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Chair

Mrs. Stella Ambler

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•(1800)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC)): Good evening, everyone, and welcome to this meeting of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women.

We are very pleased today to have Diane Redsky, project director of the Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada.

Just so we all know, we are expecting one other witness who seems to be delayed.

Ms. Redsky, if the other witness isn't here, then I hope you're okay with taking the full hour, because we'd love to hear from you. This doesn't divide your time at all, but if she is able to come by at any point in the hour, we'll give her 10 minutes as well.

Thank you so much. Welcome again, and please begin.

Ms. Diane Redsky (Project Director, Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada, Canadian Women's Foundation): Do I just start now? Do the 10 minutes start—

The Chair: Yes. Your 10 minutes start now, and we all have ear pieces so you don't have to speak very loudly as long as your microphone is on. Later on, if anyone is speaking French, you can just put the earpiece in as well and get the translation, but you don't have to worry about that right now.

Ms. Diane Redsky: Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to be here this evening.

First of all, I'd like to acknowledge the Anishinaabe territory, which we all have the privilege of being on.

I would also like to acknowledge the women who cannot be here because they currently are living in fear, have no voice, and believe that no one cares. One indigenous woman shared the following quote, which I believe is really important for all of us. She said, "Just try hard not to give up on us like everyone else in the world has."

I am presenting this evening, representing the work of the Canadian Women's Foundation. My key messages are: collaboration, reframing the issue, nurturing indigenous women leadership, and system change.

The Canadian Women's Foundation, for those of you who are not aware, is a national public foundation that invests in the strength of women and the dreams of girls. We do this by raising money to end violence against women, to move women out of poverty, and to build strong resilient girls through funding, researching, and promoting promising practices. I am sharing this because there is

an important role for philanthropy in funding organizations, raising the profile of issues facing women and highlighting the opportunities to partner for system change.

The Canadian Women's Foundation targets our support to women and girls who need it most, who are aboriginal women and girls in Canada. We achieve this by engaging indigenous women from across Canada in all aspects of our work.

We are all aware of the many challenges and barriers facing aboriginal women in Canada. Many of us are aware of the research, community initiatives, and advocacy led by aboriginal and first nation leadership, community-based agencies, national organizations such as the Native Women's Association of Canada, governments, and foundations such as the Canadian Women's Foundation.

We all know things are not getting better; in fact, they are getting worse. The root causes of the problem are deep and complex. These root causes of poverty, racism, classism, sexism, and undervaluing of indigenous women exist at significantly high levels.

Just to highlight poverty, there is a strong link, as you are aware, between poverty and violence against women. Of all aboriginal women, and this is first nation, Métis, and Inuit women, 36% live in poverty. This is much higher than the average of 9% for all Canadians.

Racism is a really important part, and the Canadian Women's Foundation is starting to talk about that in a very public way.

The Canadian Women's Foundation demonstrated leadership last summer and wrote a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper. It was written by Margot Franssen, of the Canadian Women's Foundation board of directors, chair of the Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada, and a philanthropist in Canada.

This is a quote from her letter to the Prime Minister: "If there were hundreds of white women murdered or missing wouldn't an inquiry be launched? Wouldn't their names and photographs be front page news everyday until answers were found? Wouldn't the community demand that the government uncover causes and create solutions so that no more women were taken or murdered? Aboriginal women deserve no less."

This letter was written in part because the Canadian Women's Foundation leadership to stop human trafficking in Canada began with investing \$2 million of foundation money to provide funding to organizations, conduct research, and bring together 23 experts from across Canada and survivors to participate on a National Task Force on Human Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada. The result will be an anti-trafficking strategy for the Canadian Women's Foundation and Canada, and it will be done by the fall of 2014.

There are very serious and tragic intersections, murdered and missing aboriginal women being one, particularly for aboriginal and first nation women and girls in Canada. Racism, classism, sexism at its worst results in the most extreme form of violence against indigenous women: human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

The Canadian Women's Foundation in 2012 and 2013 consulted with over 250 Canadian organizations and 150 survivors of human trafficking and learned that girls and women are being trafficked into forced prostitution inside Canada, to Canada, and across Canadian borders.

Girls and women who are bought and sold from inside Canada are often the most marginalized young girls and women, with aboriginal women being at the top of the list.

• (1805)

Many girls in Canada are first trafficked into forced prostitution when they are 13 years old.

Along this continuum, particularly for indigenous women, is the horrifying reality that they are methodically targeted by traffickers when they are teens and young women, their vulnerabilities are exploited, and they become trapped in a life of absolute chaos, abuse, and extreme violence.

It doesn't end there, though. When they are no longer of value to a trafficker, they become the women in the survival sex industry: 40 years old, poor, and dying. Women's bodies are not equipped to handle the physical and psychological trauma of being sexually exploited and trafficked, whether by circumstances or by force.

As part of the work of the Canadian Women's Foundation task force, we are also challenging the assumptions about who is benefiting and who is to blame. We conducted a national Angus Reid public opinion poll last year and uncovered the following: 78% of Canadians agree that girls under the age of 16 are not in prostitution by choice, and 67% of Canadians agree that Canadian girls under the age of 16 are being recruited and trafficked to work in prostitution against their will.

