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• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)):
Let me begin by welcoming the witnesses and apologizing for keeping you waiting. Our discussions were a little more protracted than we expected them to be.

Thank you, and I am sorry that we kept you waiting, but we're glad to see you and are anxious to hear from you on Beijing +10. I don't know how you want to proceed, but you tell us.

Will you introduce your delegation please? Thank you.

Ms. Florence Ievers (Coordinator, Status of Women Canada):
Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm pleased to be before the committee again to talk about an event that is upcoming, Beijing +10. Globally and nationally, international events and commitments and conventions such as CEDAW have been instrumental in achieving progress on gender equality. They are one component of what is necessary to advance equality for women in Canada, combined with support for women's groups and equality-seeking organizations, a strong federal machinery to coordinate progress on policy within government, strong accountability measures, and the systematic implementation of gender-based analysis.

Today, to talk to you about Beijing +10, I'm here with Sheila Regehr, the acting director general of policy and external relations at Status of Women Canada; Marie Gervais-Vidricaire, the director general of the global issues bureau at Foreign Affairs Canada; and Nell Stewart, the senior adviser to the human rights, humanitarian affairs and international women's equality division at Foreign Affairs Canada.

Because Status of Women Canada and Foreign Affairs Canada work very closely on this file, we will be sharing our presentation. We intend to make our presentation brief. You have a deck before you in both official languages, and you also received in early January a background document on which our presentation is based today. We will be highlighting some elements of that background paper in certain areas and providing you with some new information.

As the first slide shows, what is most noteworthy about Beijing +10 is that it's not an event in itself, but part of a process of longstanding and continuous development with many actors. It's as much a part of our national quest for gender equality as it is an international process, and perhaps more so in this Beijing +10 event than it has been at any other point in time; it very much does have a national and domestic component to it.

As you can see on slide 3, Canada was an early and very important player in the five-year cycle of work on women's equality that began in 1975. This was primarily because we had some of the necessary elements in place, with the landmark royal commission that came out of the women's movement and helped shaped its future. We also had a recommended policy agenda for Canada, a ministerial portfolio had already been created, and we had the beginning of Status of Women Canada, which was then housed within the Privy Council Office as a central coordination agency, and for the first time we had an analysis of women's situation in Canada, which formed the baseline for accountability.

We have come a considerable distance since then, especially in having the statistics and analytical tools to support good policy-making. But as you know, experience shows that the same elements matter now as much as before. I'm talking about the ability of women to organize and make their voices heard, government accountability and leadership, and a strong government-wide policy coordination function in Status of Women Canada. I also want to highlight that each five-year event, whatever shape it takes, takes two years' of preparation at the domestic level, so we started planning for Beijing +10 more or less two years ago.

• (1610)

[Translation]

At every step of the process there are national and international dimensions, including the development of national plans to implement the international agreements according to domestic needs and priorities. It has long been accepted that all parts of government are responsible for gender equality, but that specific mechanisms are needed to ensure coordination and cohesion.

While they may take different forms around the world there are common elements, such as political responsibility vested in a member of Cabinet, and common concerns, especially around the need for greater accountability. Canada is certainly not alone in this.

I will now turn to Sheila Regehr to talk more specifically about how Canada participates in the Beijing +10 process.

[English]

Mrs. Sheila Regehr (Acting Director General, Policy and External Relations Directorate, Status of Women Canada): Thank you.

If you turn to slide five, you'll see that Canada has national mechanisms for the status of women of long standing. We have mechanisms in the provinces and territories as well as an FPT forum that brings orders of government together. Our plans of action highlighted here are recent federal ones. They're linked to the UN five-year cycle, as Florence has mentioned, but several provinces and territories have also developed similar kinds of plans in their own jurisdictions. Federally, the minister responsible for Status of Women Canada has had the lead role in developing such plans with her cabinet colleagues. The minister is supported in this by Status of Women Canada, which has had a coordination mandate since its creation as a stand-alone agency in 1976. As the bottom of the slide suggests, Canada has a reputation for excellence on gender equality issues internationally, and that certainly testifies to the productive relationship Status of Women Canada has had with Foreign Affairs Canada and other concerned departments for a number of years.

On slide six, I won't go into any detail on the Beijing agreements at this point, but you can see how many issues are covered in a comprehensive way. We're in the process of developing a series of fact sheets that will be available soon and will talk more about this. Gender analysis, however, I'd like to point out, as you can see right at the bottom, was a new cross-cutting theme that was adopted in Beijing. So 1995 was the international mark for that concept as well as in Canada.

Slide seven provides some indication of Canada's strengths and gaps identified here. They reflect what we know from many different sources: NGO assessments, many of which we've funded; academic research; cross-country comparative studies, such as the one recently done by the OECD on child care; and reports from several human rights treaty bodies. They are borne out by Statistics Canada's wealth of statistics and indicators that are disaggregated by sex and by many other factors. You may have heard in the hearings that NGOs have talked about a disconnect between Canada's international reputation and what we do at home. This slide indicates an example. We're considered very strong internationally in GBA tools. They're widely used elsewhere, but this is contrasted by what some consider to be weak application in Canada. At a GBA conference just two weeks ago, this contrast was again highlighted.

Slide eight shows some key examples of Canadian initiatives for gender equality between 1995 and 2005. In our report to the UN, responding to their questionnaire, you'll find many more of the initiatives that we've put forward as evidence of the progress we've made.

Slide nine gives you a very brief overview of the areas in which other countries are showing leadership. Where once Canada was considered almost the leader, others have found their own areas of specialty. I think the important point to note here is that we all have something of value to share and learn and that no one can really take leadership for granted.

