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Chair: The Honourable John McKay



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• (1700)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): I now call this meeting to order. This is the seventh meeting of the public safety committee, an emergency meeting called at the request of four members. There was a motion passed earlier today to study policing and the issue of systemic racism.

We're fortunate enough today to have with us Minister Bill Blair, a person frequently before this committee, along with Commissioner Lucki.

I understand, Mr. Blair, you have a 10-minute opening statement.

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): I do, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank you and the members of the committee for their kind invitation to speak before you. As we speak, we know that important discussions are taking place in communities and provinces right across Canada and around the world on the issue of systemic racism within the criminal justice system. This is a very important issue, and I am very grateful that SECU has decided to take on this particular issue at this most critical time. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to your discussion.

We have seen shocking video footage of George Floyd's death, and that footage has galvanized people to raise their voices in protests like never before. While the protest movement began south of the border, the demonstrations soon spread to Canada as well and have compelled us to take a deep and serious look at the issue of systemic racism and the impact it has on Canadians here at home.

As the Prime Minister has said, it is something that touches every corner and every person in our country. There's no doubt that indigenous people, black Canadians and other racialized people experience systemic racism and disparate outcomes within the criminal justice system. That system includes all of our police services, including the national police force, the RCMP, for which I am responsible in the government.

As you know, the RCMP commissioner, who I am very fortunate to have joining me here today, has acknowledged that systemic racism is part of every institution in Canada, the RCMP included. I commend her for that acknowledgement. I also support the important work she is doing to reform the RCMP, including her efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in decision-making, training and recruitment.

I also want to express my sincere and profound appreciation to the members of the RCMP, who serve Canadians with integrity, dedication and professionalism every day. The RCMP has a very strict and bias-free policing policy that guides the actions of its members in every interaction they have with the public. This policy is based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination, and therefore it is an important step forward. It's also important to acknowledge that when individuals do not live up to that bias-free policing policy there must be strict accountability.

I have, as many of you know, spent most of my life in public service. For almost four decades, I served my community as a police officer, including 10 years as the chief of police for Canada's most populous city. I can tell you from first-hand experience that the overwhelming majority of police officers in this country do conduct themselves in an exemplary manner and make every effort to minimize the use of force.

The goal of every police officer must always be to protect and maintain public safety and keep our citizens safe. The highest duty is the preservation of all life.

However, we would not be having this discussion today if everything were perfect, if this happened flawlessly on each and every occasion. Systemic racism is a reality in Canada, and when it occurs, I have no intention to and will not defend the indefensible. Let me be very clear: Discrimination on the basis of race or as a result of any other form of bias is unacceptable and abhorrent. It is not merely unacceptable and abhorrent; it is unlawful. It's contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and it's contrary to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

It cannot be tolerated within policing or in any other aspect of our justice system. We cannot shy away from uncomfortable truths. We must do more and we must do better. Our policing services must be committed to ensuring they are worthy of the trust all Canadians put in them to protect us. Maintaining that trust requires rigorous accountability when there appears to be suggestion of misconduct. For example, when an officer appears to have exceeded their authority, used excessive force or acted in a biased or discriminatory way, that must be quickly investigated. If an officer is found to have broken the law, they need to be held strictly to account.

There are processes and oversight mechanisms in place to ensure these things happen. These mechanisms are important, and I will continue to support and uphold their use. I will also continue to speak with racialized community members and indigenous leaders across the country about the concerning incidents that have taken place over the past several weeks, as well as about the newly released data on the RCMP's use of intervention options.

● (1705)

These discussions are critical to ensuring that our policing services serve everyone with the dignity and respect they deserve. It is more important than ever that we acknowledge the lived experience of those who have experienced racism or discrimination at the hands of the police, and work to put a stop to this injustice.

While we will continue to engage with individuals and groups, Canadians expect concrete action. That's why I will continue to pursue my mandate priorities in this area. One of those priorities is to ensure that all officials in Canada's law enforcement and security agencies have access to unconscious bias and cultural competency training. Another is to co-develop a legislative framework that recognizes first nations policing as an essential service and ensures that police services are culturally appropriate and reflect the communities they serve. I will have more to say about this, perhaps during the questions you may ask.

We have already committed to investing up to \$291 million in the first nations policing program, which provides federal funding for professional, dedicated and culturally responsive policing services in hundreds of first nations and Inuit communities. That federal funding commitment is ongoing. It includes an annual increase to keep up with inflation, providing greater financial stability for communities. Of course, that's on top of recent funding to improve police facilities in first nations and Inuit communities, such as improving detachments and communication systems. That means funding for 185 police agreements under the first nations policing program, policing a first nations and Inuit population of roughly 432,000 people. This includes support for more than 1,300 police officer positions in over 450 first nations and Inuit communities.

I want to be clear that the first nations policing program has been a program for more than three decades in this country. It needs to become an essential service. It is our intent to co-develop, with indigenous communities and indigenous leadership across Canada, a new legislative framework for the delivery of culturally appropriate, professional and effective police services. We will work with and respect the jurisdiction and authority of first nations across this country to ensure that they have the policing services they need and deserve. I look forward to working with interested communities to expand the number that are currently served by first nations policing.

I'd also like to note that the government continues the important work to advance the calls for justice in the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This includes the calls for justice related very specifically to policing. Following the release of the inquiry's interim report, for example, the public safety department funded reviews of police policies and practices to identify gaps and challenges in the delivery of culturally competent policing services. The government has

invested \$1.25 million over two years for four external organizations with expertise in law enforcement and policing to lead these reviews. The reports have also made recommendations and identified tools, resources and promising practices that may be helpful in fostering a more trusting relationship and building confidence in police services. Their final reports will be made available on the public safety department website in the very near future. One of those reports is currently available on our website. The findings and recommendations from this review will also be an important source of information for such key law enforcement partners as the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

We are also taking steps to increase transparency in police interactions through the adoption of body-worn cameras across the RCMP. Body-worn video creates greater accountability while also providing excellent evidence and a first-version view of what a police officer encounters, often in highly dynamic and potentially tense situations. The RCMP piloted body-worn cameras in a number of different environments. We will continue to build on this experience as well as examine the experience in other jurisdictions. We're currently working on the policy framework that will support their more widespread use, ensuring that this technology is also, and always remains, respectful of Canadians' privacy interests. We will move forward with implementing body-worn cameras as quickly as possible.

Mr. Chair, as I have made clear, there is no room for racism or discrimination of any kind in any of Canada's law enforcement agencies and institutions. We are working hard, and we will continue to work harder, to make our systems more just. We have taken some steps in the right direction, but let me acknowledge that there is much more work to do. That's why I will continue to work with Commissioner Lucki as she strives to make the RCMP a more just and accountable police service, where diverse voices and perspectives are valued and included, to create a better and safer environment in the communities they serve.

● (1710)

I thank you once again for your kind invitation.

I look forward to seeing the results of this committee's deliberations on this important topic, and I'd now be happy to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Blair.

Minister Blair will be here with us for the balance of the hour, and Commissioner Lucki will be here for the entire two hours.

As I understand it, Commissioner Lucki will be making a statement at the beginning of the second hour.

With that, we will go to our first round of questions of six minutes each.

Mr. Uppal, Madam Damoff, Madam Michaud and Mr. Angus, you each have six minutes.

Excuse me, Mr. Paul-Hus. You have the first six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before asking my questions, I would like to point out that the Conservative Party of Canada recognizes that systemic racism is a problem in a number of organizations in Canada.

Minister, your government has been in place for almost five years. Mr. Goodale was here before you, and you have been here since last year. Racism problems in Canada have continued.

I would like to know, with respect to the RCMP in particular, what steps you have taken in the past five years.

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you. Frankly the commissioner is here and will perhaps be better able to articulate than I am the specific steps she's taken.

I'd point out that Commissioner Lucki was specifically appointed and given a mandate and a task to deal with discrimination and workplace harassment and a number of very significant issues that had previously been identified within the RCMP, and she's now completed two years of that task.

She recently shared with me a report on the work that has been undertaken. There have been a number of significant steps in the training of police officers serving in diverse and indigenous communities, and there has been, I think, a very sincere effort made by the RCMP to recruit people with more diverse backgrounds, and so a number of significant steps have been taken.

I would also point out that through the development of a number of important bodies, not the least of which was the building out of the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission and empowering it, has also been important.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Minister. You want to refer the matter to Ms. Lucki, however, who will be here for two years.

But I am trying to get an answer from you, from your government. Did you take action from the start? Have you looked into this problem?

You said that, in Ms. Lucki's mandate, there were certain provisions regarding discrimination, but two weeks ago you did not have the same version of the facts.

In your opinion, since the RCMP is part of your portfolio as Minister of Public Safety, has systemic racism always been an issue?

• (1715)

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Let me explain it this way, Mr. Paul-Hus.

When we look at the criminal justice system, like many aspects of Canadian society, we see disparate outcomes. There are grossly disproportionate outcomes for indigenous communities, racialized communities and young black men in our society, who are, among all of those groups, disproportionately represented in police interactions, in our court system, and in our prisons.