It seems everyone has some knowledge and knows what's happening. So what can be done about it?

One thing the Canadian Women's Foundation is doing is reframing the issue on sex trafficking. The question isn't, why girls are prostituting themselves, but why men buy sex from girls.

We need to address the root causes, including the undervaluing of women by those who harm us. We also cannot move forward without recognizing the systems that perpetuate and create vulnerabilities for aboriginal women. We are the only population

experiencing this level and type of systemic discrimination in most systems, including child welfare, education, etc.

I believe it will only be indigenous women's leadership to make these significant changes to improve the lives of other indigenous women, their families, and the communities. In fact we're seeing indigenous women's leadership at the community level, which is how I would like to conclude this presentation.

The courage and leadership of aboriginal women and their remarkable strength can be seen across Canada, in fact, even around this table.

Our Anishinaabe grandmothers are rising and reclaiming their role as protectors of our communities, and this is gaining momentum across Canada.

In the words of one of the Canadian Women's Foundation's founding mothers, "Until all of us have made it, none of us have made it."

Thank you.

• (1810)

The Chair: That was just wonderful. Thank you so much.

We'll now begin our questions.

We'll start with Ms. Ashton, please, for seven minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Chair, I'll be splitting my time with my colleague Ms. Freeman.

Ms. Redsky, thank you very much for joining us today and for sharing your important work and very important testimony.

I'd like to begin by referring to a message that you brought forward but that we've heard from almost every witness at this committee, namely, the importance of a national inquiry. Whether it's national organizations, women on the ground, or families of missing or murdered indigenous women, we've heard recurring testimony on the need for an inquiry. Along with that is the need for action, the kind of action that we could see in a national action plan.

Would you agree with both an inquiry and the need for a national action plan to end violence against indigenous women?

Ms. Diane Redsky: Yes. In fact that is what we at the Canadian Women's Foundation, in our work, have expressed strongly.

At the end of the day, it's about uncovering the causes and creating the solutions. Whatever mechanism will achieve this, one that involves women, that involves indigenous women, that involves their families, that involves their community at the grassroots level, that involves multiple partners, is the type of inquiry and national action plan that we would like to see. It's that kind of model, that kind of work, that we know is successful.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): My question follows right from that, actually.

One of the other things we do here a lot is emphasize the need for community-based action, empowering community-driven solutions, including safety plans.

Could you talk about the role the federal government can play in supporting community-driven solutions, what the role should be, how it should be reflected, and how we can help people on the ground find solutions and take action?

Ms. Diane Redsky: There are multiple roles. Through the work of our national task force on human trafficking.... We in fact have the co-chair of the federal national action plan to combat human trafficking on our task force for that linkage. There are important roles for government to play from a policy perspective, from a funding perspective, and freeing up those avenues for communities to be able to get mobilized on that specific issue.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Following from that, do off-reserve aboriginal women work, can they work, do they want to work in developing these plans? What supports and funding opportunities would be available to help them develop these initiatives?

Ms. Diane Redsky: Already from our work in going across the country in our work specifically on trafficking, there are lots.... Almost in every large city in Canada, the women are starting to gather, starting at the grassroots level to come together to identify the solutions. I really think it's about all of us being the funding partners, and some decision-making and opportunity to provide support so that we step up as well in supporting those local coalitions, organizations, and women's organizations doing the work.

Part of what we've done through the national task force is as we've been going along fact-finding in the last year, we have also been grant-making. When we're grant-making, we're grant-making in partnership with government. There are natural synergies and opportunities for the private sector and for government to come together to really build a strong circle around the women who are working really hard at trying to raise awareness and address the systems and rebuild their families and communities from the inside out.

•(1815)

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Thank you very much.

I'm going to bounce it back to Niki, if there's any time left.

Ms. Niki Ashton: How much time do we have left?

The Chair: You have three minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Three minutes, great.

Ms. Redsky, you spoke of poverty being an underlying cause across the board. Could you perhaps elaborate on that?

We've had some witnesses, although we would have wished to have many more, who live on reserve and experience poverty on reserve. We've also heard from people in the inner city about the urban poverty that women face.

I'm wondering if you could elaborate on how poverty is so linked to the violence indigenous women face.

Ms. Diane Redsky: Poverty leaves women very vulnerable in many ways. It leaves them with not enough money to have a safe place to live. That's first and foremost. There's not enough money to provide for their kids. They feel they have no other choice but to get money sometimes in illegal ways. That creates a huge vulnerability. That also factors into women ending up in relationships that are unhealthy, again as a result of not having money.

At the end of the day, it's about those opportunities to give women a hand up out of poverty and the opportunity to have a living wage, an opportunity to sustain their household on their own without having to have somebody else in their life. There are critical intersections between poverty and violence against women. Poverty is the underlying thing in every risk factor for women along the continuum of violence against women, trafficking, sexual exploitation of women. It is an underlying issue across the spectrum.

Ms. Niki Ashton: What kinds of things could the government play a role in to tackle this poverty, whether it's in terms of housing or employment? What do you think we need to see?

