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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting 42 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Before we begin today, I want to thank the clerk for arranging for Thursday's meeting to be from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., in our normal time slot.

Today we're here to talk about the supplementary estimates (A) for 2021-22. We're glad to welcome the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and officials as well. From the Department for Women and Gender Equality, we have Madam Roy, who is the deputy minister, and Madam Gardiner, who is the assistant deputy minister.

We're going to begin with five minutes of comments from the minister and then we'll go into our rounds of questions.

Minister, you may begin.

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Hello, colleagues. *Bonjour. Aaniin. Assalamu alaikum.*

I join you from my home in Peterborough—Kawartha on Michi Saagiig and Anishinabek territory.

I am so grateful to all of you for your work. Truly, your work has never been more important.

I would like to acknowledge my wonderful parliamentary secretary, Gudie Hutchings, who consistently reminds us to look out for the most rural and the most isolated.

I would also like to wish the public service a happy National Public Service Week. This has been a difficult 16 months for all of us, but you have been there for Canadians in their time of need. If we're number one in the G7 and G20 for vaccine administration with the first dose and if Canada is going to be okay on the other side of this pandemic, it's truly because of public servants like you. We appreciate you.

I'd also like to acknowledge that it is Pride Month. Happy Pride.

Happy Filipino Heritage Month. Many thanks to Salma Zahid for bringing that bill forward.

Of course, it's also National Indigenous History Month, which is a time for all of us to reflect collectively and to learn more.

Madam Chair, I am so grateful to be here today as we reflect on the upcoming Canada Day, which will be better than the last one we had. There is more to be optimistic about and more to be hopeful about. With 75% of the population here in Peterborough—Kawartha having received their first dose, we are close to putting the pandemic behind us. Even as we do that, we recognize there is work to do. We all have to survey the damage that the pandemic caused, roll up our sleeves, build back better systems and institutions, and create a million jobs by the end of this year.

There are also many reckonings happening. There is climate change, the horrendous experiences of our elders in long-term care, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, who is an essential worker and pay equity. The rate of femicide continues to increase. Anti-Asian rhetoric and anti-Asian hate is increasing, as is anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. The bodies of 215 children being discovered—and many more each and every day—offers an opportunity to us as Canadians to have courageous conversations and to move forward in a better way.

I was in London this weekend and was grateful to see MP Mathysen and her mom, as well as Salma Zahid, Minister Alghabra, Peter Fragiskatos and Kate Young. We witnessed the burial of four bodies—three women and a man. These were four lives that ended too soon. These folks were targeted because of how they worship in a country like Canada. The accused for this terrorist act is a 20-year-old and I reflect on the fact that it has been 20 years since 9/11. The rhetoric, policies, politics and decisions made since 9/11, I have to accept, has all fuelled hate. We must work together to address and to stop those seeds of hate. There is clearly a need to have a conversation about Islamophobia and all forms of hate.

I want to thank the chair of our justice committee and the chair of the Liberal women's caucus, Iqra Khalid, for bravely standing up in the House of Commons in 2017 and asking us to study Islamophobia. Because of her, we have the tools, the lexicon and the partnerships to fight Islamophobia. That fight, for her, was not an easy one to fight.

Our oppressions are connected, whether it is sexism, misogyny, racism, ableism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or other forms of hate. It is only truly together that we can put an end to the hate and violence and build back better communities, stronger advocacy networks and programs that put an end to violence and ensure that every Canadian is safe.

I am hopeful and optimistic, because despite COVID, we are moving forward. We are protecting progress. I truly hope that we all support budget 2021 because it includes historic investments that those who have come before us have fought for.

• (1105)

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Now we're going into our first round of questions, beginning with Ms. Sahota for six minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the minister for being here.

Minister, I'm going to get to my questions immediately. This past year, Canadians have been shocked and appalled at revelations of sexual misconduct in the highest ranks of our Canadian Armed Forces. However, it is well known that this wasn't the first time.

In 2015, former Supreme Court justice the Honourable Marie Deschamps released a scathing report on issues within the Canadian Armed Forces. One of her recommendations was to clarify the definition of "sexual misconduct" in DAOD 5019-5 as it was "confusing and misleading because the DAOD's use of the term is inconsistent with its plain language meaning." However, this wasn't changed until November 2020, five years after the report was released.

In your mandate letter from the Prime Minister, you've been charged with ensuring GBA+ is conducted within the government, which would include the military. Can you please explain why you did not see to it, when this report came out, that DAOD 5019-5 was amended in 2015?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, I've brought a formal update about sexual misconduct in the military for the committee. May I read it into the record? It's about sexual misconduct in the military.