On slide 10, with regard to what will happen at the Beijing +10 meetings, specifically in New York, it's important to note that this

meeting, as many of you know, is taking a different approach than in the past. The focus of previous meetings like this has been the negotiation and adoption of new agreements, and it involved quite frenetic activity to do that. Over the years these agreements have been built upon. We've gained considerable knowledge and experience since 1975, the first conference, and that is reflected in these documents. However, in the last few years the what-needs-to-be-done part of our work has been overtaken by concerns about how to do it in concrete terms. That's the challenge now in order to fulfill the commitments that have been made and to close the equality gaps. In fact, we need to figure out how to do it better.

The political spotlight effect that's mentioned remains an important feature of these meetings. The interest of this committee, I think, is evidence of that. You'll note that in addition to the UN meetings, non-governmental organizations have their own forum, and this has been the case for all such meetings. Again, over the years, NGOs have become very effective at influencing governments.

• (1615)

Interestingly, the concept of gender analysis was first introduced not in Beijing, but in Copenhagen, in 1995, as the result of an international women's group lobby.

With reference to slide 12, as we mentioned, the high-level international meetings take about two years to prepare. These include regional meetings. Canada is a member of the Economic Commission for Europe. It includes North America—Canada and the United States.

We were elected to chair that meeting. It was held just recently, in December 2004. You'll note that again the focus of this meeting was on sharing experience, good practices, and identifying challenges and gaps. Accountability was a key interest of Canada and of priority concern to many countries at that meeting.

Slide 13 identifies some areas where we see that parliamentarians and the standing committee could play a key role, such as fostering political and public support for future plans to address Canadian priorities, something that's of great importance on the eve of New York and immediately following. With your own experience, of course, we've suggested some things, but you may know of other ways that you could contribute globally to advancing gender equality in Canada and around the world.

The last slide I'll address, slide 14, shows you what the key themes of the Beijing +10 high-level meeting will be. You may note here again that the focus is not so much on what needs to be done. It's not a list of the issues in the Beijing platform, but more on how to achieve the established goals with matters related to accountability, such as institutional mechanisms, statistics and indicators, links to human rights treaties, and the need to identify gaps and ways to overcome challenges. Those are the focus.

With that, I'll now turn it over to Marie Gervais-Vidricaire, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, who will address how Canada's delegations to international meetings are formed and what the work of the delegation in New York will actually entail.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire (Director General, Global Issues Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs): Good afternoon.

Let me first say that I am delighted to have the opportunity to address the members of this committee.

World conferences and other forums dedicated to women have always attracted a large number of UN participants. That is good news in that it reflects the prevailing interest in gender equality and the appreciation of those who defend women's issues of the work that remains to be done.

The upcoming Beijing +10 meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York has certainly generated considerable interest in Canada. I know that a number of people have asked to be part of the Canadian delegation.

Along with the Beijing +10 meeting, the Commission on the Status of Women will be focusing on something rather different, as mentioned earlier, namely on the implementation of existing commitments, not on the negotiation of new agreements.

As you can see, it's important to stress that a wide range of themes will be covered.

● (1620)

[English]

As Florence has said, the Department of Foreign Affairs is working closely with other implicated departments, particularly Status of Women Canada, to ensure that Canada is well represented and able to meet the demands of the meeting.

Canada consistently makes an effort to ensure that delegations reflect a range of responsibilities and women's realities by including parliamentarians and provincial and territorial government representatives. We are especially concerned that NGOs are able to participate in the Canadian delegation, which is consistent with Canada's strong support of NGO participation at the United Nations in general. On slide 15 you will see some of the main responsibilities of delegation members. Of course, throughout the Commission it is important that the delegation speak with one voice.

Although Beijing +10 will not include a major negotiation or reopening of existing commitments, there will still be matters that require careful diplomacy and negotiations. We anticipate that there will be an opportunity for member states to express their continuing support for our Beijing commitments, probably in the form of a political declaration. Canada's priority will be a universal and unequivocal reaffirmation of the Beijing Declaration and platform for action and the outcome of the Beijing + 5 conference.

For all members of the delegation, at the formal United Nations meeting, at the organized side events, and in other informal dialogues, there will be many opportunities to gather and exchange information that can inform our efforts in the Canadian context when

we return. We must of course balance these needs with considerations related to the size of our delegation.

To be honest, it would not be in Canada's international and foreign policy interests to send a delegation that is larger by far than those of other similar countries. We must also recognize that many countries are financially able to send only a few delegates; we do not want to appear to unfairly dominate the proceedings. And of course, cost implications and public perceptions in Canada must also be considered.

We must also take logistical considerations into account. Because of the high level of attendance expected at the meeting, the United Nations will provide delegations, we are told, with a limited number of entry passes to the plenary room. We understand at this point that this number of passes may be as low as two or three per delegation. This will mean that, apart from the head of the delegation plus one or two at any given time, the rest of the delegation will not have access to this more formal, official part of the meeting.

Having said all of this, of course it will be up to the Minister of Foreign Affairs to approve the list of the delegates. I must say that we are certainly encouraged and thrilled by the level of interest we are seeing in this meeting. In particular I would mention that at our NGO consultations, held at the Department of Foreign Affairs last week, to prepare the Commission on Human Rights, we were very impressed by the level of engagement of NGOs in the Beijing +10 process, which is taking place and will continue to take place around the world and far beyond the meeting in New York.

There is a prevailing sense that Beijing +10 offers an opportunity for a revitalization of our commitment to women's human rights and gender equality, both globally and in Canada. I will be happy to answer questions, but I think Florence will want to have the final word.