Ms. Diane Redsky: It's entirely along the continuum, from women having an opportunity for education and employment programs.... The Canadian Women's Foundation has made quite an investment in economic development projects for women who are rebuilding their lives from violence. Those are significant investments across Canada into projects where women are getting the training to be able to get the jobs that are at a living wage. There are resources needed for that. There's policy with housing, as well as welfare rates, the income that women do receive.

It's almost as if they're always behind; women are always behind. They're always living day to day. Many women we met across the country in doing our work on sexual exploitation just want to stop doing that. They want to just get ahead, at least get a head start on something. It literally is day by day. They're damned if they do and they're damned if they don't. It's a really hard cycle for them to get out of.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Over to you now, Mr. Dechert, for seven minutes.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Ms. Redsky, I want to welcome you and thank you for being here this evening.

I understand that in 2012 you were a recipient of the Winnipeg YMCA-YWCA Women of Distinction Award, along with member of Parliament Joy Smith for the work that you did, and continue to do, in combatting human trafficking and sexual exploitation. I want to congratulate you and thank you for all of that great effort.

Ms. Diane Redsky: Thank you.

Mr. Bob Dechert: In your opening remarks you mentioned the impact of prostitution on women generally, and especially on aboriginal women, which we're here to study. Can you tell us more about your views on the connection between violence against aboriginal women and prostitution? Generally what do you see are the harms of prostitution for aboriginal women?

While we're on the topic, we all know about the Bedford decision, and we know that Parliament has been directed by the Supreme Court to come up with an alternative over the next year. I'm interested to hear your views and what you think should replace the current provisions that the Supreme Court has asked us to review and replace.

Ms. Diane Redsky: That's a big question.

• (1820)

Mr. Bob Dechert: Try to get it all in.

Ms. Diane Redsky: Trafficking and sexual exploitation is about gender, race, and class, and services need to be guided by a women-centred approach and a gender analysis of violence against women, so there are intersections between trafficking and prostitution.

Trafficking, in its legal definition, is forced prostitution when there is coercion, and force is a part of that. What we do know is that we've heard from police agencies across the country that because of the human trafficking legislation, the bar set for evidence, the threshold for evidence, is high, so oftentimes police officers in an immediate situation will fall back on the prostitution legislation when there is a very vulnerable woman who's in a situation where they need to separate and protect that woman or girl.

We know that the vulnerable women and girls across the country are the ones who are aboriginal. It depends, again, on which part of the country you are in, but particularly in western Canada, they are aboriginal women and girls. That's who you're seeing in the visible sex industry. That is who is being sexually exploited on the streets.

We're going to need unique strategies. The problem that needs to be solved is how we create laws that will always protect vulnerable women and girls from sexual exploitation. As the Canadian Women's Foundation, we're working on that answer through the task force, and we'll have those recommendations in the fall. We do know there is significant legal reform that's needed, not only with the trafficking legislation and working with that piece of it, but also policing agencies need tools to be able to intervene at the time. I would like to see that they have multiple tools available to them.

We are taking this position of reframing the issue. Why are men buying sex from girls? Our answers and recommendations will be around law reform, services, and public education awareness. How do we shift that? We're just entering the recommendation phase on our task force at this point, so collectively, we will be identifying those.

Mr. Bob Dechert: What is your view of the so-called Nordic model for prostitution?

I take it from your comments that you and the foundation you represent view prostitution generally as harmful to women and vulnerable persons. You mentioned that you've had an overwhelming number of people involved in prostitution who are not doing it by choice. Where does that lead us in dealing with prostitution? Do you think it should be legalized, or do you think we should try to prevent prostitution in some other way?

Ms. Diane Redsky: If I did this presentation in a month from now, I'd be able to answer that question on behalf of the Canadian Women's Foundation, because that is actually where we are

currently. We are deciding what our recommendations are as a foundation after we go through everything.

What we do know at this time is that vulnerable women should not be criminalized. We know there are a whole bunch of reasons why criminalizing vulnerable women is a bad idea and does not work for them in the future. They can never get a job. They have even more working against them to rebuild their lives.

We also know there's not enough attention to the purchasers of sex, even in the trafficking legislation. There is no criminal provision for purchasers of sex. That is a huge gap in the trafficking legislation, and there aren't enough people talking about it. We want to raise that issue.

Mr. Bob Dechert: I think all parliamentarians will be looking forward to the foundation's report on this.

Let me ask you about some of the other things that Canadian Women's Foundation does.

I understand that it has funded and participated in emergency shelters, support programs and follow-up programs for women who have experienced violence, and programs that help women and girls avoid or escape sexual exploitation. Certainly, it has helped them deal with situations of domestic violence.

Can you tell us your views on where there's a connection between domestic violence against aboriginal women, and what leads them into, perhaps, say, prostitution and human trafficking?

• (1825)

Ms. Diane Redsky: Yes I can. Particularly for aboriginal women and girls, what we have seen across the country is a common theme of their not meeting the trafficking definition, and that means they have to be in fear for their safety. Aboriginal women oftentimes are not in fear for their safety because their traffickers are their boyfriends or husbands. That is very common across Canada. That's actually a shift which traffickers are now moving towards, because then there's no crime and they don't have to worry about being charged down the road. That is the intersection between domestic violence and trafficking.