I share my honourable colleague's outrage and disappointment, as all Canadians do, with the ongoing, disturbing developments. National Defence, of course, as is the case with our government, continues to encourage everyone who has been affected by sexual misconduct to come forward. Our goal is for those who come forward to be heard and to feel safe and supported.

Currently, the sexual misconduct response centre provides 24-7 confidential support to Canadian Armed Forces members, and I thank them for that. The SMRC is independent from the chain of command and offers a variety of counselling, support and—

Ms. Jag Sahota: Minister, but that's not my—

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I'm getting to it, Madam Chair. I'd like to provide a fulsome update, as I think this is an issue Canadians care about.

Ms. Jag Sahota: I have limited—

Hon. Maryam Monsef: May I continue?

Ms. Jag Sahota: I have limited time. My question is very direct. Can you please—

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I'll be respectful of your time—

The Chair: I will add time for Ms. Sahota in order to hear the rest of what the minister—

Ms. Jag Sahota: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The SMRC is independent from the chain of command and offers a variety of supports. Moving forward, National Defence will leverage \$236.2 million to expand and enhance those supports. It's a 24-7 support line that will continue to be there, and folks can access it from anywhere in the world.

Madam Chair, I'd like to add that in this budget there is an opportunity for those of us who care about this issue and who want to bring about cultural change faster to do that work and to vote in favour of it. As for my role in all of this, I assure my colleagues and Canadians that my team and I are keeping a very close eye on this. We are connecting with survivors and experts, and we are ensuring that an intersectional gender lens is applied.

I will say this, too, before I hand the mike back over to you, Madam Chair. It is clear that what we have done over the past six years has not gone far enough. We understand that, and we're committed to moving forward faster to ensure that every woman, man and gender-diverse person in our armed forces and DND feels safe and feels like they can contribute meaningfully to their country.

The Chair: We'll go back to you, Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Minister, you still didn't answer my question.

My question was: This report came out in 2015, and five years later there was an amendment done to the definition of sexual misconduct, when you were told, five years ago, to change this. Why did it take so long for you to get moving on that?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, as I've said, it's clear that we've not gone far enough quickly enough.

The sexual misconduct response centre did not exist back when we started. We helped set it up. I thank the folks who work there. We're working to expand it further. Rest assured that our commitments to the safety of those who look after the safety of us and the most vulnerable around the world remains top priority—

• (1110)

Ms. Jag Sahota: Minister, I'm going to interrupt and say that your words mean nothing if you didn't do anything for six years. You're not answering my question, but I'll leave that and move on.

Recently, in Justice Fish's report, he acknowledged that the DAOD has recently been changed; however, he also pointed out the new DAOD was still inadequate.

How involved were you in the development of this new DAOD?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for her question. I imagine if she is asking these questions, she wants to hear my words and I will continue to give her my best response.

We're working closely with the minister, with the department and with the SMRC to ensure that they're moving forward in a good way and ensuring that the directive that has been sent down through the military, the one that has been drafted by CAF, is applied thoughtfully.

It's why Madam Louise Arbour is going to lead an independent external review into harassment and sexual misconduct in the military. We recognize that we need to make more changes in our systems to create safety, inclusion and belonging and we will continue to work with all willing partners to achieve that outcome.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Minister, what we see here is you constantly not standing up for women when it comes to making sure that they're represented in your policy. Your colleague was here last year and told us that no GBA+ analysis was done on COVID relief programs. It was your responsibility to ensure that it was done.

Now we're hearing that you have not been involved in the rewriting of the DAOD, even though they particularly affect women. Then on the weekend we heard from the media that two senior officers in the military went golfing. One of them, the former vice chief of the defence staff, has the military police directly reporting to him, all while the former CDS is under investigation for sexual misconduct. The woman at the heart of the investigation told this committee that she didn't believe she would get justice and that the former CDS believed he owned the CFNIS, and given this weekend's article, still believes that.

While your colleague spoke up against this, you remained silent. Why do you remain so silent when it comes to women and giving them a voice?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, that's inaccurate. I was standing up for women just last week, fighting a bill that was attempting to control our bodies and our choices. I stand up for women and girls and gender-diverse folks every single day.

The Chair: Sorry, Minister.

We're going now to Ms. Dhillon for six minutes.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Minister. Your opening statement touches all of us in many ways.

The violence we saw in the last week and things that have unfolded in the past two weeks are certainly issues that need to be addressed. I thank you so much for bringing them up in this committee, because that's what we're all about here, trying to help those who are the most vulnerable and to be able to bring justice and any assistance we can.

With that, I'll start with how the government is ensuring that women and other vulnerable groups are at the forefront of the recovery and won't be left behind. How can you ensure this?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you so much, MP Dhillon, for your leadership. I know, as a Quebecker, that it has been a really

difficult time for you and your communities, and I know that those femicides aren't just numbers for you. They're community members, and you continue to live with the consequences of those tragedies. I thank you for your leadership.