We also see similar disparities manifesting themselves on issues of employment, in health outcomes, in education, and in access to mental health services and a wide variety of things. That highlights for us that there are significant issues of disparity that are systemic within a number of systems.

With respect to the criminal justice system, those disparities are obvious and we have been working on that fact. The justice minister has done a number of things, which we are bringing forward now to try to address some of those disparities in our prison system and our courts.

The Commissioner, through the RCMP, has also been undertaking to reduce those disparities and those disparate outcomes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Minister.

We are beginning a study on systemic racism today. I do not know if you are aware, but a 127-page report was tabled by your government in February 2018. It is called "Taking Action Against Systemic Racism and Religious Discrimination Including Islamophobia".

Recommendation 28 deals specifically with the RCMP:

Recommends that the Government of Canada work with the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs to incorporate racial and cultural sensitivity training as well as specific training for the handling of hate crime cases for officers and other members of law enforcement.

It has been more than two years since this recommendation was made in a report from your government. The 127-page report was all about systemic racism.

Are you aware of it?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: First of all, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, we have funded through Public Safety Canada and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police four distinct studies looking at systemic racism and policing in indigenous communities. Those reports, as I indicated, have been completed and will be made public.

I might just turn quickly to the commissioner to talk about training with respect to anti-discrimination measures.

Commissioner.

Commissioner Brenda Lucki (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you.

Since I've been in the chair, we've actually introduced, first and foremost, the "blanket exercise" to cadets at Depot. It gives them the history of indigenous cultures and provides the impacts of their actions so that when they go out in the field, they can know what the impacts are of their actions. We have an online cultural awareness course. We have introduced a cultural awareness and humility course. We have brought in trauma-informed approaches to dealing with victims.

As well, in the cadet training program, we have specifically brought in a missing persons module. Under the advice of indigenous leaders, the victim in the module is indigenous, so that cadets would not only deal with an actual operational file but also know the culture associated with a missing indigenous woman.

That's some of the training we've introduced.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Paul-Hus, I think you want a point of clarification on the report.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Yes, Mr. Chair.

I would like to clarify that the report I referred to is the report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, which was submitted to the government in February 2018.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Damoff, you have six minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you both for being here today.

I think we all need to recognize that while many of these events have come to light in the last few weeks, this issue has been ongoing certainly with indigenous people for hundreds of years, sadly. The systemic racism in policing against indigenous peoples and black Canadians and other racialized people in Canada is just unacceptable. I'm glad we're having these conversations right now.

To start, Minister, I have some questions around the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission. I'm going to give you a list of some things that I think could be looked at, and I'm wondering if you could maybe let me know if they're on your radar and would consider doing them. These things include bringing in legislation that would have timelines on the reports being released; an appeals process; the report going to an advisory committee or another body rather than the RCMP reporting to itself; meaningful engagement of indigenous and marginalized peoples in the review process; and simplifying the complaints process, because many people feel that they need to hire a lawyer in order to file a complaint, and a number of people do not have the socio-economic ability to hire a lawyer.

Minister, I'm wondering if you could let us know whether that would be on your radar right now.

• (1720)

Hon. Bill Blair: Let me begin by saying that I think our complaints system has to be accessible to all Canadians. It needs to be transparent. It needs to be fair and objective. It also needs to be quick. What we have seen and what I've heard very clearly is that Canadians across the country have raised a number of concerns regarding the timeliness of those complaint reviews.

I've had a little bit of experience in my own jurisdiction, under a different legislative framework, with a complaints process. As a police chief, I can tell you that a well-functioning and accessible complaints review system that the public can trust with regard to its objectivity, its fairness, and its accessibility, and through which individuals who engage in misconduct will be held to account, is of tremendously important assistance to a police chief to maintain public trust in those complaints systems. I also recall that when they were first being introduced across the country, there was some resistance to them amongst police leaders. What we found very quickly was that when those investigations were being conducted independent of police leadership and the public trusted the outcome, they produced much better results.

I'll also tell you that in my experience the overwhelming majority of complaints can be resolved quite informally and quite quickly, but they need to be recorded to ensure the integrity of a complaints review system.

I am in complete agreement with the importance of published and enforceable timelines so that Canadians can have a reasonable expectation of when a matter will be resolved, and I think they should be as open and transparent as possible. The commissioner and I have had a number of conversations about how that can be achieved.

I would also point out that we introduced legislation in the last Parliament, which, unfortunately, passed in the House but didn't get through the Senate. We've reintroduced it in the form of Bill C-3. That's for a complaints review system that builds upon the existing CRCC body and includes the responsibility for providing a complaints mechanism for our border services officers. I'm looking very carefully at that legislation to ensure it does have those appropriate and defined timelines. I think there are a number of things this committee could do.

Let me assure you that I'm very open to your observations and recommendations coming forward from the work of this committee on how we can make the complaints review system work better, not just for all Canadians but for police officers who are the subject of these complaints. Timely resolutions of those complaints are actually in their interests as well so that they can get on with rebuilding their relationship with the people they're supposed to be serving.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Minister.

Commissioner, I have a specific question for you. In February I held a screening of the movie *We Will Stand Up*, which was about what happened to Colten Boushie. His sister, his mom, and the director Tasha Hubbard were there. Obviously, there were a number of questions raised on racism in the legal system and within the RCMP.

There was a complaint filed. I know the review has been completed. You've had it since January 2020. On behalf of the family, I am just wondering when they can expect to see the results of that review.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I can't emphasize enough the importance of such a review. It's actually we who asked the CRCC to do the review, and not the reverse. It was only because we wanted to be as transparent as we could.

The CRCC has done extensive research and a great job on the review. We need to give the same consideration to the review. I'm planning to have that review done by the fall of this year.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

Just quickly, because I have only 30 seconds left, Minister, First Nations University is in Regina. I'm wondering if you would consider, rather than having just segments of training, having the cadets at Depot take an actual course in indigenous history at First Nations University.

• (1725)

Commr Brenda Lucki: I could probably speak to that because we've talked about having that partnership. Actually, I've created a lived indigenous advisory group with retired and current members of the RCMP. One of their suggestions was that maybe people could take the course before they come into the academy. That would be a great partnership. Your voice is well heard.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Damoff.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by saying that I am pleased that the committee has been able to come together so quickly to consider this most important issue. The Bloc Québécois was among the first to support this request, at the initiative of the NDP, to convene this committee and study the issue.

The issue of systemic racism within the RCMP and police brutality must definitely be addressed. Of course, we need to meet with the RCMP Commissioner and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and I thank them for being here today. Having said that, I think it is imperative that we hear from and listen to victims of police violence and discrimination from all walks of life. These are the men and women who have the most to teach us as parliamentarians so that we can come up with concrete, non-partisan solutions on this committee.

I am very much looking forward to this process, which begins today.

Minister, thank you again for being here. You talked about concrete solutions and a number of measures that have been put in place since the Liberals have been in power. You talked about the use of cameras when officers respond.

I would like to know, specifically, what measures have been put in place from the start.

I feel everyone here today agrees that systemic discrimination exists within the RCMP. The commissioner recognizes it, you recognize it, and so does the Prime Minister. Now is the time for specific solutions and actions.

What are they?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Let me speak to a couple of things that I think are very important.

One thing that was recognized prior to the recent incidents, and that was placed right in my mandate letter from the Prime Minister, was to co-produce with indigenous leadership in Canada a new legislative framework for indigenous policing. For 35 years indigenous policing, policing in indigenous communities and in the territories, has been done primarily as a program. That's the first nations policing program. It receives program funding every year, but it's never been acknowledged or recognized as an essential service. I think that's to its detriment.

It's also, I think, necessary and appropriate to work with indigenous leadership to acknowledge and recognize their jurisdiction in governance, in oversight and in accountability and for them to have the ability to define how they want their communities to be policed. There are a number of models with various levels of success across the country. I think we can learn and build upon that. We've been doing that work. I have reached out to regional chiefs of the AFN and to the national chief, but also grand chiefs from around the country. We're also looking at those communities that are currently being policed by their own first nations policing program to look at how we can improve, through a legislative framework, the delivery of those police services. It may include the RCMP. It may include other provincial police services, such as the Sûreté du Québec and the Ontario Provincial Police. Really, it's to acknowledge and recognize the indigenous leadership in their communities and how they want to be policed. We believe there's a need and an opportunity to move forward on that.

As well, we have been investing in creating a more diverse and inclusive RCMP. The commissioner can share with you as well the work that is being done. I will tell you from my own experience that having people in policing who have the lived experiences of the people they serve, who know what it's like to face discrimination and disparity, who know what it's like to be a new immigrant family, who have that lived experience and who bring it to the profession of policing makes policing more effective in those communities. As we work to create more diverse police services, I think that's an important step forward as well. So there is no one thing to do. There are very many things to do.