A lot of women are presenting themselves in women's shelters. It's even harder to get to those women when they're trauma bonded with their trafficker. It requires a whole new set of interventions and services and consideration when we're looking at the long term on intervening and then helping them rebuild their lives.

The Chair: Thank you.

Over to you, Ms. Bennett, for seven minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Thanks for all your work, and also to the Canadian Women's Foundation. It's really important.

I'd like to tap into your expertise on trafficking and how that intersects with the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women. I heard this time last year that even at some of the Idle No More rallies there were signs that said that they go to the ships and then they disappear. During the summer we also heard of, perhaps, Duluth-Thunder Bay access in terms of this.

Last week we heard that you can't really have an action plan without the inquiry that outlines what the issues are such that you can deal with them in an action plan.

You said that you'd like some of the trafficking legislation tightened up.

Perhaps you could tell me how you see going forward, in that it seems that domestic violence against women, trafficking, missing and murdered women, these are all intersected. How would you draw the diagram for us in terms of the various areas? What would you like to see in our report that would allow us to deal with these issues?

I guess the bottom line is, how is the national action plan on trafficking working? Do you think we have all the information to actually do that piece properly, when so many people are calling for the need for a national public inquiry before we get to a national action plan on missing and murdered indigenous women?

Ms. Diane Redsky: That's a big question too.

There are clear intersections with trafficking and missing and murdered aboriginal women. Not all missing and murdered women are trafficked or sexually exploited or involved in prostitution. Across Canada we find a clear intersection. There are without a doubt missing and murdered aboriginal women as a result of being trafficked, as a result of sexual exploitation, and as a result of domestic violence. A number of moving parts are happening at the same time. It's not only what government can do, but also what philanthropy can do and how those two together can support organizations working on the ground.

There's lots of work across the country that local grassroots women's organizations have been working on for many years. They already have some solutions about what it's going to take to deal with missing and murdered women. It's important that all of us hear them out, support them, and be organized about it. If it takes a national action plan to do that, then I would like to see a role for the private sector. It is something that the Canadian Women's Foundation is very serious about. It's serious enough that we've taken a position on missing and/or murdered women. Somebody do something. Let's all work together and figure out what's going on. This is not acceptable.

Through that type of leadership as well as with government leadership coming together, there are lots of opportunities for that to move forward. I think it's a common table where there's an opportunity for families to be involved and for aboriginal women to be involved as well.

I know I'm not answering your question entirely. It's probably more process oriented. How we do it is just as important as what gets accomplished.

•(1830)

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

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Seeing it's 6:30, Madam Chair, if you wanted to go to Cindy—

The Chair: I was going to ask Dr. Blackstock to speak right after you, or did you want the opportunity to use your two and a half minutes afterwards for Dr. Blackstock?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes. There's the whole issue of foster care and fleeing foster care. Let Cindy speak and then I'll finish.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Madam Chair, can I speak?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Dechert.

Mr. Bob Dechert: We would be pleased to hear Dr. Blackstock now and then we can all ask her questions.

The Chair: Sure, that would work.

Welcome, Dr. Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. We're delighted to have you here. I'm sorry for the mix-up. You have 10 minutes.

Dr. Cindy Blackstock (Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada): Thank you very much, Madam Chair and committee members.

It's an honour to be here on Algonquin Nation lands and also to talk about such an important topic. As parliamentarians and as citizens, we have so many challenges before us in this wonderful country, and some of them feel like they can never be solved. They seem to pass from one generation to another, and despite our goodwill across all the political spectrum they seem to remain undone.

I am here to talk about a challenge that we not only can solve, but we must solve, and that we're morally compelled to solve as Canadians.

You've heard the stories by others much more expert than I and closer to the matter about the perils many indigenous women face in this country, but some of those challenges in many of those cases could have been prevented had the women received the right service at the right time when they were children themselves.

I'm going to go through a little bit of the evidence to tell you how compelling it is that the very best investment any government can make is in its children, not only in terms of setting up for a robust society we can all be proud of, but economically, too. Then I'm going to turn to how that relates to violence against indigenous women. Finally, I will put forward to you some solutions that you can take to the table and get done.

Children only have one childhood, as you know, members. We can't spend three or four budget cycles trying to figure it out because we miss the opportunity to do the right thing by them.

We know the statistics. First nations children are more likely to be in child welfare care. They're placed there at 12 times the rate of non-aboriginal children, driven primarily by neglect that's fuelled by poverty, poor housing, and substance abuse, all things we can do something about, members. Those are not unsolvable problems.

Graduation rates are at around 35%, not because children don't want to be educated, not because they're not intelligent, but because they don't have the same opportunity that other Canadian children have. There are health statistics that none of us around this table would feel proud of.

What does this mean for them not only as children but as adults? I'd really recommend that you read, and I've provided the reference to the committee clerk, "Adverse Childhood Experiences Study", an experience study in the United States. This is a sample of 20,000 Americans. They asked how much does what you experience as a child affect you down the road as you grow up.