As you know, we work really hard. It's thanks to the public service that we have a tool called GBA+. We do this best when we start our analysis focusing on the under-represented and under-served.

We've applied that lens throughout the entirety of COVID. Maybe we didn't in the first 24 to 48 hours or the first week of COVID, as we were working to set up responses to this unprecedented crisis. Very quickly, however, the Prime Minister asked all of us...and we discussed in cabinet and amongst our teams that we were going to make sure GBA+ was core to our decision-making.

I'm really glad we did that, because it helped us see how older women in rural communities were faring. It helped us understand how small businesses in really small communities were taking up the business supports our government was putting forward. When, for the first time, we started collecting race-based data to add to our existing statistics, it helped us see that newcomers, racialized folks, Black women and those on the front lines of the fight against COVID were carrying the heaviest burden.

That work was recognized by the international community. We may not be perfect, but we've done the best GBA+ of COVID response in the world, and we continue to endeavour to respond well in the budget. Budget 2021 is the most feminist budget that any federal government has put forward.

Those women whose experiences we're tracking and those with care responsibilities need universal early learning and child care. They need their child care fees cut by half as soon as possible. If the budget passes, with the support of our colleagues and all parties, we'll get to that cost being cut in half by next year. We'll get to an average of \$10-a-day child care in five years.

We'll hopefully be able to move forward with the budget so that more than \$3 billion in funds can be unlocked, moving forward, to respond to the calls for justice in the MMIWG report and ensure that we move forward with our response to gender-based violence.

I sincerely hope that every single one of us votes in favour of this budget and that we work together, moving forward, to ensure that we address the vulnerabilities that COVID has only amplified.

• (1115)

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you so much, Minister.

I'd also like to say how appreciative I am that you brought up Quebec and the 11 femicides that took place in just about the first four months of this year. It's very hard to stomach these, and we mourn the loss of these women.

I would like to ask you, please, if you can provide us with more details on the work to date of the national action plan to end gender-based violence.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you so much, MP Dhillon.

To date, as part of our emergency response, we've supported more than 250 organizations in Quebec offering emergency gender-based violence supports with more than \$17 million, and that's before budget 2021.

What budget 2021 offers with \$601 million for a range of GBV programming is another down payment on the response to ending gender-based violence and providing supports [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] ways of ensuring that young men and boys, particularly, are healing and that they're part of the solution in [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] for human trafficking-related programs and capacity building.

There are even core funding supports for GBV organizations as well as a secretariat to coordinate the work with provinces, territories, indigenous partners, municipalities, civil society organizations and the federal government. Also, there are statistics, additional data, that we'll be banking and harnessing, as well as community-based research.

This budget is an important tool and an important step forward in our collective national fight to end gender-based violence.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Larouche, the floor is yours for six minutes.

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

Madam Minister, thank you for joining us on this day that affects me greatly as a Quebec woman. We are now up to our 13th femicide in Quebec. The figure turns our stomachs. That is the context in which we are meeting with you today, Madam Minister.

I understand that you have come to talk to us about matters such as the action plan to end gender-based violence. But the problem remains. Is it not time to review the strategy a little or to speed up the process?

Recently, I was in discussions with officials from Quebec's Department of Public Security and the Secrétariat à la condition féminine, in Quebec also, about the femicide issue. For them, one essential question remains: how much money goes directly to organizations? Quebec would like to know what the plan is.

Exactly how much money is going to go directly to organizations in Quebec?

There is money for coordination, prevention, statistics and studies, but how much money will go into the trenches, because that is where things are playing out? Implementing the strategy is fraught with delay, and unfortunately, women are still dying.

My condolences go to the loved ones of this 13th victim.

• (1120)

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: On behalf of the Government of Canada, on behalf of the Prime Minister, we extend our condolences to families and loved ones grieving deaths that are entirely preventable—entirely preventable.

It wasn't too long ago, Madam Larouche, when all of us, as MPs, were in the House of Commons for an emergency debate. The numbers were a lot lower, but the pain was just as intense and the deaths just as preventable when we debated, for the first time in the House of Commons, gender-based violence as an emergency issue. My team and I took notes, and actually what you see in the budget is an acceleration in the pace of the response and a significant investment from the federal government to move forward.

As you pointed out, there are 132 sexual assault centres and non-indigenous shelters that have received federal funding over this past year, and there are 113 gender-based violence service organizations and seven indigenous off-reserve shelters that have received emergency supports. Moving forward, we are in regular conversation with our colleagues in Quebec and in other provinces to make sure these dollars get to the front lines quickly and that there's no lag in the time it takes for organizations in Quebec to receive funding compared to everybody else in the country.