[Translation]

Ms. Florence Ievers: Thank you very much, Marie.

To sum up, let me take you back to the beginning of the cycle.

As far as the Government of Canada is concerned, the real work will start when the New York meeting draws to a close. Together, we must chart an agenda for action for the next five years—from 2005 to 2010—and commit to improving accountability and outcomes.

[English]

The standing committee can play a key role in this, based on what your hearings have revealed. Government consultation with non-governmental organizations is also another critical element of the way forward. Status of Women's priority attention and resources will be, and must be, refocused toward domestic coordination. We need to do this soon, so that when Canada's record is again reviewed—and the next time will be 2007, when we report on our implementation of CEDAW—we want to be able to point to real, measurable, and positive results for Canadians.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now for comments and questions. We'll begin with the Conservatives. Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for taking the time to appear before us.

The Canadian delegation to the Beijing +10 session is smaller than the delegation to the 23rd special session of the General Assembly, Beijing +5. Could you explain why, and how was this decision taken?

Secondly, what are the respective roles of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Status of Women Canada in the upcoming 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women?

The third question is, how many non-government organizations will participate in the Canadian delegation to the Beijing +10 meeting?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire: Thank you very much for your question.

I don't have the information on the Beijing +5 session. Perhaps Florence will answer that part of the question. I wasn't there at the time. The process to prepare the delegation list is as usual. I think the whips of the respective parties have been invited to provide names of interested members of Parliament.

In terms of non-governmental organizations, we are looking at having four representatives. They will be officials from the departments concerned, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Status of Women Canada. There will be representatives from the provinces. There's so much interest. It's very nice to see that this issue raises so much interest. As I tried to explain, at the same time we want to make sure that our delegation is of a comparable size to the others, so that we don't have many more members than the other delegations.

As I mentioned as well, it will be up to the Minister of Foreign Affairs to approve and to make a decision on the final delegation list, as is the case for any other international meeting.

Ms. Florence Ievers: The two events are of a different nature. In 2000 Beijing +5 was a special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Therefore the event itself took a different track. This time it's an expanded meeting of the yearly Commission on the Status of Women, so it's a meeting of a rather different nature.

In 2000 there was some text. There was a declaration that was negotiated and preparations for that were long in coming. Governments knew that those were the kinds of things that would be happening. In this case it's possible there will be a statement issued by all nations, but it's unclear at this point in time what the shape of that will be.

We are not looking at this event to negotiate any text. We are looking at sharing experiences and seeing how individually and

collectively we can best organize ourselves in order to better advance gender equality, because in a number of countries, and I include Canada in that, we have been working at a steady pace on the implementation of Beijing in the last ten years. We're all coming to a special juncture where we're looking at things we've tried and we're seeing that we're not as efficient and we're not getting necessarily the results we would have expected after ten years of working on this.

So we're looking at ways to improve accountability of government and share good practices. Sheila in her presentation mentioned that the Nordic countries were advanced in some ways. We have things to learn from them. They, in turn, have things to learn from us on how we've organized ourselves to build capacity on gender-based analysis. Our challenge in Canada is to make sure that the capacity we've built is put to good use and is developing policies that have the benefit of that.

The two meetings are different in nature, as well.

• (1630)

The Chair: You have another two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): When the evaluation was done on the progress toward the implementation of the Beijing platform for action, who filled out the questionnaire? Was it done by NGOs? Was it done by a department? Who had actually done the evaluation for the Beijing platform for action?

Ms. Florence Ievers: For these events, the United Nations sent a questionnaire to governments, and governments are responsible for answering the questions that are put forward.

In Canada, the way we operate is that gender equality is not solely the responsibility of the federal government, it's also the responsibility of provincial and territorial governments. It's also not just a responsibility of Status of Women Canada, but government as a whole. At the federal level, we've worked collectively with a number of federal departments in an interdepartmental committee, including Foreign Affairs and a number of others. Each department was to highlight the successes, the achievements, and the challenges that remain in their areas of expertise. We also asked provinces to do the same in their areas.

What the United Nations asked us to do this time, which was different from other times, was a report that was much shorter than usual, giving just an illustration of things that had worked or not or where challenges remained. Therefore, I suppose in some sense we shortchanged the achievements of the Government of Canada and governments across Canada, federal, provincial, and territorial, in not having the leisure, in the time and in the space that was given to us and the questions that were asked, to give a full report on all of the achievements of the country.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: So it's just governments basically, not just ordinary Canadians or people who had come as witnesses to this committee.

Ms. Florence Ievers: Status of Women Canada funds NGOs. We have funded the Feminist Alliance for International Action. The Feminist Alliance does what one can call a shadow report on the report that Canada prepares, and gives its views on how the NGO community believes Canada as a whole, the whole of the governments in our federation, has acquitted itself of the mandate to further gender equality.

Some countries have the NGO report as the government report. I think if you were to ask our NGO communities and our stakeholders, they would much prefer to have the leisure to do their own reports. Marie spoke of the importance that we give to the work that's done by our stakeholders and the NGO community. We fund them in Canada to take that critical look at how government's operate and report, and I think it's very much part of the accountability that governments need to put in place.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Brunelle.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): We understand that you will be reporting on the Beijing Platform for Action developed a decade ago. The meeting will also afford you an opportunity to have discussions with other groups and countries and to share your experiences.

Clearly, this is interesting work. Would you also say that there is a public relations component associated with this work? Is this also an opportunity to increase awareness among men and women alike of the need for progress in this area? As this committee has observed, a number of major problems exist, among others poverty among women. Will this meeting be viewed as an opportunity to focus people's attention on these problems and issues? In your view, what role do parliamentarians have to play in terms of focusing awareness on these problems?