One of the things they found is that the more adverse experiences you have—and when I talk about adverse experiences, I'm talking about child maltreatment, family violence in the home, suicide, poverty. The more of those that you have, the higher the likelihood is that as an adult you yourself are going to suffer from mental illness, have challenges with addictions, that you are going to grow up and live your life in poverty. Not only that but it actually predisposes you to very serious diseases like cancer, diabetes, lung disease. All these things could be really prevented and, of course, once they develop, they are expensive for taxpayers to intervene.

The cost of child maltreatment in Canada is expensive. There is a great study by McKenna and Bowlus. What they say is the cost of doing nothing, because somehow we feel that doing something, investing more money costs us, but sometimes we don't sit back and reflect on the cost of doing nothing.... The cost of child maltreatment in Canada in terms of loss of taxation revenue, more social assistance programs and those types of things, as of 2003 when they did the study, was close to \$16 billion.

I'm sure if I announced to all of you today that you had \$16 billion to invest in other things that Canadians care about, you would all have a number of things come to mind. We can get there by investing early with children. The key things are that we go after those drivers that cut across those disadvantages for first nations kids: poverty, poor housing, and substance misuse. How do we do that?

I'd like to bring to your attention one of the innovative programs coming out of the United States. For far too long, people have said, "Well, poverty, that's too big for us to tackle. That's outside of my department, outside of my ministry, outside of child welfare." That's naive thinking, quite frankly, because poverty is at the centre of so much disadvantage in Canadian society.

• (1835)

What the American government did—and I think you'll agree with me that \$15 million from the American government is a very modest investment—was to decide that they would provide \$15 million to child welfare workers, because they noticed in their own data that 30% of American children who go into child welfare care are going there primarily for housing-related issues. That's not dissimilar in Canada, and of course, is even more the case for first nations children.

They said that they were going to give those people housing vouchers so that child welfare workers could work in tandem with housing professionals to pay the first and last months' rent, to pay for heat, or to pay for renovation of a bathroom for a child with a disability.

What ended up happening with that \$15-million investment is that they saved 7,500 kids from going into foster care, and they saved the taxpayer \$131 million, because placing a child in foster care costs far

more than keeping kids safely in their homes. I think you could all agree with me that the best place for kids is in their family homes.

There are investments out there that we can make.

We know that the federal government is directly involved with first nations children. Although we can make the argument that for other children, education and child welfare are a provincial jurisdiction, for first nations children the federal government has a direct role in the provision of child welfare for 163,000 children.

You are custodians. You have the opportunity to influence the well-being of those kids directly.

One of the ways you can do that is, of course, by remedying the long-standing inequalities that exist in child welfare, education, and health. There's no sense denying it. Every report that's done independently and even by government itself confirms those inequalities.

What people have been too slow about is addressing it in a bound.... What do I mean by that? There's been this process in Canada where we've become really comfortable, I guess, with the notion of incremental equality for first nations children. I remember reading a report back in my office that asked if anyone could "hazard a guess as to what year or what century" real progress will be made towards the equality of first nations children in education. When that was written in 1967, I was three years old. The same is true in child welfare.

What do we do about this? We have an opportunity to avail ourselves of the solutions that are before us. These are not problems that have not been costed out. There are evidence-informed solutions that we could be undertaking and funding so that we know the money is actually going to where it needs to go. However, we must have a government and a cross-party commitment that we are not going to save money on...that racial discrimination will not be a fiscal restraint measure.

We are before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal at the moment trying to get equality in first nations child welfare funding. I tell people that the most shocking thing about that case is that it's even necessary at all in a wealthy country such as ours.

I want to draw back a little bit on Jordan's principle. Many of you were there on that day in December 2007 when that passed in the House of Commons unanimously. What Jordan's principle says, simply, is that where government services are available to all other children, first nations children should be able to access them on the same terms. It's the fairness principle that all Canadians, regardless of party, believe in. That's why it got a unanimous vote.

However, it has not been implemented properly. In fact, the Federal Court recently ruled in a case against the federal government about its implementation. It's the case of Beadle and Pictou Landing versus the Attorney General of Canada. It comes out of Nova Scotia. It's the case of a single mother who is caring for a son with high special needs, with cerebral palsy, etc. She did so for 15 years with very little public support, but then she had a double stroke so severe that she cannot care for him physically. All she wants is the level of care respite while she recovers from her stroke and is then able to resume her responsibilities.

There's a Supreme Court of Nova Scotia decision that says children in cases like Jeremy's should receive whatever level of care according to his needs and not some arbitrary value. It's called the Boudreau decision. The aboriginal affairs department decided that no, they weren't going to pay attention to the decision. They were going to provide a fixed value for Jeremy's care, which was assessed by health professionals to be insufficient.

They said to the mother, "Well, you could place the child in child welfare care and we will pay for that, or we can place him in an institution and we'll pay for that." As you can imagine, as parents yourselves, or grandparents or aunts or uncles, that's not an acceptable option when you love your kid. She filed an action against the federal government suggesting that the failure to implement Jordan's principle was a violation of the charter. The Federal Court agreed that the federal government had erred in its decision-making in denying the service and ordered the federal government to pay for it.

