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Thursday, February 19, 2015

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Chair

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc

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• (1135)

[Translation]

The Chair (Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP)):
Good morning.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, October 1, we are continuing our study of promising practices to prevent violence against women.

We are pleased to welcome the following witnesses: Leah Gazan, a member of Wood Mountain Lakota Nation, and Faculty of Education at the University of Winnipeg; Kim Pate, the executive director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies; Megan Walker, the executive director of the London Abused Women's Centre; and Matt Schaaf, from the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women and the coordinator of MANifest Change.

I'm going to change the order of the presentations a bit to allow the witnesses who are not from Ottawa to testify first, because we don't really know what will happen in the House of Commons. Regardless, rest assured that we will make sure we hear from all the witnesses.

We'll start with Ms. Gazan.

You have 10 minutes for your presentation.

[English]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Member of Wood Mountain Lakota Nation, and Faculty of Education, University of Winnipeg, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chairman.

It has been 44 years since the brutal murder of Helen Betty Osborne, in which the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission concluded that racism, sexism, and indifference resulted in the incomprehensible amount of time it took to solve her murder. We are now in 2015, and things are not getting better. This has been noted by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the former UN special rapporteur on indigenous rights, James Anaya, who unanimously noted a need for a national inquiry and immediate action to address the crisis levels of violence perpetrated against indigenous women and girls.

Such high levels of violence were also noted in the 2014 RCMP national operational report on missing and murdered aboriginal women, which affirmed an overrepresentation of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, exceeding what they thought in previous estimates.

We represent 4.3% of the Canadian population, yet we represent 16% of all reported homicides. It is not safe to be an indigenous

woman or girl in Canada right now. This is related to a number of factors, including high rates of poverty—more characteristic among indigenous women—and issues with the very systems that are supposed to uphold the safety of Canadian citizens.

The most recent examples are with our dear child Tina Fontaine, who passed through five systems who could have helped her before she was brutally raped, murdered, dismembered, and thrown into the Red River. These included the police, the hospital, and the child welfare system.

We also recently heard about the brutal attack and rape of Rinelle Harper. Although the police found her attackers, there were a number of cases involving murdered and missing indigenous women and girls that have not been solved, and authorities have been criticized for their lack of action.

We also heard about Kevin Theriault, who took an intoxicated indigenous woman who had been arrested out of her jail cell to his home. It was allowed by a senior police officer, who stated, “You arrested her, you can do whatever the f—k you want to do.” It took two other police officers going to his home to convince him to drop the woman off at her own house. He said he took her “to pursue a... relationship”.

We also heard about Lana Sinclair, who was brutally assaulted and beaten by a Winnipeg police officer on October 31, 2014, after they came to her house to respond to a call saying there was yelling. She was trying to hurry her son up to go trick-or-treating.

And let's not forget the Highway of Tears in British Columbia.

Indigenous women and children deserve the same fundamental human rights to affordable housing, safety, and food security. This is not happening in the city of Winnipeg, the province of Manitoba, or in Canada. Also, the very systems that are supposed to protect us now have their legitimacy and safety in question. In fact, in response to the latest RCMP report outlining the serious issue of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls in Canada, the Harper Conservative government made cutbacks on women's programs, including cutbacks on programs aimed at violence reduction in communities.

The constable who took the woman home to “pursue a... relationship” only received a seven-day suspension without pay and was allowed to return to work.

We constantly see pushback against a national inquiry into murdered and missing indigenous women and girls by the Conservative government in spite of recommendations coming from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the former special rapporteur on indigenous rights, James Anaya, who stated in his own words that there needed to be “greater and more effective action” to address the problem of murdered and missing indigenous girls, pointing towards the need for immediate action and a national inquiry.

This is not an indigenous issue. This is an issue for all Canadians who want to protect the fundamental human rights of all persons. We need a community-led and community-driven national inquiry that does not preclude immediate action now to ensure that the issue related to violence against indigenous women and girls is addressed aggressively.

