MPs from all parties, including our colleague John McKay, who is working on Bill S-211, have called upon the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to take a position on this important issue.

The key here is to adopt a zero-tolerance approach. In Winnipeg, we signed a statement calling on the Government of Canada to adopt a zero-tolerance approach. The report will be an opportunity to discuss and debate this issue. What we want is an opportunity to propose it.

There is also the report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, and one can certainly complement the other. The goal is simply to add an opportunity to revisit the issue in the fall, in the House, in addition to tabling our report. Our goal is to provide additional ways of thinking about this issue.

[English]

The Chair: Michelle Ferreri.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Anita, your point is well taken and I think a good concern to have. I think there's a way to do both. I would ask this of the analysts or somebody from legal: Is there not a legal or criminal definition of human trafficking?

I think there's an opportunity here for us in this committee to come out again as leaders—as we've done repeatedly over and over again, to be honest with you—plus have a report. I think the intersection is the issue around sex work, making sure we don't conflate those two. Those two things are very, very separate.

In terms of the motion and the study, I think if we were to be extremely succinct in that distinction, that we're not conflating these two issues, we could still do both. We could put out a report that acknowledges a lot of the concerns that were raised and a lot of the issues that were raised and that acknowledges that sex work is completely separate. That's also maybe a whole other study that we need to do, but this study was particular to human trafficking.

To Andréanne's motion, I just think we would look like leaders. I think it's a really great opportunity. I had the chance to chat with a couple of people who have done the work when we were doing our tour in Sault Ste. Marie, so not in my city, and to talk to the people behind that and the work they have done. I just think that if it were going to happen anywhere, it would happen in FEWO.

That's what I think.

• (1110)

The Chair: I will pass it over to Leah and then Anna

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you so much.

I agree with Michelle that we have been leaders, particularly in this study, in terms of clearly defining, so I'm going to go back and then I will go to the motion.

I think one thing that came out of the study for me is that I think we are coming up with definitions in the study. We are differentiating. There's child sexual exploitation, which is deeply concerning for me. Children are often being called sex workers. I don't think a 12-year-old is a sex worker. I think they're a sexually exploited child. There's also sex work and human trafficking. Because the area of human trafficking has been so conflated with everything, I think it is premature, especially getting the study out, to put forward another motion.

Speaking about the group from Winnipeg, because I am from Winnipeg—lovely people—Steve Bell is a friend of mine. We worked on Bill C-262 together to advance the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. How we feel—Paul Brandt, me or Steve Bell—in regard to this specific matter is different, just like I had a different opinion from the woman who works with Joy Smith. I can't remember her name.

A voice: Is it Cathy McLeod?

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes.

I mean, I had a different opinion. That kind of conflated everything. She's part of that group—Joy Smith, Cathy McLeod—and that's the one that organized that specifically. Again, we have different opinions. They're all very good opinions, but I think we're opening up a discussion with this study for everybody, including me and some of my good friends. We're opening up a discussion. That will close the discussion again, and I think that would be unfortunate.

It's not that I disagree with the motion—I don't—but I disagree with the timing of the motion. That's why it's difficult for me to support it.

The Chair: I fully respect that. Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass it over to Anna.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Doing our tour really opened my eyes, because I wasn't aware of the situations across this country and how dangerous human trafficking has become.

I mentioned this to the Peel police, and they said they didn't have a lot of support. A lot of the safe houses said the same thing, that there are just no funds. I'm working on a bill that I want to present to make sure we seize the assets of users and perpetrators, and then those funds can be used to help the victims. We owe it to these victims to help them. I think if we penalize the users and the perpetrators, that will put a stop to it, and hopefully we won't have to see these children going through this.

I met with Timea Nagy. She's having an event this Thursday in Toronto with the police. She told me about how she worked with the Peel police from Sonia's riding and about the wonderful job they're doing on understanding the difference between human trafficking and prostitution.

I'm going to support this. I think we have to support this, because if we look at the whole picture, I can't remember the numbers exactly, but I believe that 98% of people who are trafficked are women. I could be wrong so don't quote me on that.

If we're the status of women committee, we owe it to these women and these girls and these young children to help them. I think we should proceed. That's just my opinion, and I'll wait to hear from everyone else.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thanks very much.

I'll take it from Leah next, but what I'm feeling from the room right now is that if the vote were today, we'd get one result, but if the vote were after the study, we'd actually get a different result. If I were to take a vote today, it would not go through, but if I were to take this vote a few months from now, it would pass.

I just want to make sure that we're clear on this when we're looking at our timing.

Leah, go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I would agree with you, Madam Chair.

I think it's not the motion that's the issue; it's the timing that's the issue. I think it would be good for the study to come out. There are going to be recommendations that come out of the study. I don't think it's a bad motion. I just think it's bad timing for the motion. That's my sense of it.

The Chair: Andréanne, I'm going to bring it back to you and ask if you'd like us to vote on this today or if you would like us to vote on it when you know you'll have the support of everybody else.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: What is important to me is that the committee recognize the need for the zero-tolerance approach. That is also the purpose of the motion.

I am of course thinking of the testimony we heard in Vancouver and Halifax. That is when we heard about the #NotInMyCity movement. I am also thinking about all the work that non-partisan groups

have done to combat human trafficking and modern slavery, as well as their testimony.

Although a bill was passed recently, there is still a lot more work to be done. I invite the committee to think about the zero-tolerance approach.

If the goal is to vote once we have a majority, we can retain the motion and come back to it later on. If timing was an issue, that is because the clock is ticking and there are a lot of victims. We were hoping that measures would be taken before the summer, before the report is tabled. If the committee takes a stance on zero tolerance, that would not be at odds with the report. That is what we are moving towards in any case. If the committee does not have a majority on the motion, we can return to it later on, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Marc, what were you saying? You were having a little conversation.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): I heard, literally in my ear somewhere, let's adjourn the debate.

The Chair: Some person over here was saying let's adjourn the debate.

We will adjourn this debate and we will come back to it. Thank you very much, Marc.

For anyone watching, I can't adjourn the debate but I know where this debate is going, so we will bring this back.

This part of the debate is adjourned.

On a point of order, go ahead.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I just wanted to say welcome back, Marc. I'm sorry we didn't identify it earlier. You look so much better. I'm afraid to think of what the other guy looks like.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Okay, everybody, we are suspending because the next part is all in camera.

Emmanuella, once you log off and then log back on, we'll be good to go again.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>