• (1840)

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs, through the Department of Justice, is now appealing that decision at the Federal Court of Appeal. Most difficult of all is they're actually asking Ms. Beadle to pay for the court fees. It's difficult for me to understand how this is in the interest of public policy at all.

In terms of some solutions, we have them before us. Implement Jordan's principle fully. At a minimum with the implementation of Jordan's principle, please reflect on the question of whether recovering legal costs from a single mother, who is caring for a high special needs child and recovering from a stroke, is in the best interest of Canadians, or whether investing those funds and keeping him at home is in the best interest.

The Chair: Could I ask you, Dr. Blackstock, to wrap it up as quickly as possible. Thank you.

Dr. Cindy Blackstock: We need equitable funding in child welfare. There's an opportunity before us with Premier Selinger putting on the next agenda of the Council of the Federation, the request that first nations child welfare be put at the top of the agenda, which is great news. It provides a political platform for discussion and cooperation among governments. I'd encourage the federal government to do that as well.

We should consider something along the lines of a Canadian version of the adverse childhood study, not only for the provisions of good public policy for children, but because it cuts across so many areas in the federal government, it would be a good predictor for health outcomes, as they are a big part of the budget for the federal government.

All these things could be informed by this very insignificant, relatively, amount of funding. You might want to consider that family unification program.

The Chair: Thank you.

Because we're so far over time, I'm going to give you back the floor, Dr. Bennett, for your last two and half minutes, which you can use to allow the witness to finish, or however you wish.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Seeing we have very little time, I'd rather hear from you as to what would make your heart go pitter-patter if you saw it in our report.

First, Cindy, we've heard some of the terrible stories, the Highway of Tears. Do you have any experience of the reasons, including violence, why sometimes people are fleeing foster care?

Dr. Cindy Blackstock: We hear lots of stories that show that children who are maltreated themselves are more likely to end up in violent situations as adults. We also have the situation where women who are in domestic violence situations in their families are in a difficult situation, because child welfare jurisdictions require that this be reported. Witnessing domestic violence is considered to be a definition of maltreatment in most jurisdictions, but many women are therefore reluctant to get the help they need because they're afraid their kids are going to be taken away. This whole cycle is in place.

That's why the answer of investing in children's services and in family supports at the earliest stages makes good economic sense. It also would be a good predictor of trying to roll down the incidents of violence against women as women grow up, and keeping families safe for those women who are in that situation where domestic violence is a reality in their families.

• (1845)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Diane.

Ms. Diane Redsky: I would just like to say that in terms of a profile of who are the young people who are being sexually exploited and trafficked, if you look at a province like Manitoba and at Tracia's Trust and their statistics, 400 sexually exploited youth are currently on the streets in Winnipeg, 70% of them are aboriginal and 80% are female. They're as young as 13. We've actually seen younger, from my experience. Some 70% of them are children in care. That's another really important risk factor for kids. Some 90% have a history of trauma. This is also really important: the average grade level is seven.

These are really important opportunities to address those gaps and barriers, particularly when it comes to young people and what makes them vulnerable.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to Ms. Brown, for seven minutes also.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, ladies, for being here. Both of you have given us great food for thought. I think you have given us some things we can work on.

When we had the witnesses in front of us, the families—and I cited this last week—we had Bernadette Smith here whose sister is missing. One of the things that she so imploringly said to us was, "Please, no more reports".

Ms. Blackstock, you've cited two more reports tonight just in your own commentary. Last week I made the comment in our discussions that there are an extraordinary number of reports available. One of the committee members challenged me, so I did a bit of investigation this week. Just in 22 reports that I have downloaded, there are 437 academic reports cited, just in 22.

Ms. Redsky, one of the ones I have here is by the Canadian Women's Foundation. That alone has 66 citations of academic studies that have been done.

The studies are done. Isn't it time we got down to work and put solutions to these problems? Isn't it time that we came up with recommendations?

Ms. Redsky, one of the academic reports you cite is from Amnesty International. I see here they have made recommendations to ensure indigenous women access to justice, to improve public awareness and accountability, to provide adequate and stable funding to the front-line organizations that provide culturally appropriate services, to address the root causes of violence against indigenous women, and to eliminate inequities in the services available to aboriginal children.

All of those issues are hitting the very things you've talked about with us tonight.

I note that, according to another report, which is from Newfoundland and Labrador, 56% of the violent incidents committed against aboriginal people are perpetrated by someone who is known to the victim. It goes on to talk about the domestic violence that goes on.

If we know what the causes are, and you've talked about starting to put together some of the solutions, isn't it time we started to address them?

Dr. Cindy Blackstock: I would say yes, but I would also say that shouldn't preclude any investigation of other alternatives or development of a rather organized strategy. You can get rather piecemeal, I guess, with shooting in various recommendations. It's very important to look across these existing reports, identify those common themes, and get to work. There are women and children out there right now depending on the good work that you, as committee members, are doing.