Madam Chair, I am always open to ideas on how to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness, as well as the equity, in these programs. If colleagues want to reach out to me with their input, please do. I'm happy to take that call and happy to be part of this work.

I assure you, however, that just like you, I am haunted by every single death, by every single headline. Those are just the ones we know of. There are women sleeping in their cars right now because they have nowhere else to go. There are women staying in abusive relationships because they don't know there are other places they can go. There are women trapped in harmful circumstances because of poverty. That is the work we can all do together to move forward and create more choice and opportunity for women and non-binary folks in this country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Minister, I wanted to ask you some other questions and I was trying to signal to you.

First of all, during the emergency debate, I pointed out that, last time, there had been a difference of six months between Quebec and the other provinces in terms of signing the bilateral agreements. For me, efficiency means speeding up the signing of bilateral agreements when it is high time to transfer the money. Quebec wants to put that money to use and has the ability and the jurisdiction to do so.

The Department of Public Security and the Secrétariat à la condition féminine are asking for the signing of the bilateral agreements to be speeded up. If we are to be effective, we must also avoid duplications. There is an action plan to end gender-based violence, and there is a federal gender-based violence strategy.

What is the difference between the two?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The federal strategy that Patty Hajdu brought into effect back in 2017, because of her work, was the first time the federal government was coordinating its efforts and investing significantly in gender-based violence. It gave us statistics and data we didn't have before.

This next phase is phase two of Canada's response to gender-based violence. It has three times as much funding, and of course we've built partnerships, programs and efficiencies that will scale up. If colleagues have input into how to move that work quickly forward, particularly in Quebec, that's a priority for me too and I'm all ears.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister Monsef.

When you came to London last weekend, it was greatly appreciated by the community and certainly by me. One of the things my community has been asking for out of all of this tragedy is action. It's something that I certainly have been asking for as well. I am grateful that you were listening and mentioned core funding. That certainly warms my heart. I will be watching carefully and working with you to move that forward for all those organizations that provide that incredible support to our communities.

With respect to that, one thing that is required.... You, of course, as the minister responsible for women, sit at the cabinet table to represent women and we've heard from you often at this committee about a lot of things, programs and departments that impact women but don't fall under your jurisdiction. We've talked about missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. We've talked about pay equity legislation. Today we're talking about defence and how that's referred to others. However, you have that seat at the table.

With respect to murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, a national action plan was technically released; however, there were no financials attached to it and no timeline. Could you speak to when people in this country, and indigenous women in particular, can expect to see those timelines and that money attached?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: MP Mathyssen, thank you for your leadership to your community in these very difficult times. If I have time, I will talk about Islamophobia.

Let me talk to your question about MMIWG first. Regarding the funding attached to it, there is \$2.2 billion in budget 2021 that we hope will pass in the upcoming vote. Those funds start flowing this year, in 2021, so that work will move forward with culture being at the heart of the work and survivors being at the heart of the work.

The plan we put forward a few weeks ago is like no other plan in the world. We're doing something that hasn't been done quite like this before, with families and survivors at the centre. Of course,

we've learned from other colleagues in countries like New Zealand, but Canada is moving forward. As we all know, time is up on this.

We're not building from scratch either. We've invested significantly in relationships with partners on the ground and we will move forward in a good way so that, through this national tragedy, we're able to change the story.

I'm happy to provide more information if there's a follow-up about the MMIWG plan.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: There is, absolutely—

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Would you like me to respond to what we're doing on Islamophobia?

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Maybe in a little bit. It absolutely is important.

I want to specifically ask this. You said “in 2021” and of course, there is a crass realization that we may be in an election, so are you waiting for those funds until after the next election or will you be providing them before?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: As my officials know, I am working very hard with our colleagues across government departments to make sure that once, God willing, we get that vote, and it's a positive vote, those funds are released as quickly as possible.

MP Mathyssen, as you know, this isn't the first time we're funding indigenous supports and indigenous innovation. We're building on investments we've already made in women-serving organizations, and we'll continue to take our lead from them. The answer is, as quickly as possible, we intend to ensure these funds build on existing investments, because there is a lot of work to do and there is not a lot of time to waste.

I also will add that we're moving forward to address the cell-phone gaps along the Highway of Tears with \$50 million that has already been released. We have already moved forward with one project in B.C. to ensure the entirety of the highway is connected with more indigenous communities, and cell-gap projects are under way as we speak. The work is happening. Budget 2021 investments build on it and we'll move forward very quickly to roll those dollars out as quickly, as effectively and as equitably as we can.

• (1130)

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: In terms of pay equity legislation, the last time we talked about this, you referred us to the Minister of Labour. We heard from the Minister of Labour and it seemed as though those regulations were going to pass quickly. However, we're still waiting. It has been at least six months since the last promise of those regulations being put forward.