Ms. Florence Ievers: Clearly, this exercise and the five-year reporting requirement are critical in that they keeps us on track for achieving results. However, as you so aptly stated, aside from those already interested in the status of women, and that includes some men as well, events of this nature also attract the attention of many other women and other groups, whether journalists or media people, who then focus more on women's issues during these analysis and reflection exercises that are held every five years.

These meetings therefore afford us an opportunity to aim the spotlight on actual results, while remaining realistic—at least Canada does—in order to stress the challenges still to be overcome on the road to achieving full gender equality in Canada.

Parliamentarians do have a role to play. The mere fact that you have invited us to appear before the committee to discuss the Beijing +10 process in more detail contributes to this objective. Given your ties with your constituents, you can speak out about the process and the role you play. These meetings can help shed new light on some issues of concern to all of us. You will have an opportunity to take part in the delegation and to make speeches.

The Beijing +10 meeting will be an opportunity to exchange information. However, the real work will start when we return from New York and Canada moves to set goals for the next five years. It is at this juncture that, in my opinion, the committee will have a pivotal role to play. Over the next several months, you will hear from a number of stakeholders and you will ask them questions about how they see the future and what components they believe a new plan of action should contain. As I see it, you have a key role to play in setting the Government of Canada's new agenda for 2005 to 2010 and beyond.

• (1635)

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire: If I might just add very quickly to that, it's important to understand that parliamentarians attending this conference as delegates will also be attending the daily briefing session for delegates. This session will provide them with an opportunity to share their experiences and interesting ideas with other members of the Canadian delegation.

A series of events will be taking place, sometimes concurrently. Even though our delegation will be fairly large, there will be a lot of ground to cover. In my estimation, delegates will perform an important function.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Do I have any time remaining?

[English]

The Chair: You have another few minutes, yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I may be off a little on my analysis, but according to the data I have, Canada was initially viewed as the leader on women's issues. Would you say that we have lost some ground as a result of budget cutbacks? If so, would it not be advisable to allocate substantially more funding to Status of Women Canada?

Ms. Florence Ievers: Canada was once the leader in this field, and in many respects, it still is. We are to some extent victims of our own success. Numerous other countries have not only copied our approach, but improved upon it as well.

As I've said to the committee on other occasions, we must now evaluate our approaches and see what improvements can be made in order to achieve some tangible results. I trust that our discussions on the Beijing +10 process will bring us closer to our objective.

As for the parliamentarians who will be attending the meeting in New York, they will have an opportunity to exchange views with representatives of other nations, in particular northern countries and to ask them what they have done to get results.

Thirty or fifty years ago, someone asked the \$64,000 question: Would having more funding be a positive thing? Clearly, more funding would always be welcomed, not just by Status of Women Canada, but by all groups dealing with women's issues.

• (1640)

Ms. Paule Brunelle: That is the right answer.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I understand Ms. Kadis and Mr. Powers are sharing their time.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Just in general terms—it's hard to elaborate in detail right now—going back from the last vantage point to now, when we were going to present our current status, how well are we adhering to the agreements that we signed at the last juncture? How close or how far are we?

Ms. Florence Ievers: I think we compare well to a number of other countries, and we certainly have an approach to gender equality that is, I would say, equal to none. In processes and achieving results, some are giving themselves, or have improved on, the mechanisms we already have. But if you look at progress that's been made, we've made consistent progress since 1995 as a federal government and as a country. Without going into a lot of detail, we will be circulating fact sheets prior to going to New York for Beijing +10—unfortunately, these are not finalized yet—that will give the commitment and the way Canada has addressed each of the 12 priority areas of the platform for action. When you have a chance to look at those, you will see that Canada has done a good job.

If you ask me if any country has achieved all the objectives of the platform, I would say no resoundingly. This is still, for everyone, very much a work in progress.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: I appreciate that answer, and I will look forward to that information. I would have loved to have it now, but I understand the timelines and constraints. However, I'm thinking of violence, for example, as being one of those that's been identified in our gaps. I don't see that there; I know we're a little more general in those statements for these slides. I'm looking at one area in particular that we heard referenced a lot with the witnesses—in general terms, would that be an area that we are not doing as well in?

Ms. Florence Ievers: I would say that violence is an issue that remains a challenge for everyone. One would think that, in a country like Canada, we would have been able to solve that problem, but when we look at the plight of aboriginal women, when we look at others, certainly the solutions.... We've put forward many policies and programs in order to alleviate that phenomenon. We have the family violence initiative, the government has gun control legislation, and we have a crime prevention initiative. A number of other areas related to violence against women are related to health and other areas, so we could do better.

On the whole question of violence, trafficking was not something we were very well aware of, or did anything about, just ten years ago. Perhaps we're more conscious of the violence because we now know more about it. It's more acceptable to talk about it. In the past, nobody talked about it. Now at least governments are not only listening, but also doing things about it.

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire: I'd just like to add that from an international perspective, you should be aware that Canada is leading on the resolution on violence against women at the UN Commission on Human Rights, so we've done a lot to raise awareness on this issue. Through this resolution, a mandate is given to a special rapporteur on violence of the Commission on Human Rights. The rapporteur will go to various countries and produce reports. I think that's an important element as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Powers.

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): The last point is very interesting, because I've looked at the deck here, and page 14 gives a broad overview of the agenda. Perhaps more by accident than on purpose, the headings are clearly straying away from the issue of human rights, which is one of the major issues impacting women from a global perspective. Is it

intentionally the purpose of Beijing to stay away from the human rights issues and talk about other things, or not? It was an interesting point raised back...because I think it will all come back.