I have the following recommendations.

First, I recommend that immediate action is taken to address the root causes of poverty that compromise safety and keep a disproportionate number of indigenous women living below the poverty line. According to the Canadian Women's Foundation's report on poverty, 36% of first nations, Métis, and Inuit women live in poverty, which they partially attributed to inadequate levels of education, lack of employment opportunities in local communities, and discrimination and sexism in the workplace.

Such barriers often result in women failing to have the economic means to access basic human needs, including safe and affordable housing, and food security. As a result, many women have been forced to remain in violent and abusive relationships and take up residence at an unsafe location, which often places both themselves and their children at risk.

The federal government needs to provide immediate funding for educational programs and training initiatives for indigenous women that support acquiring skills to participate in employment opportunities that assist with poverty reduction where they receive, at the very least, a living wage to ensure that women have access to safe and affordable housing, food security, and family stability.

Second, I recommend that the federal government review its economic action plan, which focuses on aggressive resource development at the expense of the safety afforded to indigenous women and girls. Victoria Sweet, in 2012 in her study on human trafficking, asserts that there is a direct correlation between the establishment of man camps that house workers in extractive industries and increased reports of violence against indigenous women and girls.

According to Sweet, male workers, often disconnected to the community and having little regard for local culture and traditions, are often hired. This has resulted in increased rates of sex trafficking and violence against indigenous women residing in these communities. She uses the example of the Bakken oil formation in North Dakota where there's been an increase in the numbers of forceable rape, prostitution, sex trafficking, and violence against indigenous women and girls, and notes that a similar phenomenon is occurring in Fort McMurray, Alberta, where violence against indigenous women and girls is rapidly on the rise.

Third, I recommend that the government invest moneys into economic development ventures that nurture the safety and economic well-being of women and girls, including providing small business grants for women and girls living on and off reserve.

Fourth, I recommend that there be a major increase in funding provided for training and prevention programs to support local communities and to facilitate community-driven initiatives to address the issue of sex trafficking, sexual violence, and all other forms of violence against indigenous women and girls.

Fifth, I recommend that the federal government reinstate the multi-millions of dollars that were cut from violence prevention and healing programs, including programs aimed at addressing the intergenerational impacts of residential schools, that were formally used to support indigenous families and communities in violence reduction. This is much more effective than rerouting money towards regressive bills like Bill C-36, which will further marginalize already vulnerable indigenous women and girls. This includes vital programs that were formally facilitated through organizations such as Sisters in Spirit and the Native Women's Association of Canada. I question why that funding was cut in the first place, given the acknowledgement by the international community that violence against indigenous women and girls in Canada is a crisis.

Sixth, I recommend that the government provide funding for a 24-7 resource centre in each province to provide a one-stop shop for families impacted by violence, including advocacy support, referrals, counselling, and cultural programming for families experiencing trauma.

Seventh, I recommend that the federal government provide funding programs to support services and programs for families and communities impacted by violence against indigenous women and girls. This should include funding to support families in their searching efforts and liaison workers to guide families in working with agencies that become involved when a person goes missing, such as police, child welfare services, and schools. It is not okay that families are forced to use their own limited income to look for a family member, often leaving them financially vulnerable and economically unstable.

Eighth, I recommend that the federal government immediately support a community-led, community-driven inquiry, and implement immediate actions to address the crisis of violence against indigenous women and girls. This is not an either-or discussion. The international community is watching. Canadians are watching. When the world is criticizing Canada for its lack of action, it is not the time to cut corners. Ending violence against indigenous women and girls requires investment. It should not be guided by either-or discussions. We need action now and we need a community-led, community-driven inquiry to make systemic changes to protect indigenous women and girls from dangers persistent within the very Canadian institutions that are supposed to protect us. People care. Canadians care.

● (1140)

I have witnessed care with grassroots initiatives such as the Drag the Red campaign, led by Bernadette Smith, where people came out to support her efforts in searching for the human remains of their loved ones.