Having sat at the cabinet table and discussed this, pushing the agenda, of course, and ensuring that women don't have to wait any longer for pay equity than they should, to actually start that process—because, as you know, they could wait up to eight or nine more years for actual pay equity to be implemented—do you know when those regulations will be put through?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, they come into effect this year.

I agree with my colleague. This recommendation was in the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada report 50 years ago. We're moving forward, as you heard from Minister Tassi.

The commissioner will be officially in place. Karen Jensen is the first pay equity commissioner in Canada. The pay equity regulations were pre-published in part I of the Canada Gazette back in November. They were there until June. Once finalized, the regulations will complement the act and allow the regime to be brought into force later this year.

The Chair: That's very good.

Now we're going into our second round of questions, beginning with Ms. Wong for five minutes.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the minister for coming to this meeting so that we can listen to the update from the government. My questions are many.

First of all, I'd like to let you know that we're all very proud of our place of origin. I am, and I hope you are. As time goes on, there's a lot of violence against women, especially Asian women, and not much has been done by the government. I brought it up in question period, but there's no definite answer about actions.

We talk about shelters. Again, in the Lower Mainland, especially in my city of Richmond, women are crying for help because they want to get into the shelters, and of course, the shelters are crying for money. You may have beautiful plans, but if the money doesn't go directly to the organizations in need, there's little....

Then there's the alienation of the western provinces. You can see a lot of money being pumped into other provinces but not to the western provinces.

I have so many questions. I hope that you can briefly answer all these questions instead of just giving us a speech of your own.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, MP Wong.

I'll try not to give you a speech of my own but use my words to tell you that, first of all, there's additional funding for housing, shelters and transition homes in budget 2021. I hope colleagues will support it. We're directly delivering funds to the front lines in ways we've not done before, in the fastest, most efficient way. We've cut red tape and we're going to continue with that approach.

On the place of origin and anti-Asian hate, let me say to my colleague that, first of all, no, I wasn't always proud of my origin. Post 9/11, being a high schooler, I faced, as many did across the country and around the world, a certain level of hate and demonization that continued to build up and it did affect my cultural identity. It took a

long time for me to feel secure in that personal cultural identity. I see the anti-Asian hate and other forms of hate rampant right now and I'm alarmed because there are young people who are going to grow up uncomfortable and insecure in their own skin. We can do something about that.

I also will say to my colleague that the \$100-million feminist response and recovery fund will be announcing the recipients of that investment soon. My team and I have taken special care to ensure that Black, indigenous and racialized folks who are disproportionately affected by violence also receive a disproportionately high level of the funds to build capacity at the community level, and regional and national levels.

If my colleague has organizations that she thinks are doing great work and that we have to keep an eye out for, for proposals or otherwise, please reach out. I would love to hear from her.

• (1135)

Hon. Alice Wong: Thank you, Minister.

My next question is about seniors.

Elder abuse is on the rise, especially during COVID times. Many of these elderly people are women. Again, I asked the same question, and again, nothing has been done.

Would you like to tell all of us what you are going to do to help our poor seniors who are under such threat of being abused?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, first, I disagree with an assertion at this table that nothing has been done. Actually, more has been done by this government than by any government before, but it is not enough. We have to do more. Centuries of misogyny, hate, racism, sexism and colonialism don't undo themselves in five or six years, and with the reckoning happening all around us, we are accelerating the pace of progress.

Today is a day to acknowledge elder abuse; absolutely it is. What we've seen during the pandemic—one of the hardest lessons and one of the most shameful experiences—is our elders experiencing neglect, abuse and such undignified care, and those who care for them are not being treated properly.

We have partnered with organizations that are working to address and prevent elder abuse across the country. My colleague, Deb Schulte, the Minister of Seniors, is particularly outspoken on this.

Again, if there are organizations in your communities that are doing important work and need that additional support, please reach out to my team and me because we'd love to partner with them.

The Chair: Very good.

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

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

Thank you, Minister, and thank you to your team for being with us today.

I want to reflect on what you said in your opening statement on the attack in London.

Minister, last night I joined the vigil in my community in Brampton. I saw many women from all communities looking for allies in the government. I know you're working very hard for them, and you have been working throughout the pandemic. This pandemic has highlighted some inequities in society. I want to ask you about how these are being addressed in budget 2021.

Minister, since the last time you appeared at committee, budget 2021 has been tabled. Can you expand on how that investment from budget 2021 will directly respond to the needs of women or gender-diverse folks and equality?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you so much, MP Sidhu, for your leadership on this committee and on the health committee. From young leaders in my community who live with diabetes and who have come to the Hill many times to advocate for government supports, let me say a huge thank you. You've shown these kids that they don't have to wait to grow up to lead, that they can be part of the democratic process long before they turn 18. You're delivering for them. I appreciate that, MP Sidhu.