The last thing I will say in response to your inquiry is that it's not simply about the police; it's about the community in which the police work and the type of work we have them do. It's also necessary to invest in communities, in kids, and to support other aspects of those communities that reduce the need for police intervention. Perhaps no greater challenge exists for the police in this country than that of dealing with people in crisis. A great deal of work has been done and much more needs to be done in that regard.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

I understand that you feel that recognition of existing Indigenous police forces as essential services is on the drawing board. That's very good. Do you believe that funding them adequately and also funding Indigenous recruiting are viable solutions?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: I think funding is an important issue. I think there are a number of aspects. The most important thing is to put in an appropriate legislative framework that recognizes that an essential service creates a strong system of governance. In my experience, good policing requires good governance. We have to make sure that's in place. In addition to that, we have to make sure that the people who are hired and trained, overseen and held accountable for the delivery of those services, have to be adequately resourced to do so.

Getting that right means there must be important conversations. That work has begun, but there's a great deal more to do in working with indigenous leadership across the country and also provincial and territorial partners. All of us, all orders of government, have a responsibility here, but for the first time, and I think most importantly, we need to include indigenous leadership in that discussion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: As minister, how do you define systemic racism?

As a former chief of police, you may have witnessed racial profiling. In light of that, how do you define the systemic racism that might exist within the RCMP or police services?

[*English*]

The Chair: A very difficult question—very briefly, please.

Hon. Bill Blair: First of all, racial profiling is the misconduct of an individual, but systemic racism speaks to a far broader issue. It speaks to all of the aspects of the system—the criminal justice system, for example. It begins in communities with police interventions, activities in the courts and within our prison system, and even through the parole system. It's a very broad thing.

I define systemic racism as deficiencies in a system that give rise to different outcomes for different racial groups. When we see, for example, indigenous people grossly overrepresented in our prison system, in our courts and in police interactions, or young black men or any other racialized group, that is strong evidence, first of all, of systemic racism.

The other evidence that I think cannot be ignored and must be given full consideration is the lived experience of Canadians of different racial backgrounds, religious and racial minorities or indigenous people. We have to acknowledge the truth of their lived experience. If they've experienced racism within the entire criminal justice system, that compels us to act.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Michaud. We'll have to leave it there.

Mr. Angus, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister Blair, and thank you, Commissioner Lucki.

It's an honour to be here. I'll say two things at the outset.

Mr. Blair, you are, like me, a talker, so I'll have to ask you to keep your answers a little shorter. I have only six minutes here, and I don't want to be rude.

Second, I want to acknowledge the late Wayne Russett of the RCMP, with whom I had the honour of negotiating some very tense standoffs when I worked with the indigenous communities. Wayne understood policing as a social engagement about de-escalation and about building trust. We are here to ensure that all officers in all departments understand that the role of the police officer, as someone who can actually take on a very difficult and tense situation and de-escalate it, is vital.

With that in mind, I was interested in your comment that systemic racism is deficiencies in the system that bring different outcomes to different people. To me, the deficiency in the system is that 4.9% of Canadians are indigenous, and yet they represent nearly 40% of fatalities in the RCMP. The different outcome is like life and death. These numbers are staggering.

Minister, you talked about young black men being disproportionately involved in the system. When you were chief of police, carding was one of your very strong tools. You were very strong about it in the city of Toronto, and it was heavily used. Given what you know now, as my colleague Matthew Green has said, would you consider apologizing to say that it was a mistake using those tactics? What do you say about the use of carding that happened on your watch?

Hon. Bill Blair: I would clarify for you and Mr. Green what the policy was in Toronto. We worked very hard on reducing gun violence in the city. I've worked in racialized communities most of my adult life. I know the importance of treating everyone with respect and with dignity and within the law. I strongly advocated for working within those communities and never supported the indiscriminate or arbitrary stopping of individuals that was based on anything but evidence and the law. Those were the rules, and we upheld those rules. I think the disparate outcomes were something that we were aware of. I can cite countless examples of working within those racialized communities and training programs for the police to reduce it.

Mr. Angus, I said then and I say now that racial profiling and any action of the police that is based on bias is not only unacceptable and abhorrent; it's contrary to law. It's contrary to the Canadian Human Rights Act in section 15 and it's contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is the highest law in the country—

• (1735)

Mr. Charlie Angus: That was what was pointed out about carding—the arbitrary stopping of young black men.

Again, we can look at the numbers and at what they tell us: 8.8% of Toronto's population is black, yet they made up 30% of physical confrontations with police that resulted in serious injuries; and 60% of deadly encounters and 70% of fatal police shootings were black, young black men mostly, in the city of Toronto. These are very serious issues, so I'm glad to hear that from you.

I want to switch gears a little bit. We understand that the government is not moving forward yet on the murdered and missing indigenous women and girls because of COVID, but COVID hasn't stopped the domestic violence and the horrific mistreatment of indigenous women. I refer you to what's going on in Nunavut, where I believe the complaints commission has over 30 cases of women being treated in horrific conditions. It's actually hard to read it out: strip searches, humiliating treatment, tying women naked to chairs. That wouldn't happen to white women, anywhere else, but in Nunavut this seems to be a pattern. And yet we've had no investigation of it.

In light of the promises that were made on the murdered and missing, how is it that we can see such abusive treatment of women who are suffering sexual assault in Nunavut?

Hon. Bill Blair: Those things shouldn't happen to any woman in Canada. There needs to be investigations and a clear line of accountability. I will certainly allow the commissioner to speak on behalf of her service, but I also believe that this is unacceptable to her and to the leadership of the RCMP.

Mr. Charlie Angus: We'll follow up in the next round.

I'm very pleased to see you talking about the disparity faced by indigenous police in what is being treated as a program. In the communities we represent in Treaty No. 9 with the Nishnawbe Aski Police, who do incredible work, we've had a hell of a time getting them radios, getting backup. One officer told me, "I've slept in places you wouldn't let a dog sleep in." Their underfunding has put their ability to serve people at risk.

When I see the struggle that we have in Nishnawbe Aski territory to get good policing, and then I see, for example, the RCMP buying two armoured vehicles at a time when we're talking about de-escalating and demilitarizing, I have to ask, what kind of priority is that? We're buying old gear from Iraq, but the RCMP can afford that? We can't get backup radios to ensure police protection in isolated communities such as Kingfisher Lake or Pikangikum.

Hon. Bill Blair: Your question, I think, highlights a flaw in the existing system, where those indigenous police services in Ontario that you cite are funded on a funding model where the federal government pays 52% of the salary and costs of policing, and the province pays 48%. That model of program funding has created, I think, very serious deficiencies in those police services.

By the way, I know the men and women who serve in those services, and their leadership too. They're really great people, and they're doing their very best under very difficult and challenging circumstances. It's one of the things that motivates my government to create that new legislative framework to serve those communities better and to give them the type of appropriately resourced policing services they deserve and need.

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there.

Mr. Morrison, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to start off with a brief comment. As a former member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for over 30 years, I am fortunate to have worked across Canada and internationally. I've worked with thousands of regular members, civilian members and public service support staff, as well as municipal and provincial police agencies.

The RCMP is a professional organization with outstanding employees. I am proud of my service, and I am confident in RCMP policing in Canada. I want to recognize the members of the RCMP who live in our communities. Their children grow up in our communities. They coach high school sports and volunteer for many events. I thank them for their service to Canadians, especially in tough times.

Right now, though, their morale is low. The members are looking for some leadership from senior management, and they're not getting that support. We're here to discuss racism in all departments of the federal government, specifically today with the RCMP, and we are here to discuss senior management recognizing current issues and being accountable to take corrective action.

I want to thank Minister Blair and Commissioner Lucki for being here today.

Minister, the government has admitted there is systemic racism in every department of the federal government, including in the RCMP. I know that your mandate letter does not identify the priority of working to engage your departments with instructions to eliminate racism, although diversity was in the commissioner's mandate letter.

Mr. Minister, can you explain why the commanding officer's cultural diversity advisory committee in British Columbia was dissolved?

• (1740)

Hon. Bill Blair: I don't have the answer to that question, because I'm not familiar with it.

I could, perhaps, turn to the commissioner, if you want that question answered now.

Commr Brenda Lucki: This is news to me, but it possibly could be because when we brought in gender committees, many of the people on the diversity committee and the gender and harassment committee.... There was a meld of those. We created the gender and harassment committees, which include diversity. They may have re-branded it.

Mr. Rob Morrison: That is a bit disappointing.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I will follow up.

Mr. Rob Morrison: I was fortunate to be the chair of the commanding officer's cultural diversity advisory committee a few years ago.

The importance of that committee in helping to bridge the gap between law enforcement and our diverse communities, listening to what the communities had to say, understanding their issues and concerns.... That committee reported directly to the commanding officers, who in return reported to the commissioner. There was some accountability there.

I would strongly recommend that the public safety minister reintroduce the commanding officer's cultural diversity advisory committees across Canada. This will ensure that the commanding officers who report to the commissioner will be accountable for taking action and will not just be paying lip service. I also recommend introducing a similar committee across the public safety portfolio and ensuring performance agreements of your senior management are reflective of this accountability.