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire: I think human rights is really a cross-cutting theme underpinning everything that will be discussed at this conference. Clearly, that's what we're talking about—whether it's the question of women's health, of education, these are all related to human rights. I don't think there was any intention to minimize the role of human rights. I think it is acknowledged as the concept that underpins everything.

• (1645)

Mr. Russ Powers: I don't have the detailed agenda as to which panels are taking place when, and what the titles are, but on your perusal of the agenda is it clear that it will be, or will it just be an undercurrent that will probably surface in every one of the sessions?

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire: I don't yet have the program of all the events that will happen. Hopefully we'll get that soon and then we will communicate it to you. We have an annotated agenda of the main meetings—the more formal meetings—and at those there will be a kind of open discussion on the platform for action from Beijing, which was adopted ten years ago.

Florence, maybe you would like to address the specifics.

Ms. Florence Ievers: Yes, there will be an interactive panel on the implementation of Beijing and CEDAW, which is the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and that speaks very clearly to the human rights agenda. However, as Marie said, women's rights are human rights, and it's a cross-cutting theme throughout the discussions of this conference.

Mr. Russ Powers: There's no doubt that it's a global issue. Clearly it's an issue within Canada that we all recognize. Every group that's made a presentation to this committee has highlighted it in some varying degree, from identifying it as a variable that has to be considered not only in their programming but as part of the challenges they're experiencing in getting the programs out, to acknowledging that it is very clearly widespread and cannot be ignored. I'm sure all the participants, whether they're technical or parliamentarians or official delegates, will be appropriately briefed in order to aggressively participate in the dialogues. If we get an opportunity for a second round, I'll pursue that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you for the interesting presentation. I would agree that it's very important for Canada to be speaking up publicly in an international forum, and of course to continue to work domestically on some of the issues.

My question is really going to centre around post-Beijing +10. In the UN questionnaire to governments that was completed, there are some very good summaries of the good work that Canada has done, but there are also a lot of issues that have been highlighted as still gaps, and Ms. Ievers certainly talked about efficiency and accountability.

There are a number of things in here in terms of the accelerated GBA and gender mainstreaming and aboriginal, and it says specifically, "to examine potential improvements to accountability". FAFIA, over the last week, produced both a document around the budget process and how the gender mainstreaming isn't included in a comprehensive way, and a brief that came out to the committee, talking about the need to look at our application of gender-based analysis, showing that it hasn't worked and that it's been voluntary.

I guess some of the discussions at the Beijing +10 conference will be about best practices. What would you see happening, coming back, and who is going to take the lead role on addressing the gaps in Canada's current performance on Beijing +10? I know you've mentioned a possible role for the committee on the status of women, but the committee on the status of women has a broader mandate than just Status of Women Canada. I wonder if you could comment on what will happen with the delegation that comes back, and specifically what should happen across the departments.

Ms. Florence Ievers: When we come back from New York, we will be sitting down with government departments and other stakeholders to determine collectively what approach Canada should be taking in the next five years and beyond. I don't want to presume what the results will be, but surely there's a role for the Government of Canada and a number of federal departments to play. There's a role, as I said, for parliamentarians to play. There'll be a role for stakeholders to play and also a role for provinces and territories to play. Status of Women will presumably take the lead, and with the information we have gathered and the best practices we have gleaned at Beijing +10, we'll try to consult and assess which is the best way forward in order to achieve results.

You said that the application of gender-based analysis is not mandatory. It is left to everyone's will to practise it. We adopted gender-based analysis as the way to go in 1995 because that was in essence one of the commitments from Beijing. In 2000 it was decided that what was lacking for governments to apply gender-based analysis effectively was capacity building. People didn't quite know what it was or how to do it. So we've spent the last five years building that capacity within the federal government.

Now it's time to move to the next step, which is when the rubber really hits the road. The policy is in place. We've built the capacity within government. Now we must put in place mechanisms that will make sure this policy is implemented.

I always go back to the example of the IRPA legislation, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, where there's an obligation for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to report back to Parliament yearly on the application of gender-based analysis. That's not something Status of Women has traditionally forced departments to do. I don't want to presume where the Government of Canada will want to be with its plan, but we may be at the juncture where we need to be much more forceful in ensuring those commitments are lived up to. We do have in front of us an example in a piece of legislation that works. So I think that probably leads part of the way forward.

• (1650)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: When I asked for a copy of the agenda for gender equality, which was adopted in 2000, I was told that it wasn't in writing. When policies aren't in writing so that they're transparent and when clear accountability mechanisms aren't built in, it makes it very difficult to talk about performance.

The policy on gender-based analysis, which is an underpinning of almost everything else we do, has been voluntary, and over the last five years there have been this mechanism to look at educating people and capacity building. I know you may not be in a position to answer this. We need to get specific targets in place around a number of these things under Beijing +10. We're seeing some dismal results in violence against women and children, family poverty, the wage gap not being closed sufficiently, non-standard employment for women, and employment insurance that doesn't work. I wonder if you would see us going to much more accountable measures.

Ms. Florence Ievers: I would certainly welcome that.

I'd like to talk about the agenda for gender equality, which you mentioned. There is no document because it's a strategic approach to moving the agenda forward. In our strategic approach we did invest a number of resources in building capacity on gender-based analysis, which was the issue of the day at Beijing + 5. It also enabled us to provide funding to our stakeholders, which were in dire need. It also provided us with an opportunity to take part and to report internationally on the progress or the challenges we face in Canada, because there is an international component to the agenda for gender equality.