I have witnessed such care in the current We Care campaign that I started in solidarity with Rain Hamilton, a non-indigenous woman who was appalled by the lack of action and level of violence perpetrated against indigenous women and girls. This campaign has been endorsed by the leader of the official opposition, Hon. Thomas Mulcair, who has shown his support for immediate action and a community-led, community-driven inquiry; the Aboriginal Peoples' Commission; Council of Canadians; the International Women's Forum on human rights; and many other organizations and individuals who have shown that they care.

I saw Canadians care at a vigil for beautiful Tina Fontaine, where over 2,000 Canadians came out, with an estimated 50% who were non-indigenous. They cared.

It is time for the federal government to come on board and show they care. We are waiting to be on their radar.

Thank you.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gazan.

I would invite Ms. Walker to speak for 10 minutes, please.

Ms. Megan Walker (Executive Director, London Abused Women's Centre): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I'm representing the London Abused Women's Centre, which is an agency in London, Ontario, that provides women who are being abused by their intimate partners and women in prostitution with counselling, support, and advocacy. During our last fiscal year, the agency provided 3,300 women with services and responded to more than 5,000 phone calls.

I think it's important to go back almost 19 years ago to March 9, 1996, when Arlene May was murdered by her partner, Randy Isles. He then killed himself. After that the coroner for Ontario held an inquest into her murder and his suicide. The jury met with 76 witnesses over 51 days. On July 2 the jury returned with 213 recommendations.

In its opening statement the jury wrote:

Until we, as a country stand up and declare a 'Zero Tolerance', this problem will not only continue, but in this jury's opinion, will escalate.

They further went on to say:

A combined effort must be made by our Government and Communities in order to put an end to family violence.

Finally, they stated:

Domestic violence cases are different than other criminal cases. In most situations the accused and the victim would normally never meet again. With domestic violence, the accused often must have contact with the victim due to property, support and child issues.

The criminal justice system will have to be changed to deal effectively with these differences.

We live in a society where gender inequality, while present in almost every single aspect of our lives, is largely made invisible by our silence. I'm often asked whether we can ever end men's violence against women. I do know one thing for certain. With certain actions that we take we can definitely shift the culture for future generations and reduce men's violence against women. I often compare it to the work being done by MADD Canada. Drinking and driving was once considered the norm. Now thanks to legislation, advocacy, education, and awareness it is socially unacceptable to get in a car when you've had a drink. I believe we can do the same for domestic violence.

We need three things. First of all we need to speak out, just as President Obama and former president Jimmy Carter have done. We need the government at all levels in Canada to take a stand and say, "Not on our watch. On our watch we have a zero tolerance to men's violence against women."

We need to name the problem and understand its source. The source is patriarchy and women's inequality, and we need to set our minds to achieving women's full equality in society.

We also need action. We need an investment in violence prevention, and public education and awareness programs, starting in the very early years in school. At the London Abused Women's Centre, six years ago, we started a campaign known as Shine the Light on Woman Abuse. The goals of the campaign were to raise awareness about men's violence against women, increase the profiles of agencies that can provide service to these women, and shift the blame and shame abused women so often feel to the shoulders of the perpetrators. Finally, we wanted to show women that we stood in support and solidarity with them as they tried to live their lives free from violence and abuse. The campaign has been overwhelmingly successful, has now spread to 25 communities throughout Ontario, and service demands at the London Abused Women's Centre continue to increase by about 100% each and every year.

We also initiated a Value Women campaign, which was started as an alternative to what was called, and is called still, the SlutWalk, which we opposed. The goals of the Value Women campaign are to change the culture for women to one where women are equally valued. To do so we're asking that everybody recruit one person, who then will recruit five, who in turn will recruit five more.

Over the next five years we hope to reach five million individuals and call them champions for women.