Mr. Minister, can we count on your support?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm very interested in your proposal. From my own experience, I actually had 17 different community advisory committees in my small police service, and of course the challenge for the RCMP would be much larger, being a national service.

I recognize the value of meeting with and working with diverse communities and engaging with them on a number of different levels. I also did it at the command level because I found great value in that. It improved the quality of our interactions.

I am very open to that. I will tell you that we have created a number of different engagement mechanisms and structures with vari-

ous diverse communities on a number of important issues that the public safety portfolio is undertaking, but I'm happy to look at the model you recommended and discuss it with you further rather than take up your time this afternoon.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Okay, thank you.

Minister, when your government appointed Commissioner Lucki, did you make addressing and eliminating systemic racism within the RCMP part of the mandate? If so, what specific issues did the government instruct the commissioner to act on?

Hon. Bill Blair: The commissioner's mandate is quite broad and deals with a number of issues of diversity and inclusion, but it did not speak specifically, in my recollection, to the issue of systemic racism more broadly. I think that acknowledgement is an important place that we as a country have come to today in acknowledgement of systemic racism in so many aspects of our society. It certainly goes well beyond the criminal justice system. I think when we look at all the challenging things that police, for example, deal with or our Corrections deal with, it does compel us to look at systemic disparities in other aspects of our society.

I think it is an important issue and one that we have been very frank with Canadians in acknowledging its existence as the commissioner has. Clearly, as this committee recognizes, there's work to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrison. I know that was a short five minutes, but five minutes it was.

Madame Khera, you have five minutes please.

• (1745)

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister and Commissioner, for being here.

Minister, I know you've been very clear on this even in your remarks and some of the questions that you've answered, but I want to get it on record for my constituents, especially with your extensive experience in policing and now as the Minister of Public Safety.

Do you believe systemic racism exists in policing, especially in the RCMP?

Hon. Bill Blair: If I may be very clear, I think it's an issue in Canadian society and I think it's an issue in policing. The RCMP is the national police service and also delivers contract policing in many provinces across the country. It is included in that, but I'm not pointing them out exclusively. I think these are challenges within many aspects of our society.

The police perform a very difficult and challenging role on behalf of all Canadians. I think that systemic racism as it impacts the delivery of policing service is perhaps one of our greatest challenges because we are dealing with people often at their most vulnerable and we have seen the disparate outcomes and listened to the lived experience of so many diverse Canadians.

Ms. Kamal Khera: In your view, Minister, where are the biggest gaps in addressing systemic racism in the RCMP?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, with respect to policing, I think it's essential, first of all that—and I mentioned this earlier—governance is very important. Good quality governance is where you enable a community to engage in oversight and, through policy, have input on the types of policing services that they want to see delivered. Greater systems of oversight, accountability and transparency are also critically important.

Some of the most recent issues highlight the need for continuous improvement in training, not just in cultural competency and the communities that the police officers serve, but also in the way in which they do their job.

There's a report I would commend to you on police officers and how we deal with people in crisis in our society. It's an incredibly important issue, and it affects policing in every community in every part of the country.

There are a number of significant gaps that need to be addressed. Ultimately, our police services, as I've acknowledged in my opening remarks, are overwhelmingly good people doing their very best to do an incredibly difficult job. They need more help, and I think we need to be very clear on the type of policing we want and expect in Canada.

Ms. Kamal Khera: Thanks, Minister.

I want to shift gears in terms of some of the training. Can you provide us with an overview of what training or education a recruit would undergo to learn about the lived experiences of racialized Canadians? Is this training mandatory? Can you walk us through the whole training experience?

Also what training is available for those who are already established RCMP officers?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm going to begin by saying I think it's important to make sure you're recruiting people who come from diverse communities, who have the lived experience of the people they're going to serve and protect. I think that's critically important, and so an inclusive recruitment and hiring policy is very important. It goes beyond that, of course, because you want that diversity reflected throughout that entire organization; I think that's a very good place to start. At the very least, we want to make sure that we're recruiting police officers who are open and willing to learn about other cultures and other peoples, because I think that commitment to continuous learning is also very important.

The commissioner was the commanding officer at Depot and knows perhaps more than anyone I can mention would know what is done there, so I'll turn to her.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I did mention, first of all, the blanket exercise that we brought in; when I was the commanding officer, I

attended the first one with the cadets. An elder comes in and leads that session. We have a specific room that was there before, an indigenous reflection room for members, as well as prayer rooms at Depot and various other spots for reflection of all cultures.

We have cultural awareness training; it's an extensive online training that is mandatory for every employee of the RCMP. We just introduced culture and humility, which is a new course.

When members go out to their divisions, each province has its own one-week indigenous perceptions course specific to the province. Obviously, a course in Nunavut would be much different from a course in Manitoba. They bring in people who have lived experience with the residential school or the sixties scoop or any of the lived experiences. Every module...when we talk about, for instance, domestic violence, we have somebody who has had a lived experience present that. In the LGBTQ module, we have people who have that lived experience. We always try to get people from the community in those modules, to reflect and understand the impact, so that when members go out and deal with those people they have a better understanding of the impact of their actions on the history of what that person has lived through. It's really important.

• (1750)

The Chair: We're going to have to unfortunately leave that answer there, Ms. Khera.

Mrs. Vecchio, five minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you, for coming today Minister Blair and Commissioner, it's wonderful to have you.

I am looking at some things that are recurring. There's currently a \$600-million class action lawsuit against the RCMP specifically regarding indigenous people in the north. Can you share a little bit about that and share with me how many other lawsuits there have been and whether they mostly have been settled out of court? Do you have some information on that so that we can look at that?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I don't have that information in front of me. That particular lawsuit is very new in the sense that I don't even believe it's been certified yet.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Minister Blair, are you familiar with the lawsuit?

Hon. Bill Blair: No, I'm not familiar with that one. Until it's certified...and quite frankly, we don't normally comment on something that's before the courts until it's resolved, but we track them very carefully of course. We don't wait until the outcome of those lawsuits to do our best to respond. For example, during the murdered and missing indigenous women inquiry, the RCMP implemented a number of different training initiatives while that inquiry was ongoing in an effort to respond quickly.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

Minister, we know you were the police chief for 10 years in Canada's largest city. During that time, what were some of the steps that you took to address racism and to eliminate systemic racism in the Toronto Police Service?

Hon. Bill Blair: On the very first day I was appointed police chief, I was asked whether racial profiling exists, and I acknowledged that it did. Apparently I was the first in the country to do that. I honestly believe that if you don't acknowledge its existence, how can you do anything about it?

We immediately undertook.... For example, I wanted to create a diverse police service—Toronto is the most diverse city in the world—and so I put in a policy that half of all the people we would recruit into the police service would be from diverse communities and/or female. We never once went below 54%. We initiated extensive anti-bias training programs, diversity training programs in a number of areas. We looked at all the positions in our organization that led to promotion and people ascending to leadership positions in the organization, and we made sure that diverse people within our organization had full access to those training opportunities, those experiences that would enable them to be successful in our promotion systems. When I left the Toronto Police Service after 10 years, half of my command was diverse and half of my command was female.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Fantastic.

Would you say, with the diversity you had on the Toronto Police Service, that you found racism was eliminated or reduced? What do you think your actual results were during your time?

Hon. Bill Blair: Karen, I would acknowledge, first of all, that we recruit from the human race, and racism and bias are human failings. I would not presume to tell you that we eliminated it, but we created a very strong culture within the Toronto Police Service of respect for the diversity of our city and of inclusiveness.

We created very strong examples of leadership within the community. We worked tirelessly in diverse communities. We did a lot of outreach, as I mentioned earlier. We had consultative committees with all of the diverse communities, which helped us with recruiting, helped us with our policies and helped us with our training.

I think we made significant progress. I would never suggest to you the job was done.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Have you seen that it has gotten worse? If we compare 2020 to 2010, what are some of the changes you have seen in one of the greatest and most diverse cities in Canada, and around the world?

Hon. Bill Blair: We have seen the emergence of a far more diverse leadership within policing, not just in Toronto, by the way,

but across the country. I think that's reflected in many ways. We've seen a significantly increased and changing role of women in policing, for example, but also of people who have lived in diverse communities.

In my experience, when I put people around my command table who knew what it was like to be an immigrant, who knew what it was like to live with disparity, and I asked them for their feedback on important decisions that we had to make about policing the city of Toronto, the benefit of that diversity of perspectives enabled us to provide much better services to people of diversity.

• (1755)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: You mentioned as well that you had 17 different individuals who you worked with as part of your policy-building.

Hon. Bill Blair: It wasn't individuals. It was representatives of different community and cultural groups within the city.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Iacono, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, your mandate letter emphasizes that one of your priorities is to ensure that all law enforcement and security agency employees have access to training on unconscious bias and cultural competency.