But as you say, I think we've come to the juncture where we need more accountability and more results. We have statistical information that enables us to identify gaps and see where the challenges lie. I think that together, parliamentarians, government, and stakeholders can develop a plan that Canada will be proud to live up to in the next five years.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Guergis.

• (1655)

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you. My apologies, I'm suffering from a cold.

Thanks for being here.

In preparation for the Beijing +10 meeting, regional and sub-regional meetings have been organized by the United Nations' five regional commissions, including the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. You had mentioned a little on this in the beginning in the slide deck, and I was wondering if you could elaborate on what emerged as the key challenges for the ECE region in the implementation of the Beijing platform for action. In what ways are these similar to the challenges faced in Canada? In what ways are they different?

Ms. Florence Ievers: We were quite proud to take part in the meeting in Geneva. Canada was asked to chair the meeting, so we were particularly proud of the results of the meeting. There were a number of issues that were discussed, and I'll ask Sheila to take you through them.

Certainly one of the cross-cutting issues was the issue of accountability, which was raised here and which we're grappling with as a country, and it's certainly something that most members of the commission were also grappling with. So it was an interesting exchange of views in that sense. I think the greatest achievement of the meeting in Geneva was that it was the only regional commission that reaffirmed the commitments in Beijing. The other commissions that had taken place, or were to take place, have not reaffirmed that commitment. So we were very pleased, as we chaired that commission, that the commitments to Beijing were reaffirmed.

Mrs. Sheila Regehr: Because the Economic Commission for Europe has a specific mandate mostly focused on economic issues, the main themes for that meeting were women in the economy, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. So all of the areas around accountability were discussed under that thematic, and, as Florence said, a lot of countries focused on accountability. Several countries had just started an exercise of having national plans and they wanted to highlight how important those efforts were.

The third area was trafficking, which is a new area and of particular concern to a number of European countries and to the Americans as well. The document that has the chair's conclusions, the result of that meeting, which reflects the discussion and reflects a regional overview of what the trends looked like for Europe and North America, can be found on the UNECE website. We can give that to you. It's not available yet in French, it's only in English. We will, as soon as it's available in both languages, make it available on our site as well.

The Chair: You have a little bit of time.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I want to go back to your opening remarks, Florence, where you talked about Copenhagen having gender-based analysis. Did I understand that the gender-based analysis in Copenhagen is succeeding? You specifically cited Copenhagen. I just wanted you to tell me.

Ms. Florence Ievers: What I mentioned was the Nordic countries that are advanced in gender equality, and I wouldn't necessarily say Denmark more than another. I know that Norway even has measures that force private companies to have a certain number of women on their boards. Government takes action when they haven't been able to meet the quotas that have been affixed by government. A number of governments have organized themselves differently to advance gender equality. Most have stand-alone departments, but where they're placed in government is often interesting to see. Most Nordic countries, as a rule—and I can't be very precise, but I can find the information and give it to you—do apply gender-based analysis more systematically than a number of other countries.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I'd be interested to see what you could offer.

Mrs. Sheila Regehr: My profound apologies. I was guilty of UN shorthand that may not be familiar to other people. The Copenhagen meeting I was referring to in 1995 was the World Summit for Social Development. It was held just a few months before Beijing. There was an incredibly active, very sophisticated lobby of women's organizations from around the world. Their work for Beijing started for that social development summit meeting, and that's why there were so many references to women, gender equality, gender analysis, that got carried over. There was one reference in the Copenhagen document and I think there are maybe 300 in the Beijing document.

●(1700)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I understand, Madam Chair, that we're going to be studying gender analysis, but our witnesses today say that it's already policy in place. So how are we going to do that?

The Chair: We'll study it by looking at whether it's being implemented.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: The mechanisms to implement it.... Therefore, we could be learning from Copenhagen, or some of the countries, you said?

The Chair: I think that's part of our plan, Ms. Yelich, to look at what's happening in other jurisdictions.

Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver-Centre, Lib.): I just wanted to say that in fact Canada has a very sophisticated mechanism for dealing with gender-based analysis. The toolbox is complete for Canada, and a lot of people have borrowed it.

I think the thing is, did other people take our toolkit that is recognized as being so good and take it to the rest of the world and implement it better than we're implementing it? So it's about political will at this point in time, not about the tools that are being used, because the tools in Canada are probably seen as the best tools there are.

I just wanted to ask a question. The question is this: given that you're dealing at this next meeting, Beijing +10, with looking at best practices and identifying the challenges, etc., does it denigrate that advocacy role of the Beijing fora—Beijing +5 and Beijing +10—in openly ensuring that the countries of the world are following the plan of action?

I know that in Beijing +5, there was almost an effort to roll back the language of Beijing. Many countries had ignored it on things like.... The advocacy role of these meetings is about dealing with things like honour killings and forced marriages of girls of 10 to 50-year-old men and those kinds of things, which Canada had gone forward with and was pushing for and on which we had seen very little done. How is that advocacy role going to be carried forth if what you're going to be doing is more that of identifying challenges and talking about best practices? Is that going to be diminished at all? Because I think that's a key role.

Ms. Florence Ievers: I don't think it will be diminished per se. I think that will continue to take place. The difference is that we're not trying to negotiate a text. I think those talks will be done perhaps in some of the panel discussions. If we look at how we're implementing Beijing and how we're implementing CEDAW, for instance, those issues will continue to come.