• (1150)

The London Abused Women's Centre is part of a coordinated effort between the City of London and the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse. We partnered with the corporation of the City of London to develop a national, award-winning, collaborative program called "I Step Forward to End Violence and Abuse in my Community, Workplace, and Home". It is a training program for all City of London employees to increase their understanding of men's violence against women and to increase the capacity to recognize and respond to situations of violence at home, at work, and in the community.

The London Abused Women's Centre is the lead agency for the Ontario woman abuse screening project, which has promoted collaboration between the woman abuse, sexual assault, mental health, and addiction sectors to provide trauma-informed services including routine universal screening for abuse and trauma, and to promote these as best practices across all sectors. The project has been successful in ensuring improved services, with fewer women having to live their lives alone, homeless or in isolation. In fact, that project has now spread throughout 141 communities across Ontario.

Finally, we need legislative change. We strongly recommend amending the Criminal Code to reflect the realities of those women being abused by their partners. We have great models in place where they have done that, including Sweden, where they have put into place the "gross violation of a woman's integrity" legislation. We've done a lot of research and are certainly happy to make that available to you.

Finally, I want to say that never in my life, and I've been at the London Abused Women's Centre for 18 years, did I ever think we would see the result of legislative advocacy. We saw that with the passing of Bill C-36, which we did support.

We're already seeing an increase in women seeking service from our agency. Legislative changes, along with advocacy, public awareness, and information can make a difference in the lives of women and their children.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Matt Schaaf, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Matt Schaaf (MANifest Change Coordinator, Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, honourable members.

It's a pleasure and an honour to be here today, to be invited to share a bit about promising practices from our work with men to prevent violence against women.

I'm delighted to be here among others who are doing similar work. I want to acknowledge the work of the committee and of the organizations represented here today. In fact, we would not be doing work to prevent violence against women with men if it were not for the leadership of organizations like these.

The program MANifest change is hosted in the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women. OCTEVAW is composed of front-line agencies that support women experiencing violence—that's victim services, women's shelters, Children's Aid, the local Elizabeth Fry Society. The work that we do with boys and men happens alongside the work of those people who are caring for and supporting women experiencing abuse, alongside the work of those offering opportunities for rehabilitation to men who have used violence, and alongside policing and criminal justice responses. It's part of this larger fabric.

As a coalition of agencies doing this kind of work, our value-added is the prevention piece. Our members are focusing on response, and there is enormous need; they are overwhelmed. It wasn't surprising for me to hear that you see 100% increase in service delivery every year. That's the case in Ottawa as well. But ultimately, we want to see an end to violence against women. Again, you brought up what does that mean, what does that look like? It could look like many things. What I'm going to do today is describe some promising practices that come out of OCTEVAW's MANifest change project, which aims to prevent violence before it even starts, or encourages men to get involved in intervening in violence when it's in the early stages.

MANifest change begins with the evidence that gender inequities are real, that gender-based violence happens in a framework of gender inequity, and that women suffer disproportionately from that violence. We recognize that as men, we ourselves experience high levels of violence, often as boys and often at the hands of other men, and that violence can be transmitted and reproduced in our relationships with women and others. We know that most violence against women is committed by men. However, the majority of men do not directly commit violence against women. What do we do with this large group of men who are well intentioned but don't know what to do?

This is where MANifest change comes in. Those of us who don't use violence directly, we are taught to look the other way for a friend, to keep our head down at work when we suspect harassment is happening, or laugh along with rape jokes in the locker room, whether or not we believe those things. For many men, they value respect and non-violence towards women. Those are the men that MANifest change seeks to engage. So what does that look like?

We launched this campaign last fall. It's only four months old. We got the conversation going with a series of 30-second video spots.

So in the interest of the cinema—

•(1155)

The Chair: Just to let the members know, you will have a video in French with the transcript in English, and you will have a video in English with the transcript in French, and you will have also interpretation.

Mr. Matt Schaaf: Thank you.

Hopefully it's not too confusing. I appreciate the accommodation to be able to do this because this demonstrates the values that we bring to working with men.