Can you tell us the status of the unconscious bias training?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: There are programs that are available in policing and within the public service, but I will acknowledge to you that there is a great deal more work to be done to make sure that training is accessible to all of our employees.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Minister, systemic racism needs to be addressed, not only in the RCMP itself, but also in its operations and in our communities across the country. In this system, an enormous gap exists between the actors on each side. It seems that no communication or mediation is able to fill the gap. At this point we need bold changes.

How do you plan to reboot the system in a parallel way at the RCMP level, and also at the community level, to fill in the gaps and thus have a more harmonious environment?

Hon. Bill Blair: First of all, I try not to be too discouraged, because I've seen some extraordinary examples right across this country. I've been speaking to indigenous leaders and people in communities right across the country who have shared with me extraordinary stories of the relationship between them and the police officers who serve them.

I was speaking to the national chief the other day. We were talking about policing, and he shared with me that three of his brothers serve in the RCMP. I was speaking to one of the regional chiefs in the Northwest Territories who talked to me about special constables, community safety officers and the extraordinary relationship that was built between the RCMP and people in his community. There are some extraordinary examples in the Yukon and in places right across Canada.

I think we need to build upon that extraordinary work and the relationships that have been built. That's not to suggest for a moment that the situation does not require a lot of work or that it's perfect, but there's a great deal to be encouraged by, because we have good people working in good communities and they are doing some extraordinary work. We need to make sure that they're properly supported, and that's not just supported by money, people, resources and equipment. We're talking about having strong governance structures and strong systems of accountability and transparency.

There's nothing more important in the relationship between the police and the people they serve than trust. To be trusted, one has to be trustworthy, and trustworthiness has a number of really important elements, which include accountability and transparency. People need to demonstrate their commitment to service and to protecting the people they're sworn to serve.

There are some great examples of that, and there are some places where we need to improve.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Do we have a plan of action to take these examples that you are referring to and to reprogram the system and influence better interaction between the RCMP and the communities? You mentioned earlier that programs of diversion and inclusion already exist. Are they appropriate? Are they up to date? Do they take into consideration what Canada is today with its different cultural communities, requests and expectations?

Hon. Bill Blair: I can say absolutely and unequivocally that some of them are great, but they're not good enough; there's more work to be done. We all acknowledge that there's a great deal more to be done.

We're working very hard on some things within my ministry. I've already reached out to indigenous leadership across the country. We've had a number of very important and, I think, positive discussions about creating a new legislative framework for indigenous policing across the country to make it an essential service. It's not something we're going to develop just here in Ottawa and impose upon those communities across the country. It's going to be co-produced.

We're working with indigenous leadership, and we are also having important conversations with those communities that have had some very strong histories and examples of good policing in their communities, to build on those examples but also to make sure that we address a history that is not as positive in other places so that we earn back the trust that is necessary to police those communities.

• (1800)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Normally I would end it here, but there are still two and a half minutes for the Bloc and two and a half minutes for the NDP, which

I would ask that they pursue. Then we'll suspend for one minute in order to allow the minister to leave and then we'll continue.

With that, go ahead Madam Michaud.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There are a number of reasons why some communities are discriminated against.

On the website of the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP, we can see that the complaint form is available in 16 languages. The language barrier is certainly a form of discrimination. Only 13 of the 16 languages are Indigenous languages. Why is the complaint form not available in all Indigenous languages? How can an Indigenous person who is a victim of abuse or discrimination file a complaint if they cannot even access the form in their own language?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: We spoke earlier about the importance of the accessibility of a complaints resolution system. Every Canadian has to have the ability to bring forward a complaint without the help of a lawyer and in a language that makes it accessible to them.

The RCMP, I know, has worked hard, as has the CRCC, to make that as accessible as possible. You mentioned translating it into a number of indigenous languages. There's more work to be done, and that will be part of the work we have in front of us.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Minister, the Annual Report 2018-2019 of the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP reported a 13% increase over the previous year. The majority of complaints dealt with improper arrest, neglect of duty, improper attitude, mishandling of property, or improper use of force.

You speak of measures that have been in place for a number of years, such as cultural diversity training. That being the case, how do you explain the increase in the number of complaints?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: It's always possible to look at the number of complaints and an increase in the number of complaints as indicative of a growing problem. It also, I hope, indicates a growing awareness and trust in the complaints resolution system.

A greater concern to me would be no complaints at all, because we know that interactions between the police and the public do not always go perfectly and that people may be quite unsatisfied with the service or the outcome. So, making sure that a complaint system is available and accessible to Canadians, and that it provides them with a timely resolution of their complaint is the right thing to do for the public and for the police officer.

Of course, I know the commissioner tracks very carefully when there is a pattern of increasing complaints of a certain nature and that it is quickly responded to and evaluated with respect to their training, their policies and their systems of accountability.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Michaud.

Mr. Angus and Mr. Blair, you have two and a half minutes for two talkers.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One concern, when we are talking about taking seriously the issue of systemic racism in Canada, is that the federal government has always had a policy of not collecting race-based data because it says we're not a racist state and everybody's the same.

We know, since we're having this meeting, that everybody's not treated the same. The incidence of violence against indigenous people is much higher and the incidence of targeting racialized and black communities is much higher. Would you make a simple recommendation to say that the RCMP needs to collect race-based data so we actually can start getting better pictures of how the force is being used?

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, sir. I will tell you that, again in my experience—about 30 years ago now—the police used race-based data inappropriately. It had the very negative effect of stigmatizing people, Canadians, and was therefore prohibited in Toronto for a number of years.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Just to jump in here—I have only a bit of time—how do we do it? How do we balance it so that what we're gathering is actually about accountability and not targeting?

Hon. Bill Blair: I think it's the collection and the availability of race-based data. We need that information so that we can make decisions on where we need to make investments in communities, investments in kids and changes in the criminal justice system.

That data is invaluable and necessary, but I always place a caution on it. We also need to be careful that it's not misused for a purpose that we do not intend. With regard to information, I very strongly support the collection of disaggregated race-based data to help inform the important decisions we have to make in order to support those communities and help those kids.

• (1805)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Commissioner.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, as the minister said, before when we took that data—it was to be bias-free—they said you couldn't collect that data. Now we're looking at it and saying that to be more effective and to bring on the change that's needed to combat the racism, we may have to look at starting to collect that data so that we can define the racial disparities, how they exist and how to address it. My commitment is to work with the Privacy Commissioner on that.

Mr. Charlie Angus: You will work with the Privacy Commissioner?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes. Absolutely.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: I want to thank the minister for his attendance here.

I will suspend the meeting for 30 seconds only, because I think the minister can exit the room without any assistance whatsoever.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We will resume this committee meeting.

As we can see on our monitors, there is a third person who is present virtually.

I want to thank you, Commissioner, for being here. With or without the permission of the committee, I'm going to run a little bit late, only because it took some time to do some transferring. I think it's important. Everybody has made a lot of effort to be here, and I know they want to direct a lot of questions to you.

With that, Commissioner, I would ask you to give your opening statement and introduce the people who are with you.

Thank you.

• (1810)

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With me is Dennis Daley, assistant commissioner with contract and indigenous policing. On the screen is Gail Johnson, our fairly new—eight months, probably—chief human resources officer.

Good evening.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the invitation to speak on these critical issues.

[*English*]

I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking on unceded Algonquin territory.

The last several weeks have been extremely difficult for Canadians, for indigenous, black and racialized communities, as well as for police. This has sparked an important conversation across the country. I have been listening. The calls for action have been heard. My opening remarks will outline RCMP modernization efforts in the wake of these recent events.

When I was appointed commissioner two years ago, I said, “I plan to challenge assumptions, seek explanations and better understand the reasons how we operate. This means that no stone will be left unturned.”

[*Translation*]

The past two weeks have given the RCMP an unprecedented opportunity to advance change and step up our actions.

[*English*]

We have strengthened our resolve to advance change and step up our actions to serve, protect and reflect all communities; achieve reconciliation with indigenous and racialized communities; and bolster relationships built on recognition of rights, respect, mutual trust, co-operation and partnership. We are not a perfect organization but we will continue to learn, grow and evolve.

As I expressed directly to my members in a video message several days ago, it's painful to hear; nevertheless, a constructive dialogue is important if we are to strengthen the trust of Canadians. There's also a deep pain in Canada's indigenous, black and racialized communities, including those in the RCMP, who have suffered the inequities of systemic racism. I would like to affirm here, before Parliament, that I am so very proud to lead the 30,000 employees of the RCMP who continue to have my deep appreciation for what they do every single day, serving Canadians with dedication and professionalism. They do this out of an intense sense of fairness and a desire to protect the vulnerable in every corner of Canada and around the world.

Let me say that we are committed to seeking out and eliminating all forms of racism and discrimination in our organization. I have listened to RCMP employees and their families who are demoralized by the anti-police narrative that is painting everyone unfairly with the same brush, but acknowledging that systemic racism is present in the force does not equate to employees being racist. It is about how an organization creates and maintains racial inequality, often caused by sometimes subtle and unintentional biases in police policies, practices and process that either privilege or disadvantage different groups of people.