As for the lessons of COVID, as Patty Hajdu has said, this virus sneaks into the cracks in our system; it flares up and we have an opportunity to build back better systems while looking out for those who have been hardest hit by COVID. Budget 2021 offers us tools to do that, to create a million jobs, to put COVID behind us, and to grow our economy by focusing specifically on those who have been hardest hit. I am talking about those on the front lines of COVID, those in the tourism sector and in small businesses, young people, women and those in isolated and really small and rural communities as well.

One of the ways we are doing that is by investing in high-speed Internet. Isolation is made that much more difficult when you don't have access to this essential service. Thanks to Gудie Hutchings and our rural caucus, we're moving forward and implementing Canada's single-largest investment in broadband. I'm grateful to communities for their uptake. By the end of this year, hundreds of thousands of households will have access to this essential service. They didn't have it when we first formed government.

There are also, as I mentioned, supports for housing and shelters. We're collecting data and disaggregated data, and we are building for the first time a data strategy with partners at StatsCan.

Following up on MP Wong's point about seniors, in addition to providing income supports, you know that we're contributing \$9 million to the United Way so they can continue to support local senior-serving organizations. We're working to keep seniors at home because they have that preference, and aging in place has been seen as a best practice. There are additional funds for community-based organizations to provide them those wraparound supports. There is, as I've said, more than \$3 billion for GBV. There are investments

for skills development and training for those who have to skill up on the other side of COVID. There are some 215,000 training opportunities for young people. We're providing employers with a top-up. We're increasing the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. We're ensuring that the working poor have a top-up, a living wage, so they can respond to the costs of living and to the needs of their communities in meaningful ways.

I sincerely hope, Madam Chair, that colleagues will vote in favour of this historic budget, and that they will also ensure that we move forward with universal early learning and child care.

● (1140)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Minister.

Budget 2021 has set aside specific funding allocation towards programming for men and boys. I believe this is the first time we are prioritizing this group in the work of preventing and addressing gender-based violence.

Could you speak to why this grew to be such a significant priority in the work you do?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We worked with Mr. Terry Duguid, who was my parliamentary secretary for a time and built a framework to support men and boys in the work to address and prevent gender-based violence.

The new investments in budget 2021 expand on the work we've already done and allow us the opportunities to build systems and networks of organizations that are feminist in their approach and support men and boys as they help other men and boys heal and become champions for equity and change.

The Chair: Excellent.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

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

In my previous comment, I pointed out that the Department of Public Security and the Secr tariat   la condition f minine are still asking for details about the transfers of funds for shelters to assist women victims. They are also asking that more money be invested for social and affordable housing.

The Minister says that she is proud to be part of a government that calls itself feminist. So why has the government been letting the Deschamps report gather dust since 2015? The investigation actually began with Quebec reporters in 2014, and recommendations were made in the Deschamps report in 2015.

The report on the RCMP by Justice Bastarache shows once more that women in the RCMP are victims of all kinds of crimes and they are not in a good situation. But the Bastarache report is still on the shelf.

They may say they are feminist, but they have delayed in implementing the recommendations of the core working group that published the 2021 national action plan for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Indigenous women's groups had to go public to condemn the delays in implementing the recommendations before the government became involved.

My colleague Ms. Mathysen spoke about pay equity. How long have we been talking about that? Even the Minister said that they were talking about the importance of pay equity 50 years ago. The government may talk about it, but the equity has yet to be achieved.

As for the action plan to end gender-based violence, we have often asked for dates and specifics as to the money invested to assist women who are victims of violence.

So many files are gathering dust! I will not even mention women aged from 65 to 74, whom the government has completely forgotten. According to recent announcements, they will receive nothing. However, the seniors who are the most forgotten and the most likely to be poor are women. They are not waiting until they are 75 to be poor. Between 65 and 74, women seniors suffer from poverty and isolation. The pandemic has made it all worse, as it has increased the difficulty for women to take their place in the world of business.

Is the Minister working with her fellow ministers? Our justice system needs to be reworked, because money will not be enough.

Madam Minister, you have 30 seconds to tell us in a few words how the discussions between ministers and your colleagues are going.

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, my colleague just asked eight questions, so I will try to answer as quickly as I can in the order she asked them.

On public safety and the status of women and our partnership with Quebec, we have a great relationship with them and will continue to work out the details. I hope colleagues vote for the budget so that those funds can flow starting this June.

On housing, we've signed an agreement with Quebec, and we're moving forward with additional funds in the budget.

On DND, my colleague is right. Despite all the progress that's been made, not enough has been done, and we're committed to accelerating that work and additional resources in the budget will help, but that alone will not help. This conversation is part of the greater reckoning we're having as a country, and that culture change has to be part of it.