[Video Presentation]

That was Ottawa Senators defenceman Marc Methot, and we're grateful for his involvement in the campaign.

This video features Alex Néron of Railbender Tattoo Studios.

[Video Presentation]

As you can see, our starting point for working with men is that men are part of the solution. Our target audience, since we've begun, has been young men aged 13 to 18. We employ two complementary strategies that work in tandem.

The first and the heart of the project is a workshop series with young men, led by male facilitators, that helps young men recognize both subtle and overt forms of violence against women and then gives them practice in responding to those situations. They often come up with situations that they've actually seen, and we work with those. What we're doing there is closing the gap between the values of respect and the good intentions that many men have and their ability to actually put it into practice, their ability to say or do something in the moment.

The second piece is an online awareness campaign that sets the conditions of success for the project. Our social media streams are full of male positive conversational space that you won't find a lot of on the Internet when it comes to men's roles in ending violence against women. This is how both men and women get to know us and trust us, which allows us to do the more face-to-face work. On our website we ask men to pledge how they will act to end violence against women. This breaks down some of the isolation and trepidation that men often feel about speaking up.

Three promising practices have come out so far. It's early, but what we know is that MANifest change is based on male-to-male relationships. We know that men listen to other men. We know that young boys and young men are influenced by coaches and mentors. By tapping into that, it allows us to challenge and explore what it means to be a man. It allows us to look for positive definitions of masculinity and replace restrictive and violent definitions of masculinity.

A great example of this is that we've trained the staff of a local community health centre who are in a long-term mentoring relationship with young men. They deliver the program and it's embedded in their programming, so the relationship piece is key.

Secondly, MANifest change needs the expertise and accountability that comes with partnering with women-led organizations. We're hosting the project in a coalition of women-centric organiza-

tions. That means that the voices of survivors and the expertise of those who support survivors of violence are front and centre when we engage men. It's absolutely necessary to do the work with sensitivity and professionalism and to complement the work that's already happening.

As an example of how that accountability and sensitization works, our male volunteers are invited to the same volunteer appreciation parties, public education events, and professional development opportunities alongside our member groups that serve women, so there's an important cross-fertilization happening there.

I need to emphasize that organizations such as ours that serve women experiencing violence are responding to violence in progress. They are responding to the after-effects of violence. It's urgent, and resources for this type of prevention work cannot come out of their pot of money. Prevention has the possibility of greatly reducing the strain on those responsive systems, but we cannot pull resources from responsive systems into prevention.

•(1200)

Third, MANifest change is community driven. Our volunteer workshop facilitators and community volunteers bring the workshops to athletic programs, school clubs, drop-in centres, university courses—

The Chair: I've noticed that you have two recommendations for the committee. Could you state those two recommendations because we're running out of time? Is that okay?

Mr. Matt Schaaf: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you very much for accommodating us.

Mr. Matt Schaaf: It's my pleasure.

To wrap up my last point, it is also community driven at the organizational level. This is a project of the Ottawa Police Service, the City of Ottawa, and OCTEVAW. We're combining the reach and legitimacy of those municipal bodies with our expertise in violence against women.

These are our recommendations to the committee. The strategy of preventing violence before it begins by engaging men and boys is largely unexplored. There is a body of evidence that has been built up in the last 10 years or so; however, it hasn't been fully exploited. The potential to reduce the number of interventions that come later is there. It's real. As this committee moves forward in exploring prevention strategies, and as it moves towards tabling its recommendations, it's vital that community organizations, like those that you've been consulting through this space, continue to be drawn in on an ongoing basis. This is an unexplored area and we need to do this together.

Second, at the local and community level, we know that it takes women's organizations, community organizations, municipal bodies, and male volunteers. All of these people need to come together to work at preventing violence against women. It is an everyone problem, not a women's issue. We need everyone solutions.

What does that look like at the federal level? Are there places in the federal framework where you bump up against large numbers of young men? Are there ways that this committee and Status of Women Canada can support other departments?