I have heard from and reached out to many people, listening, learning and reflecting on how these discussions translate into strengthening my organization. I have spoken with indigenous leaders, including Senator Murray Sinclair, who spoke to me about taking a closer look at our recruitment and our training. I also spoke to MMIWG Commissioner Marion Buller, who spoke to me about our ongoing commitment to work with and learn from communities, which will help us make real progress. I listened to indigenous employees, both current and retired, who reminded me of the importance of our roots in community policing and the importance of our connection to the people we serve.

[Translation]

Now the RCMP can strengthen this trust and counter systemic racism.

I want to talk to you about what we have done to date.

[English]

I was given a clear mandate to modernize and transform our culture. In just over two years, we have made significant progress. I have received input both internally and externally from my national council of diversity and inclusion, my indigenous advisory committee and community leaders, particularly those in black and indigenous communities. I have established a new indigenous lived experience advisory group, comprised of current and former indigenous RCMP employees.

• (1815)

[Translation]

We are putting a diversity and inclusion lens on our policies, programs, recruiting, training and practices to better understand some of the unintended barriers that exist, and to work to correct them.

[English]

Character-based leadership is being integrated into our recruitment, our training and our promotion process. We have added more learning about indigenous history for cadets and incorporated indigenous traditions into our RCMP traditions in a number of ways, including supporting indigenous employees' wearing of traditional items like the eagle feather and the Métis sash when donning our red serge. We have updated national programs, including strengthened cultural awareness training and training in unconscious bias and trauma-informed approaches. We have enhanced the RCMP's participation in restorative justice initiatives across the country.

In terms of doing more to address systemic racism going forward, we are reprioritizing and enhancing our action plan to make changes at all levels, from recruitment to training to reporting and accountability. We really need to double down on hiring a more diverse membership, as we would like greater diversity to reflect the communities we serve. We are working to ensure that no unintended bias exists in our recruiting or training that could inadvertently and inappropriately impact some segments of our society.

[Translation]

We are revisiting our relocation practices and looking at place-based recruitment so that officers remain in the communities where ties and roots are already established.

[English]

We also have continued examining our policing models and are really looking at solutions with the communities we serve that are community focused and community driven. The RCMP was built on community policing, and we respond to an average of two million calls for service each year. Fewer than 1% of those calls involve use of force. Over 99% of incidents are resolved with our presence, our communication and de-escalation, and not the use of force. For those few incidents where force is used, our training and our protocols provide clear direction on using a minimum amount of force. We rely on de-escalation and crisis intervention when necessary.

When it comes to holding employees to account, we have extensive operational policies designed to ensure transparency, accountability and openness. Policing is a profession that has a broad range of accountability mechanisms. There is oversight in the courts, as well as independent inquiries, commissions, inquests and reviews. We are completely dedicated to making this great organization better than what it was when we started.

[Translation]

My team and myself are determined to get this work done, and we are making progress, but modernization is an ongoing process.

[English]

Our goal for the RCMP is to be the most respected and the most trusted police service in the world, grounded in solid relationships with all Canadians, and particularly with our indigenous, black and racialized communities. We need to broaden the space for these difficult discussions and build on the ones already under way. It is an opportunity for real change and leadership, and we are committed to doing just that.

[Translation]

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

[English]

I look forward to your discussions and dialogue.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner Lucki.

Mr. Uppal, you have six minutes, please.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Thank you, Commissioner, for being here for this important study.

As Canadians, we around the table would all agree that there's so much we have to be proud of in being Canadian. We are proud of our history and proud of what Canada is. Of course, there are issues we need to work on in Canada. Racism is one of them, both racist incidents and systemic racism. We've all acknowledged that they exist in our public institutions and in private institutions as well.

This is a very important conversation. It's an important opportunity to study this issue and for legislators to take a look at how we can move forward. As parents, this conversation about racism is one that my wife and I have had with our kids. Racism is not something we can completely shield them from, so it's something we feel they need to understand and to maybe prepare them for as they grow older. Of course, the conversations change, but they're important. The work we're doing today is working to make the system better going into the future, and better for them.

To start off, I just want to ask you about the makeup of the RCMP, the demographics of it. Do you have any statistics? In terms of members with cultural, indigenous or ethnic backgrounds, do you know what the percentages are, overall, for the RCMP? Is that data that you keep? If you do—which would be important for recruitment—where was that five years ago compared to where are you now?

● (1820)

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, we do keep those statistics. I must put a caveat, though, that the statistics are based on self-identification. If somebody doesn't self-identify, then we don't have those statistics.

Right now in the RCMP, when we talk about the sworn police officers, 78% are male and 21% are female. There are 11.5% who are a visible minority, 7.5% who are aboriginal and 1.6% who are people with disabilities. I don't have the data as of five years ago, but what I do know from our charts is that both females and visible minorities are on the rise, as well as indigenous members. In the last year or so the number of indigenous members has plateaued, but the other two are still rising.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Thank you. That's the makeup of all of it. What does that look like in the management ranks?

Commr Brenda Lucki: During my time as commissioner, that has been a huge priority for me. We have 15 commanding officers of each province or division. When I arrived, for example, there was one female commanding officer, and now seven of the 15 are female. In our senior executive committee...because when I talk about diversity, I talk also about the category of employee for us because that brings diverse ideas and thoughts. At one point all senior executives were police officers. Now we have Gail Johnson, who is our chief human resources officer. Our chief informatics officer is female. Our new CFO, who started on Monday, is female. We have me, the commissioner, of course. Those three people I mentioned are all civilian employees. For the first time ever, we have a chief administrative officer who is also civilian. There are actually more civilians on our senior executive than police officers.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Do you have statistics on the number of police interactions in Canada, interactions versus those that result in complaints?

I'm just trying to get a sense of the scope of that problem. I know you mentioned use of force. This wouldn't be just specifically use of force but overall complaints.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Actually, it was surprising when I heard the statistics for complaints. We get, on average, about 2,250 to 2,300 complaints a year, and it actually has gone down. In 2018-19, it was 2,317 and in 2019-20 is 2,286.

Just to give you some context, when you make the complaint, the CRCC asks the RCMP to investigate in the first instance, and in 75% of those complaints the complainant is satisfied with the disposition that has come about in that complaint. At the very end of the disposition, it says, "If you are not satisfied...."

Somebody mentioned an appeal process in that complaint system. The CRCC is actually the appeal process because 25% of those go to the CRCC, and of those 25%, 75% of the time CRCC is happy with our disposition. It's really 25% of 25% that is the part that is not in agreement, but we do agree with 75% of the recommendations from the CRCC.

● (1825)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Uppal.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Those were a lot of numbers. Sorry.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Anandasangaree, my second fellow Scarborough caucus member.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start by acknowledging that we're all gathered here on the unceded lands of the Algonquin people.

Madam Commissioner, I was one of the many people who were very excited upon your appointment two years ago. The last several weeks have been very difficult, and very difficult for racialized people. There are many names, starting with George Floyd, and there are many others in Canada I can name as I outline the tragedies that have taken place at the hands of the police. What is very disappointing is your lack of clarity in acknowledging that systemic racism existed when the question was posed to you, and equally troubling was the failure of your deputy commissioner in Alberta.

I think what's difficult for me today is to understand whether the RCMP, and you and your office and your team, understand the urgency that is before us. This is a moment in history where the world is moving. I have seen people demonstrating on the streets who've never gone out before, who were complacent and who thought that, even if they were affected by racism, they would not speak because they were afraid of the repercussions. I've seen so many people, especially young people, who have been on the streets demanding action.

How do you respond to this urgency? It's not the recruitment and training. Those are important, but those will take time. How do you respond in order to gain the confidence of the public, particularly racialized people, notably indigenous and black people?

Commr Brenda Lucki: If this moment in time isn't a wake-up call, then shame on everybody, including the RCMP. When I said I struggled with the definition of systemic racism, it wasn't a disacknowledgement of it. When we look at the systems and processes in place.... When I became commissioner, the first thing I did was to bring in a gender-based analysis plus expert. That person sits at our senior executive table for every decision we make so that they can put that lens on every decision we make. It's made a huge difference in our decision-making.

I have widened my lens and changed my perspective in the sense that there is systemic racism in the RCMP. I had a long talk with Deputy Commissioner Zablocki, who, again, didn't want to paint all the members with the same brush.

When we had a discussion, I have to say, I asked Gail Johnson, who is on the screen, to share her personal lived experience with our senior executive group and our senior management team across the country so we could get a better understanding so that we would not have just our own perspective on something that we may or may not have lived.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: There's a lot of talk about reimagining policing. Some are calling for defunding it. Many are suggesting that, given number of incidents involving people with mental health challenges.

How do you reimagine police? How do you reimagine the RCMP to be a service of the future, a service that can actually serve all Canadians?