Outside of that though, that doesn't preclude the value of a national strategy or some kind of inquiry, if you like, which has been called for by many groups, to look at a national strategy that's very holistic in terms of preventing and responding to violence against indigenous women.

• (1850)

Ms. Lois Brown: Ms. Redsky.

Ms. Diane Redsky: The priority would be action. That was clearly the response of the Canadian Women's Foundation back in July. We need action. We need to know what. We need to uncover the causes and create the solutions. We need action items.

Ms. Lois Brown: Do you think that with 437 academic studies already done—and those are just some of the ones that I downloaded. Literally thousands of academic reports have been done. Do you not think that from these numerous references we can start to pull together some of the solutions and get acting on them?

Dr. Blackstock, you've talked about some of them, and they start with the children in the home. It is reprehensible that any child has to suffer any kind of violence in the home. That should be reprehensible to all of us. There's one of the suggestions. Can we not take that forward and start finding the solutions to that? Do we really need to do more reports and more study when we have all of these available?

Dr. Cindy Blackstock: When it comes to first nations children, we've identified through our work some examples of things that could be done right now. We'd be happy to provide them to the committee, at their discretion. They not only show short-term benefits for first nations families, but also set in play and lay some track around those longer-term problems as well.

I think the real key is to say that we'll get off the rails and do it, that we'll start down this path of action. This is particularly because the most important years for children are those early years. Getting those services in there early really is the best predictor of long-term outcomes throughout their childhood and into adulthood as well.

Ms. Lois Brown: Delaying that, delaying any action on those things, will impact a whole other generation of children. Action is needed now.

Dr. Cindy Blackstock: Right, and I would say fulsome action, courageous action.

I know it's difficult when you're dealing with budget restraints, but I just want to bring this to your awareness. There was a great study by the KidsRights foundation, which is the organization that works with Nobel laureates to hand out the International Children's Peace Prize that Malala received last year. They wanted to look at the performance of children's rights in proportion to the country's wealth. We wouldn't expect poor countries to be doing as well as rich countries like Canada. Then they ranked countries using an economic formula.

They found that Canada, a G-8 economy, ranked 60th in the world. This was in November 2013. There's clearly room to be able to increase what we're doing for the benefit of children and get back up to where our economy is, which is among the top eight in the world.

Ms. Lois Brown: You've just cited another study.

Madam Chair, I know you weren't here last week. Ms. Crowder chaired the meeting. I would like to submit these studies as part of the record, just because I was challenged last week on the number of studies that were available. I would like to submit these to the clerk.

The Chair: I think we can accept those. You can table them as part of your...

Ms. Lois Brown: Absolutely. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I'll let Ms. Duncan take her five minutes.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Thank you to both of you. I'm sure everybody agrees that we need you here for a week, not half an hour, but thank you both for your testimony.

Cindy, when you walked in, and also having heard Diane's great testimony, it occurred to me that really there are two things. One is after the fact, after aboriginal women and children have fallen through the cracks and have become addicted, or are in prostitution, or living in poverty, and so forth, but there's also the other thing, and that's the possibility of prevention.

It sounds to me that a lot of these studies, including this study about the particular areas of trafficking, prostitution, and the poverty of aboriginal women, look at the side of it that is after the fact. The decision has to be made on whether or not we'll continue to dwell on that. It's not that it shouldn't be addressed...and very specific to strategic actions. It sounds like Diane has really thought through a lot of that, not that Cindy hasn't.

The other side is prevention engagement. I'd like to hear from both of you on whether or not you would see a value in....

To me, what aboriginal men and women are calling for is they want the inquiry. That's more about looking at strategic actions to deal with the interaction between police and aboriginal women and children, and so forth, at how many are really out there, and at whether we're properly documenting, identifying, and taking appropriate legal actions and so forth.

The side that you talked about, Cindy, was about the strategic actions that have been taken in other jurisdictions that could be taken.

I'm wondering if each of you could talk briefly about that. Do you think both should be part of a strategy and merit some intensive look, with some sort of a timeline and so forth? In other words, "Here's some strategic action. Get on with it."

•(1855)

Dr. Cindy Blackstock: I would equate it to the analogy of fighting a fire versus preventing a fire.

Right now you have a generation of babies and young children out there. You have the opportunity as parliamentarians to make a substantial difference. It's not only about whether or not they experience violence as adults, but there's also providing them with a healthy childhood. You could reduce the cancer rates, the diabetes rates, the incarceration rates. It's all of these issues that are on the agenda of your various constituents across the country as concerns.

Really, as I often argue, and I think the evidence is very much in support of it, the very best investment any government can make is in children. It's not in the demographic of my age group. When you spend dollars on children, you see big payback down the road. I think it's also true with regard to violence against women and violence in the aboriginal community as well. That initial investment has big payback.

Ms. Diane Redsky: To me what's different from anything else about the action moving forward—and I really do believe we're at an important crossroads—is the voice of experiential women, the voice of the indigenous women leadership who need to lead. They need to be a significant key player in an inquiry into a national action plan. I do believe that is the biggest difference moving forward in terms of what action needs to happen.