On pay equity, as she asked, as my previous colleague asked, pay equity legislation is actually moving forward on time, despite COVID, and those regulations will come into effect this year. Employers will have time to then build those plans.

My colleague asked about gender-based violence and seniors as well. I agree women in rural communities, particularly those 55 and up, are hardest hit, and we're working hard to ensure that they have the security and supports they need.

On GBV, we've already rolled out historic investments, and as soon as the funds are unlocked from budget 2021, we'll roll those out quickly as well, so they get to the front lines quickly.

Last, on women entrepreneurs, I was there when Bardish Chagger developed the strategy and ensured that that feminist lens was applied. We're collecting data. Mary Ng is responsible for that file now. She's increased investments for women entrepreneurs during COVID, of course, but budget 2021 also includes additional supports for them. Women entrepreneurs make up about 16% of businesses. We need to double that number, and our government's committed to ensuring that happens.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we'll go to Ms. Mathysen.

You have two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Madam Minister, you talked before about Islamophobia, and I'd like to get to that now.

As you know, last week I presented a unanimous consent motion in the House asking for a national action summit on Islamophobia. I was pleased that it passed.

One of the key parts of that motion was that a timeline be established and that this summit happen by July 2021. Can you give us an update if, in fact, this summit will happen within that timeline?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: MP Mathysen, I appreciate your advocacy. We spoke earlier about the unique role that I have around the cabinet table, where it's horizontal, and I have oversight in every file. I also have the ability to support programming on the ground with investments which, frankly, the department has never had. The department had never existed before, either. It came into effect at the same time that the pay equity legislation received royal assent.

I say all this to you because, as the first Muslim around the federal table and as the first minister responsible for women and gender equality, I see a lot of responsibility. I feel that responsibility, and a lot of opportunity.

Minister Chagger has committed to moving forward with a summit to have that conversation about Islamophobia, and, in terms of timelines, I think it will be as quickly as possible. My team and I are having conversations with Muslim women and Muslim women-serving organizations, because we want to make sure that Muslim women, particularly visible Muslim women wearing hijabs, are shaping the agenda and are taking up the space.

Beyond that, MP Mathysen, I think it's time to talk about the hate online and how it spills into real life. We need to talk more about white supremacy and the fact that white supremacy, as we've seen, is linked to incels, it's linked to misogyny, and it's linked to racism, so, beyond the summit, there is important work to be done. Minister Chagger and her team are working very closely with the Prime Minister's Office and community leaders to make sure we get this done right.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I'm certainly glad that you brought that up in terms of those timelines, because we're also waiting for a bill and legislation against online hate. You haven't really said whether we're going to meet that July deadline for the summit. I hope we do, because the House promised that, but what about a bill about online hate? That's been long overdue as well.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but you're out of time.

Now we're going to Ms. Shin for five minutes.

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

I'd like to thank the minister for taking time out of her busy schedule to join us today.

As the minister has expressed often, I know that when she is working on a file for women and gender equality, there is personal passion that fuels her work because of her personal story.

Canadians have been gripped by the cesspool of toxic masculinity and sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces. My frustration throughout the questioning conducted by our committee has been the lack of personal accountability despite platitudes on culture change and trauma sensitivity to women victims of sexual assault and misconduct in the armed forces.

Surprisingly, I don't know why, but the minister has been very quiet throughout the deliberations held by the defence committee and the status of women committee. Canadians are hoping to hear from the Minister for Women and Gender Equality. What does the minister deem to be her personal accountability on this issue? Does she endorse what many MPs and Canadians perceive of the Minister of National Defence's lack of response as abdication? What are her thoughts on the three-year delayed response to the case of accusations against General Vance?

Thank you.

• (1150)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, like every woman, like every Canadian, I am disturbed and disappointed by the lack of progress and the manifestation of inequity and disrespect for women in our institutions, and my commitment to Canadian women, particularly to survivors who have had the courage to come forward, is the following.

I'll continue to create spaces that are safe and away from partisan spaces so that you can have the opportunity to say what you need to say. I'll continue to work with you and experts to make sure that we have the right supports and processes and protocols in place. I will continue as an aunt who's really excited to watch two little girls grow up who believe they can do whatever they want, these fierce young Canadians, to ensure that should they choose to serve in

these professions or any other every workplace, that it is a safe one for them.

That personal commitment, as well as the Government of Canada's commitment, as well as that of DND and CAF is a reflection of what we're hearing from Canadians, who are demanding greater action faster, and it's only happening because survivors continue to have the courage to come forward. They can rest assured that we will continue to move forward in this important work as quickly as we can and keep their voices at the heart of our efforts.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Minister, do you feel that the Minister of National Defence responded as he should have, or do you feel that there could have been a better response in the timing and how he has deflected from responsibility in all this?