But I think the challenge that most countries are facing right now is that we have the commitments.... As you say, in 2000 it wasn't clear whether we were going to stick to those commitments. We were lucky to be able to stick to them; we still have them. Now that we have them, we're not implementing them; we're not moving forward as quickly as we should. So how can we organize ourselves and what do we need to do more or differently so that we're able to achieve the results that are expected?

Hon. Hedy Fry: So are you saying there are going to be some accountability mechanisms that you're going to devise to allow for countries that signed on and said they were going to sign on to the plan of action and did not meet the objectives? Is there going to be some accountability mechanism internationally? They're very much needed.

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire: No, I don't think so. That's not the way the UN works, unfortunately. But I think a lot of emphasis needs to be put on implementation, because this is the problem, frankly, not only in this area of women's rights but also in many other plans of action. Dr. Fry, you were in Durban for the World Conference against Racism; I think it is the same challenge.

It's difficult to get countries to agree on what needs to be done. Once you've got that, it's very difficult to make sure that people implement what was decided. So I think that focusing on implementation at this point in time is key. Florence mentioned that we were lucky in 2000 that we didn't have to lose ground on what had been agreed in Beijing; but frankly, if you were going to have another discussion on the Beijing commitment now in 2005, I'm not sure that you wouldn't have to go back. The environment is not necessarily easier now than it was five years ago. We see this on women's reproductive rights—very difficult.

So I think it's very important at this point in time to focus on what needs to be done and how to do it.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Bonsant.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): I don't know anything about 1995 or 2000, but I am intrigued by one thing in so far as Beijing +10 is concerned: will all nations be represented? I'm thinking about Communist nations, notably China, where women have no rights, and about Muslim countries such as Iran. I'm wondering if these countries will be sending delegates. If not, what steps can we take to integrate them into the process?

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire: All Commission on the Status of Women members, and therefore, virtually all UN member countries, will be represented at this meeting, including China, of course, along with many other countries. Everyone is coming to the discussion table with a different perspective, while different religions and different cultures will be represented. Given this extraordinary diversity, it's truly remarkable that we've managed to agree on the commitments made at the world conference a decade ago.

Ms. France Bonsant: You mentioned cultural differences. However, there's also the matter of AIDS and the spread of this disease in Africa where governments are keeping the public in the dark. I'm not sure if their objective in so doing is ethnic cleansing or some other thing, but I'm also wondering if heightening women's awareness of AIDS is on the Beijing +10 conference agenda.

[English]

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire: Nell, do you want to answer this one?

Ms. Nell Stewart (Senior Advisor, Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and International Women's Equality Division, Department of Foreign Affairs): Sure.

Just quickly, I could mention that there is a resolution at the CSW, dealing with

[Translation]

women and HIV-AIDS. A resolution to that effect is tabled each year. This topic is on our agenda once again this year.

Ms. France Bonsant: I see. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Are there any further questions?

Ms. France Bonsant: No, it's okay.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle: I have here a copy of a report by the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action. On December 12, 2004, the Alliance gave a speech to the NGO Forum of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The speech was entitled: A Decade of Going Backwards: Canada in the Post-Beijing Era. The FAFIA does not really have many kind words to say about you. Obviously, the report discusses employment insurance, poverty among women and the many spending and social program cuts that have left Canadian women in dire circumstances. I don't know if you've read this report.

How would you respond to the FAFIA?

Ms. Florence Ievers: I've read their report. It's clear that on looking back, the government had no choice but to make some hard decisions. Some of which impacted certain segments of the population more than others. I find it interesting to look at this analysis prepared by persons outside government and to see their perspective on the situation. Our challenge at Status of Women Canada is to keep our focus firmly on the future. We must draw inspiration from the obstacles encountered over the last ten years and look for ways to maintain our forward momentum.

If we look at the table, we see that the prospects are not all gloomy. The actions of the Government of Canada over the past decade are also cause for some optimism. Substantial progress has been made.

How do we focus on the future? To my mind, that is where we should be channeling our energy. We mustn't necessarily look to the past at all times. We need to look ahead to the next five years and to accomplishments in which we can take pride.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I was actually looking for the quote, but I can't find it right off the top of my head.

I appreciate the fact that part of the delegation that's going to Beijing +10 is made up of NGOs. The UN response to the document acknowledges the very strong role that NGOs play in Canada around identifying issues and working toward solutions. We almost have this split, though. On the one hand we've seen core funding, as we've heard over the last number of weeks, being reduced to key women's organizations, and their ability to continue to speak up on key issues being eroded as a result. Yet on the other hand, we acknowledge the importance of them in our response on Beijing +10. I wonder if you could speak a little bit about how we balance that off.

• (1710)

Ms. Florence Ievers: There again I think the picture is not all that bleak. The case in point is, your colleague, Madame Brunelle, just mentioned a report that was done by FAFIA that had been funded by Status of Women Canada. There is a vibrant community that even though there is no core funding as used to exist in the early 1990s—at Status of Women Canada we now have project funding or initiative funding—we certainly still hear very vibrantly from the community on the challenges that we face in advancing gender equality.

Could more resources go to that community? Yes. Are they doing a good job? Yes. Are we contributing as a government to helping out for them to speak out? Yes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I would agree that we are contributing, but I know we heard very clearly from women's groups....

I wonder, given the good work they've done, about the kind of pressure we're putting on these groups to survive, and we know many of them don't survive. It just seems that women's work and contributions continue to be undervalued by our decrease in funding to core groups. That's just more of a statement than a question.

Ms. Florence Ievers: I'll just end by saying that with the agenda for gender equality, \$10.5 million over five years was given to groups. So instead of the funding being some \$8 million, as it was in 2000, it's now \$10.8 million, so there is a progression toward the positive.