I'll end my comments there. Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much; I'm terribly sorry.

I need unanimous consent that if the bells ring, we will let Ms. Pate finish her testimony.

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): If she starts right now....

The Chair: Yes, she will start right now. We may go over, and then we'll wrap up.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: What I am asking for is unanimous consent that we won't interrupt her testimony, and that we'll run over. It's a 30-minute bell so we will have plenty of time.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Yes, let's start and we'll go five minutes over.

The Chair: Ms. Pate, you have 10 minutes—hopefully.

Ms. Kim Pate (Executive Director, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies): I'll chase you if the bells ring. How's that? I can do that. Believe me.

I want to thank you very much for inviting the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. As many of you are aware, we have members across the country, and we work with women who have been marginalized, women who are victimized, women who are criminalized, and women who are institutionalized. You often know of our work because of the work that we do with women in prison, but some of our members are the only organizations providing work and assistance to victims in some of their areas, particularly in the western part of the country.

What you probably also know is that women are the fastest-growing prison population in this country. When we look at those women and the link to this issue, we know that more than 80% of the women who are in custody have a history of physical and/or sexual abuse. They've experienced violence in their lives as children and/or as adults. That figure goes up to 91% if we talk about aboriginal women alone.

As the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has found and as the United Nations has documented—and I certainly underscore the testimonies of other witnesses here today and other witnesses who have appeared before you—it's well documented that the high rates of violence against women, and in particular against aboriginal women and other racialized women, are linked to systemic discrimination, both on the basis of sex and race, but also on the basis of disability and sexual orientation, and on the basis of immigration and refugee status. We know that their economic and social deprivation is directly linked to their experiences and their vulnerability. So I'm going to—

Are those the lights I see going? Have the bells started?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Kim Pate: Okay. I'll go to my recommendations.

We would suggest, in terms of violence issues in particular, that violence against women has yet to be taken seriously. We already have legislation that says we are not supposed to have violence against women. We already have legislation in the form of the charter that mandates equality for women. What we really need is that to be lived and not to have property and men privileged over those.

There are four main things that we could see implemented. When we got rid of the Canada assistance plan in this country and virtually eliminated national standards for social services, health care, and education, we immediately increased the vulnerability of women and other marginalized groups. We need to look at reinstating national standards. We need to ensure we have a guaranteed livable income for all people, but particularly for women and those who are most vulnerable. We need to ensure that we shore up our education, our housing, our social services, and our health care initiatives in this country.

Now, yes, many of those fall under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories, but they could be directly influenced by the national standards that could be developed, and the United Nations has repeatedly sanctioned Canada for not looking at those kinds of national standards or for reducing them. In short, in order to limit women's vulnerability to being victims of violence, we need to ensure that they enjoy more equality.

I would also like to say that in particular for aboriginal women we know that there is a need for a national inquiry. We support the call of the Native Women's Association of Canada and the calls for action. This action, as I say, needs to be much more systemic in nature. We applaud the preventive efforts that are being taken by many groups, but we also need to see the reinstatement of resources for rape crisis centres, women's shelters, and women's services that have been cut historically, and we encourage you to do that.

If there is anything else we can assist with, we'd be happy to do that.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

In fairness, what we will do is translate your brief and distribute it to all members. Since we won't have time for questions, because we have to go for a vote and it will be difficult coming back, I would like to suggest to members to submit some questions in writing following the testimony, always keeping in mind the motion of our study right now. We have to be reasonable because of the resources of the people. Send the clerk your written questions, which will then be submitted to the witnesses, who will try to answer them as best they can within the resources that they have.

I can't thank you enough for coming here, giving your testimony, and enriching our study. We will keep in touch. Again, if there is anything to add, you can always contact the clerk. I would ask members to keep in mind that the questions should be succinct and to the point, so that the witnesses can answer them.

We'll see you next Tuesday, February 24.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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