Thank you.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The Minister of National Defence I see is working hard every single day to overcome all sorts of challenges and barriers, and I'm honoured to work with him to put an end to this violence and to this hate. It is clear that, as a government and as a culture, though we've moved forward significantly, we've not come far enough, and we've renewed our commitment to move forward faster and appreciate every time Canadians demand us to move forward on this file. Gender-based violence has been stigmatized. It's happening behind closed doors and now it's out in the open.

Ms. Nelly Shin: I appreciate the minister's desire to see this. Would you agree with me that personal accountability is primary and most important if we're going to see a culture shift?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I think the most important thing in all this, Madam Chair, is keeping survivors at the heart of our efforts and listening to them and taking our lead from them, which is exactly what our government is doing and calling—

Ms. Nelly Shin: Minister, unless there is a culture shift, we'll always be having to defend the women instead of going after what needs to be gone after, the perpetrators.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I hope, Madam Chair, that colleagues will vote for the budget to move forward, which includes \$236 million to do the work that my colleague has just referred to.

The Chair: We will go to Ms. Zahid for the last five minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for appearing before the committee today.

The last few days have been very difficult. Both of us witnessed the funeral of the four innocent lives lost to hatred and Islamophobia. This incident of the attack on the London family hits very close to me. It hit close to my home because, as a hijab-wearing woman, as a Muslim woman, as an immigrant woman named Salma, who came to Canada in 1999, who loves to walk in her neighbourhood, my first comment to myself was that it could have been us four.

I know that in the last five and a half years we have done a lot of work as a government to combat Islamophobia. There is a lot of work ahead to break the walls of hatred that we have erected around us and to combat Islamophobia so that no mother feels scared dropping her hijab-wearing young girl at school, nor is a young woman wearing a hijab scared to travel on public transit.

Since this tragic incident, I have been talking to many families in Scarborough. We organized a community walk where people from all walks of life and people from different faiths came together.

Can you please expand on the work that you have done and what work needs to be done going forward to make sure that we can combat Islamophobia and hate?

• (1155)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: MP Zahid, thank you for your incredible leadership. In your capacity as chair of the citizenship and immigration committee, in your capacity as a parliamentarian and as a community leader, it has been inspiring watching you overcome challenge after challenge and still rise.

I thank you for that because you are a role model for so many right now who are afraid to put on the hijab. What I say to them and to the moms who are afraid to let their hijabi daughters go outside for a walk because they're afraid for their safety is that we can't let the terrorists win. They want us to be afraid of who we are. They want us to not be who we are. They want to prevent our progress and contribution to Canada. We can't let that happen.

I also acknowledge that all of us across parties have Muslim staffers. There are more Muslim staff working on Parliament Hill, albeit virtually now, than ever before. I'm sure everybody has taken the time to check in on them, because they're carrying a lot of this. They're behind the scenes, in the backrooms, but they're carrying a lot of the grief and the trauma that has come towards Muslims, particularly over the last month, since Eid.

My colleague is a really good example of how communities can be mobilized to do the right thing, to pull down those walls of hate. If she continues to work with my team and me, we'll make sure that we build up the community capacity to respond to this hate.

I also want to take this opportunity to speak to hijabi Muslims in Alberta who are experiencing violent incident after another in public spaces simply because they choose to worship as they do and they are proud to be who they are out in the streets and in public spaces.

The hate that you are experiencing is not okay. Our government stands with you and condemns all forms of Islamophobia and hate. There is no place for that hate in Canada, but we are reckoning with some disturbing realities about our wonderful country. We have an opportunity through the budget to continue to invest in the anti-racism secretariat, to continue to invest in community-based programming.

Salma Zahid, my goodness, I'm sorry that you feel afraid to go outside into the streets, and to just take that afternoon or evening stroll. So many of us have left countries and have come to this place so that we could be free to worship as we do, and that persecution that we continue to feel is not okay.

Madam Chair, this is probably the heaviest conversation I've had at this committee in the 12 times I've appeared before you. That's really saying a lot, because it has been an interesting experience every time.

MP Zahid, thanks again for your leadership. I appreciate you and I continue to draw inspiration from you.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: You'll be very pleased with what we're going to be studying next.

Thank you to the minister for coming today. Of course, we've had a great discussion about the supplementary estimates.

We have to vote on those estimates. At this point, I'll read them out:

DEPARTMENT FOR WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY
Vote 1a—Operating expenditures.....\$12,058,140
Vote 5a—Grants and contributions.....\$88,575,100

(Votes 1a and 5a agreed to)

The Chair: Shall I report the supplementary estimates (A) 2021-22 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you again to the minister.

Now, if I could ask the members to log off from the public venue and log into the in camera meeting, we'll go into our committee business for the day.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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