It's not perfect. There's always room for improvement, but there has been movement upwards.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have another minute and a half. Do you have anything further?

Ms. Jean Crowder: No, that's fine.

The Chair: Ms. Torsney.

Hon. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): Thank you.

It was interesting to see that some of the groups that are going to be participating are obviously unhappy with some of the accomplishments or perhaps setbacks over the last number of years, but when you actually look at what has been accomplished in the short time that I've been here, and since Beijing, things like the child care initiatives, both provincial and federal, have to be counted toward accomplishments, I would argue, as well as the child tax benefit, the year-long parental leave, the number of women who are elected—many of whom are around this table—and initiatives in women's entrepreneurship where, again, Canada is leading the way,

especially within the WTO and other places where our experts are really accomplishing great things.

I know you mentioned, in terms of the delegation, that there are going to be parliamentarians, but in addition to the main part of the meeting, various parliamentary associations of which the members around this table are members will be hosting their own day around the meeting. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, for instance—l'Union interparlementaire—is having a day,

[Translation]

March 3, devoted to the status of women and to

[English]

improve women's access to Parliament.

The second theme is strengthening Parliament's capacity to address the Beijing objectives. That's important, because if parliamentarians are providing policy guidance, setting directions, or passing bills or motions, they need to be in keeping with the initiatives and directives to the civil servants right around the world who are implementing these initiatives.

I understand that FIPA, the parliamentary association of the Americas, is having a session. Hopefully some of the people around this table will be participating in that.

I'm particularly interested in, if we have the NGO community, what specific measures are being done to encourage young women to participate, the under-25 set, and are there certain spots on the delegation being reserved for young women to participate in New York?

Ms. Florence Ievers: Yes, there will be a spot on the official Canadian delegation.

• (1715)

Hon. Paddy Torsney: One?

Ms. Florence Ievers: Hopefully, one of the four NGOs on our delegation will be a representative of young people. The delegation has not been set yet, but that is something we're striving for.

This is an issue that came up at the Economic Commission for Europe, the fact that youth were largely not included.

I understand also that there will be four NGOs on the official Canadian delegation. There's a process to choose them, but it is my understanding that there will be, perhaps, in our tally, 69 representatives of NGOs who will be in New York for this meeting. I understand there is a contingent of young women, and possibly men, from the McGill law school who will be taking part, a contingent of maybe 20 to 25 young people.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Clearly it's important to have them participate in the process in New York, but across the country we need to engage young people particularly—young men and women, as you rightly point out—if we're going to make the kinds of changes and achieve the objectives that I think all of us want, of an inclusive society.

So I'd be interested in hearing how we're broadening it. It's not just New York. This is the tenth anniversary of Beijing, but there's an opportunity to have a series of activities, and again, across parliamentary associations, many of them are having their annual meetings this year focus on what it means for women.

The second thing I want to identify is on CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Canada funded a parliamentarian's handbook to make sure that other parliamentarians can implement policies in their countries. I wonder if you have had, whether it's at the ECE or other places, a chance to get feedback on how important that document is.

Ms. Florence Ievers: I haven't had feedback directly, but I will inquire among those of us who were in Geneva to see if there was. Certainly that's something I will pursue in New York when we're there, because that was a very important and interesting initiative.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Maybe we could make sure that members of Parliament who are on this committee have a copy of that document, as well.

The Chair: That would be excellent. Thank you.

We can all hear the bells ringing, and I have a couple of other people on the list, so I will ask for very brief interventions.

Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: To Sheila, I would like a copy of the report you spoke about, the European report on the economic issues that you made reference to.

I have another quick question. I'm curious, when you talk about high-level participants and the round tables they will be having, who is the high-level participant? And how could this committee benefit from the sharing of the best practices that will be discussed? Is there going to be any guidance from the committee on what we could do if we are accepted as delegates?

Those are a couple of quick questions.

The Chair: Ms. Regehr, could you make that document available to the clerk for distribution to all on the committee?

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire: On the issue of what is meant by "high-level", that means heads of delegations, in many cases the majority of whom will be ministers leading their delegations. When

there's a reference to a high-level discussion, normally that is what is understood.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: So we'll be low-level opposition.

The Chair: I have Mr. Powers down.

Mr. Russ Powers: No, that's fine.

The Chair: Is there anybody from the Bloc? No. Ms. Crowder?

Mr. Powers, you have a quick question.

Mr. Russ Powers: After this meeting is finished, what's the format? We may have some further direction later, but what are the timelines for basically summarizing the activities that are there, and then likely a reporting mechanism back to this committee? Do you have any thoughts at the present time?

The Chair: Anyone?

Mr. Russ Powers: If not, perhaps they could put it in writing to us as to how it should ideally be played out.

Ms. Florence Ievers: Well....

Mr. Russ Powers: You'll give it to us in writing. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Fry, you have the last word.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Actually, it wasn't a word, and maybe we don't have time, but I wanted to ask if you can tell me how the fact that in our federation we have jurisdictions for women's equality that are both federal and of course provincial...? How does Canada's inability to do anything about how various provinces either support or do not support initiatives for women impact on Canada's report as a whole?

• (1720)

The Chair: That is complex question.

Ms. Florence Ievers: It has an impact. The actions of every entity of the federation are important, so each government needs to be responsible for advancing gender equality. We can't force anyone. You can lead horses to the water but you can't make them drink. However, we can lead by example, and I think that's the best way.

The Chair: Thank you to all committee members, and thank you very much to the presenters for coming out. Again, my apologies for keeping you waiting. This was a very helpful and very productive session. I thank you all for coming.

The committee is adjourned.

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