Commr Brenda Lucki: When I think of defunding, I think more about funding all social services. Having policed in the north myself, I know that in many communities there is no addictions counselling. There are no mental health crisis centres. In times of crisis, we are the first response. Even if there were those services in those areas, when a person is in crisis, at three o'clock in the morning

when somebody is wielding a knife and is suffering from a mental health crisis, that is not the time to bring in mental health practitioners. It's time for the RCMP to go in and to get that person calm, get them to a place of safety and get them the help they need. Often it's not in the community. We actually will physically escort them on the plane and bring them to a place where they can get the help they need.

It's not about defunding; it's about funding everything that goes along with it. I think we can work better with our mental health practitioners. We had a model, for example, in Grande Prairie, Alberta. I'm familiar with it because I was in charge of that district. A mental health practitioner was on the mental health de-escalation team in Grande Prairie. They would attend the call and stay in a safe location, but as soon as it was safe, that person was in.

We have to look at those various different models and not be stuck in a traditional response mode.

• (1830)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Madam Commissioner. I don't think I have time for another question.

One thing I do want to get on the record is the issue of mental health. We have seen a number of fatalities that have been the tragic results of police either doing wellness checks or responding to something else involving someone with a mental health challenge on the other side, in which things have not gone well. We definitely do need to reimagine policing, not just in the sense of looking at funding other programs but also to change policing the way it currently exists.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Anandasangaree.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Madam Commissioner.

You said the following in a statement on June 12: "Throughout our history and today, we have not always treated racialized and Indigenous people fairly."

You also acknowledged that systemic racism exists within the RCMP. However, the first time you were asked the question, you were reluctant to say so. What made you change your mind afterwards?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: I don't call it changing my mind. When I talked about systemic racism I kept thinking of all the things...I wasn't looking at it from a historical point of view, I was looking at it through today's lens and thinking about all the things that we have done to eliminate it, and the work still to be done.

I looked at it from a different perspective in the sense that there are things in our recruiting process, in our hiring processes, that exclude certain people, and I can give examples.

It wasn't that I was devoting it, I was struggling with the definition at that point, because I had heard many different ones. When I put it to policing, I was looking at it through a different lens from what I had seen, but I would never say that there is no systemic racism, and for that I apologize.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Ms. Lucki.

You also said that federal police officers who refuse to comply with the core values of the RCMP should be held to account for it. Are you aware of any officers under your authority who have not complied with those values? The way it is worded suggests that you would finally wake up and recognize some behaviours.

What will the officers be held to account for, if ever you discover improper behaviour?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: Any RCMP member who does not live up to our core values will be held to account, point, final, no question. We have obviously a range of disciplinary measures from operational guidance to dismissal.

We need to look at hiring the right person, training them properly to be empathetic and to be compassionate, to live to our core values. We are introducing character-based recruitment so that we can ensure that we get the right person. It's not just about that because you might get the right person, but if your training is all for naught, that's not going to help. It has to be from the time they start to the time they retire.

We've brought in foundations of leadership, a pilot project that was brought in at the end of last year and the beginning of this year. There are several modules, one includes unconscious bias racism, conflict management and having difficult conversations, because we can have great employees but if they are not properly supervised or properly led, that's yet another issue.

It has to be from all angles and it's something that we need to work on and get better at, but we are definitely putting the GBA+ lens on our recruitment. We did a full GBA+ on our recruitment and we are now starting a GBA+ on our entire cadet training program.

• (1835)

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: The Prime Minister recently stated that the changes you have already begun to implement within the RCMP will go a long way in addressing and reducing systemic racism across Canada.

What changes have already been implemented? What changes will be implemented in the coming weeks and months to counter this scourge?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: When I got into the chair as commissioner, I introduced Vision 150, and that's our road to the 150th anniversary in 2023.

The focus was based on people within the RCMP and community. The premise was that if we focus on our people, we'll have better operations and a safer Canada. Under that we put four pillars: our people, our culture, our stewardship and our policing services. There are initiatives under each one of those pillars.

All of it is so that we can make our culture more tolerant, more inclusive and more diverse, so that we can be reflective of the communities that we serve. They need training, they need to make sure that they... How do we get rid of their unconscious bias, or sometimes conscious bias, when they are policing? That's the most difficult part of policing because when you are policing groups of people, and with the same types of incidents, it's very easy to get an unconscious bias.

How do we get people to recognize that, acknowledge it and be more empathetic? Bringing in, for instance, the blanket exercise through the training academy is one such area. The culture and humility course is very powerful. Bringing in a trauma-informed approach to dealing with victims was part of our missing and murdered indigenous women and girls actions. We have quite a few actions underneath that so when we speak about... We established a national office of investigative standards and practices so that those investigations will be dealt with the same way regardless of what individual is the victim, or what individual is the criminal.

We need to get better at our restorative justice referrals so that we eliminate people getting into the justice system, especially as a youth...pre-charge restorative justice. We need to get better at the referrals.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we'll have to leave it there, Madam Michaud.

Mr. Angus, you have six minutes. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Commissioner.

This past weekend 400 people in my little town marched for Black Lives Matter. This is a transformative moment, and I have to be able to look at them and say that they can trust that their voice is being heard around the world and that change will happen.

For you, you need to be able to tell your officers that when we deal in a transparent manner with issues that are completely unacceptable, the morale of the force will be strong. It really comes to moving beyond good words to clear actions that we can point to.

I want to ask you just a few questions on that, because when an incident occurs, we need to know that the process in place can deal with it and that whatever the result of that is, we can hold it up and say that this was the investigation.

I did meet with the Colten Boushie family and I learned a lot. I learned about the trauma the mother suffered when she was basically treated like an accomplice when her son was dead, and that the evidence and the body of the boy were left out in the rain for 24 hours, which wrecked the case. There were RCMP members on a Facebook group saying Colten Boushie got what was coming to him.

These are the allegations that we saw that came out in court. The Civilian Review and Complaints Commission looked into it—you have the report—but when I spoke to indigenous advisers in F Division, they hadn't heard anything about what the RCMP thinks of it or what they're going to do about it. They say it's like dealing with a black hole, and that black hole is about the lack of trust.

When is that report going to be released?

• (1840)

Commr Brenda Lucki: They started that investigation in 2016, and we received the report at the end of January 2020. They put a lot of thought into that report and into that investigation, and it is very important that we do the same when we look at those recommendations.

I personally have read the report already. Usually I wait until our analysts go through it and do a scrubdown, but I wanted to give my attention to it early on so that there would not be unnecessary delays, because often what happens is that we look at it and see what we've done and what we can do, and there's a lot of work. Do we agree with the recommendations or don't we?

I personally looked at the report. I see no issue with most of the recommendations, and they will make us a better police agency. My goal is to have that report out in the fall.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay. Let's talk about another report that came forward. This was in New Brunswick seven years ago, on the RCMP's heavily militarized response to the first nation community defending itself against fracking. I was very shocked, because I've dealt with indigenous protests and the RCMP, and seeing sniper crews with sniper rifles was something that I found really shocking.

A report was done. That was seven years ago. I believe you've had the report for most of your tenure. When is that report going to be released?

Commr Brenda Lucki: The report is no longer with the RCMP. It's with the CRCC. We are finished. We have done our review, and the CRCC got it a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay.

Commr Brenda Lucki: There are a lot of recommendations in that report. Again, that report was investigated over six years. There were two or three terabytes of information that had to be re-

viewed, and we wanted to make sure that we did the proper review, because people deserve that.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I get that. I guess the issue is that with the Wet'suwet'en, we saw a repeat of what happened in New Brunswick. Again the RCMP was heavily militarized with sniper rifles. They were targeting unarmed protesters, and the reports that we saw from the duty commanders talked about the need for "lethal overwatch".

We're having a discussion about demilitarizing and de-escalating when people are being confronted with sniper rifles, exactly the same pattern that we saw in New Brunswick, and the New Brunswick report is still not out, and there's been nothing done on the Wet'suwet'en, so how do I go back to indigenous communities and say, "No, this is not an occupying force that's going to threaten you if you stand up for your land"?

Sniper rifles and lethal overwatch— do those not represent something that is much more militarized than necessary in dealing with a nation-to-nation relationship?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I can say that in our response to the indigenous protests in northern B.C. there was no use of force with people. People were arrested.

Mr. Charlie Angus: But using sniper rifles—would you suggest that's okay?

Commr Brenda Lucki: The work we did with that community and in connecting with the hereditary chiefs was unprecedented, and we had actually lots of discussion, and operationally it was a success.

Mr. Charlie Angus: But then why the need for "lethal overwatch"? The definition of "lethal" is that it is capable of causing death.

Commr Brenda Lucki: When we use certain types of resources—for example, when we have public order individuals—they are unarmed. They have no arming, but just in case something happens or goes sideways, they need to be protected, so they have what's called armed overwatch—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Well, certainly, but isn't that the difference between the sniper watch and police just having their normal sidearms, as you would have at a normal event?

Commr Brenda Lucki: The specialized team, the emergency response team, was in the background. There were armed members in their uniforms, overwatching that incident.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Morrison, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Gail and Dennis for being here. I'd also like to thank the commissioner for staying for the extra hour.