That really hasn't been done as in depth as it has been in the past. Even in our work with the national task force on human trafficking, we have experiential women and survivors on our task force. We have met with survivors across the country. In fact, we had a national round table with survivors. The voices of the people who it affects the most need to be at the table and need to be the fundamental part of the process. They need to be at the centre of anything that happens. That's going to result in action.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I'm hearing you both saying we need both, but they're different things. We need action on both right now, the inquiry and to hear the voices and those issues. We also need to act with respect to the children.

Is that fair to say?

Dr. Cindy Blackstock: Yes. It would be the equivalent of just funding hospitals and not funding the flu shot. It doesn't make any sense. Let's get out there and provide both. As you invest in the early years, you're going to need less of those acute and very expensive interventions that come in adulthood. That's the hope and that's what the evidence suggests.

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Shoot. I wanted to give—

The Chair: You know what? Go ahead.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I was going to share my time, but....

The Chair: Do you have a quick question, Mr. Morin? There's not much time left.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): I will try to be brief.

Ms. Blackstock, my question is for you.

Aboriginal communities have always been excluded from economic life and society in general. I have travelled throughout Canada and that was the first thing I noticed. I was 17 or 18 years old and I could see that a whole segment of society was living as though it were from another planet, as though it were made up of strangers. Could that be one of the sources of the problem? All of these disappearances, as well as the problems related to prostitution and substance abuse... Are they not simply consequences of that premise?

•(1900)

[English]

The Chair: I'm going to give you about 30 seconds to answer that.

Dr. Cindy Blackstock: There's a great book called, *The Spirit Level*. I recommend it to you all. It shows that if you want to be a government where there are high trust levels, low incarceration rates, high education rates, and long life spans, you need to do only one thing and that is to reduce the inequalities in your own country.

I think by making that investment a priority as a federal government, you would see all of these good outcomes across the spectrum, and it would address many of the issues you raise.

The Chair: Thank you so much. I would like to thank both of you for being here today, Ms. Redsky and Dr. Blackstock, and for your time this evening. We really appreciate it. We're going to suspend for a minute to go in camera.

Ms Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I really appreciate Ms. Brown's sharing the information based on the point of order that my colleague raised last week. I'm wondering if that list of academic reports—I'm not sure what an academic report is, actually—could be shared with the other members of the committee.

The Chair: We can't share them unless they are in both official languages. They can be received but not distributed is my understanding. Is that correct?

Ms. Lois Brown: Yes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: We agree to receiving it through the committee and perhaps the committee can make sure it's translated. I realize that Ms. Brown brought it up as a result of our request. The number she referred to last week was 120,000. I'm surprised to see that it's 435 today, but we certainly would like to see that list.

Ms. Lois Brown: Madam Chair, I downloaded 22 reports as an example for the committee to see how many studies there are out there. When I presented them I said that in just the 22 studies that I downloaded, 437 academic reports are cited. We could download all of them, and I'm sure the compounding effect of the number of studies that are there should satisfy Ms. Ashton that an enormous number of studies have been done.

The Chair: I think the point is probably more to make the point that there are that many studies rather than to have them, the ones that Ms. Brown has submitted to be translated and considered.

I think it wasn't Ms. Brown's intention to have them considered in the report as such, as opposed to making the point that there are many studies out there. I think we can all concede that point.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'm sorry I cannot concede that, and Ms. Brown asks if I'm.... It's not a question of my being okay with any one member's actions here. There is word on the record referencing 120,000 reports, 435 reports, 22 reports, and this information is being wielded as the truth.

My concern is that Bernadette Smith and anyone who is referred to reports not have their name used inappropriately by anyone's testimony. What you have, Madam Chair, has been used to supply Ms. Brown's argumentation. I'm concerned that we aren't getting to see the facts that are being shared with you as the chair. I would certainly be concerned if the analysts are being given information and the rest of us don't know if it is factual or not.

The Chair: As I said, that's not the case.

This is an issue of reports that I don't think you're tabling. Am I correct?

Ms. Lois Brown: They don't have to be tabled.

The Chair: You don't want them to be considered for the report. The point is simply that in a very short period of time it was able to.... In any case because they are not in both official languages, these are not reports that will be considered for the report.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Chair, I have no idea what is going on. They're either tabled or they're not tabled. Journal articles are generally in both official languages.

•(1905)

The Chair: That's a very good point so—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Again I don't know what the member's doing. Without an analysis of these reports, how do we know what they are saying? Who has analysed them? Compared to the 120,000 reports she said there were last week, I'm afraid this is some sort of cover for her inaccuracy last week, and I don't know that we can be party to that. She is trying to pretend that almost every witness we've had has said there needs to be a national public inquiry, that there needs to be a national action plan, and that constitutes action. This stunt with a bunch of papers is not going to fool any of us.

The Chair: To answer your question, they are not being tabled; they are not being received, and they won't be considered. I'm quite happy to give them back to you because that's the case. I don't think this is an issue and I do not want to cut into the time we need in camera for drafting instructions.

I'm going to once again thank the witnesses for being here, and we're going to suspend for one minute to prepare for the next part of our meeting.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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