I have two questions, one on HR and one on contract policing.

Commissioner, you brought up a concern that I have with regard to hiring the right people. The minister brought up a similar issue, about hiring people who understand the cultural diversity of communities. My concern is this: When you recruit individuals who understand and embrace cultural diversity and want to embrace small communities, for example, wouldn't the hiring of new RCMP recruits be much better if the hiring was done by the provinces and territories and they took the lead based on regional priorities?

Now, I know how the system works. I'm asking if it would be better if they based hiring on a point-based system that suits that province and not Ottawa.

• (1845)

Commr Brenda Lucki: You raise an excellent point. There is a project we are looking at. We used to have a special constable program, for example, whereby people from the community could get modified training and go back to their community. We sort of got away from it, because they said it was a tiered system, but I think with the right checks and balances.... I know from talking to the territories that they are very anxious to look at that.

We also have a great recruiting project going on in Nunavut, for example, for people who don't have access to acquire some of the skills that are needed to be a police officer. We are actually training them in Nunavut to be prepared to come to our training academy. They don't have access to a lot of driving, for example, so we're providing that access.

I think we need more than one way to get into the RCMP, not just the traditional way.

Mr. Rob Morrison: That's a good answer.

Here's another good question on contract policing.

As the RCMP does not have a minimum standard for contract policing, has the RCMP ever thought of having a minimum policing standard so that you can do rural policing reviews, for example, in different contract provinces to see whether the minimum standard of policing is adequate? I hear so often of the strain and stress of smaller detachments, and that there just are not enough people there, yet the only relief is through the province. That's how the contract works.

Could the RCMP have a minimum standard to say to the province, "If you want to contract an RCMP member, you need to have this number of people"?

Commr Brenda Lucki: You raise another excellent point, in the sense that our business intelligence is not strong in that area.

We have what's called the police resourcing methodology. It is so labour-intensive to figure out how many police officers we need in a given area. In a place like Vancouver or Toronto it's very easy to do, because it's in one geographical location. When you're dealing

with the north, where somebody might have to go on a snowmobile or a boat to a complaint, it's very hard to measure the time and distance geography. They might have to fly in to another community, because we don't have police detachments in every community.

Doing that ratio is very labour-intensive. Divisions can only do two of those a year. We need better intelligence to say how many people or police officers we need to adequately police a community; absolutely.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Okay.

With regard to the management review system, or MRS, in the RCMP, I don't know why, but since 2018 the management reviews have stopped in British Columbia. If you don't have a management review, how do you possibly help detachments or units that need direction?

Let's pick racism, for example. Let's pick diversity. I am not too sure I understand the thought process behind not doing management reviews. How are your management teams addressing the needs of these detachments that need help before you get to a directed review, which means you're in trouble?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, you're absolutely right. We need that level of oversight.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Do you know what happened?

Commr Brenda Lucki: At the detachment level, as far as I know, they have their annual performance plan, which includes the unit-level quality assurance process. They review each activity to see whether there are risks that need to be addressed, and it's supposed to feed up into the management review.

Mr. Rob Morrison: That is what directs the management review.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I'm going to look into that. I commit to that. I know when I was district officer in three different districts, we had that nailed down. As much as we didn't like it, we had it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrison.

Madam Khera, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Kamal Khera: I think that Greg hasn't had a turn yet.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Fergus, you have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is very kind of you to give me this opportunity to ask a question.

Thank you very much, Madam Commissioner. We are happy to have you here.

First of all, I would like to say that I recognize the very difficult work that the RCMP and all its members do every day. It is not easy being a police officer. It is not easy to have spotlights shone on cases that are the exception, perhaps. I understand that it is very difficult, but that is the burden that you and all members of the RCMP have to bear. It is normal, in a democracy, that our police services have to undergo this kind of attention.

I do not want to repeat Mr. Anandasangaree's question, but I too was a little confused by your definition of systemic racism when you were asked that question in early June. I sincerely believe that people can change. They have to be given a chance to evolve and change their minds. So, to you I say, well done!

In connection with Ms. Michaud's question, could you once again provide me with a definition of systemic racism? You mentioned the notion of duration and the history of the RCMP. You acknowledged that systemic racism has existed.

Do you believe systemic racism still exists in the RCMP today?

• (1850)

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: First, thank you for your appreciation for our members, because it means a lot. They're working hard each day in the communities they serve.

Yes, there's absolutely systemic racism. I can give you a couple of examples that we've found over the years.

For example, we have a physical abilities requirement evaluation. It's an obstacle course. There is a six-foot mat, and you have to do a broad jump. When we put the lens on it and reviewed that physical requirements test, evidence told us that the average person can broad-jump their height. Of course, how many six-foot people do we hire? There are people in all different cultures who may not be six feet tall, including a lot of women, who would not be able to get through that type of test.

Mr. Greg Fergus: That would be systemic discrimination, but I'm trying to think of systemic racism.

Commr Brenda Lucki: We have some questions, for example, in our aptitude test.

You know what? I might refer this to Gail, because that is Gail's specialty in the HR world. A lot of it has been brought out in our recruiting process.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Johnson.

Ms. Gail Johnson (Chief Human Resources Officer, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the question.

First, I'd just like to say that when we talk about systemic racism, we understand it to mean that systems that exist in organizations

over a long time disadvantage certain racialized indigenous groups, so institutional racism differentially impacts people.

We do have some examples. I will say that when we were looking at our recruitment process and what was required for our folks when we tried to recruit people from the north, because of remote locations, the need for a driver's licence, etc., they had a difficult time coming to write the aptitude test and having a driver's licence and leaving to come and sit for the processes we had. We recognized that this was disadvantaging that group.

We've changed the way we do that process now. We've made it easier. We go there and we do certain activities there so that we can make sure they have the opportunity to apply to become police officers. That's an example.

Mr. Greg Fergus: The minister mentioned that when he was chief of the Toronto police force, he took great efforts to make sure that the management of the police force looked like the diversity of the city in which he served.

Is there any intention for the RCMP to make its management look like the diversity that exists in Canada?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Absolutely. We work very hard to ensure that we increase the diversity at all levels. We're doing better, but it's not good enough.

We need to do it better, and we need to bring people up and develop them from within the employees we already have, because if we don't... When it comes to the next commissioner, if we don't develop anybody with diversity, how are we going to offer up people who can represent our communities?

• (1855)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul-Hus, you have five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Commissioner, at the beginning of the meeting, I spoke of various reports that have been released over the years. There have been two major reports.

The first was released in 2014 and is entitled "Invisible Women—A Call to Action: A Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada". In the report, various recommendations have to do with the police.

The second report is 700 pages long and was released in 2019 following the major National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I did not bring it with me—for obvious reasons. Recommendation 16.32 of that report calls on police services, particularly the RCMP, to ensure that there is Inuit representation among sworn officers and civilian staff.

Have you had time to act on that recommendation?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you for your question.

We have started a special recruitment process in Nunavut for Inuit people. We've identified people interested in the RCMP and we are working with them. Right now we have seven. It's a pilot project. Seven people were recently identified, in January, and we are giving them the skills that they don't have access to, like driving, or if they require certain educational components that can help them with their learning of police studies, we are giving them that learning in Nunavut before they go to the RCMP training academy. We will look at every single piece that we can do in Nunavut to help them succeed, and we will do it there instead of bringing them down to the RCMP training academy.

We are also looking at a troop—and we've done this before—specifically with Inuit candidates or indigenous candidates in the north, as opposed to people south of the 55th parallel, because they have very unique needs, and it's very difficult for people who have never been away from home to all of a sudden be sent to a training academy in Regina for six months.

Again, we have to be open and flexible for all of those diverse options in order to attract the most diverse population.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

My next question is for you or Ms. Johnson.

We have already heard that, among Indigenous communities in particular, young people or others who wanted to be on the police force were being harassed by their own communities. They were told that they were with the white people and that they were traitors to their community.

Does that kind of thing still happen today?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: I can't speak specifically to whether they've been harassed in their own community, but—and I think somebody mentioned it earlier—it's all about people trusting their police. If they don't trust the police, it doesn't matter if you get people from that community; they're still the police. They're still wearing a uniform. They're still part of that system.

We need to look at that, but we also need to provide them with the skills and knowledge to come back to their communities, because I think a community-driven response is much better than an Ottawa or an RCMP top-driven response.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I am going to take advantage of your presence here today to ask you a question about the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are still in the midst of managing this pandemic. Various provinces have begun to lift the lockdown. In your opinion, is the situation under control? Are you worried about a second wave in the fall?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: In the RCMP when COVID-19 hit, we made some very difficult decisions within our organization, and those have probably contributed along with what's happened recently to the morale. We cancelled all leave. We cancelled all training. People had to quarantine before they could go up north, because we wanted to be as responsible as possible and not bring COVID-19 up to the north.

Within our organization, those difficult decisions have paid off. Out of 30,000 employees, we've had only 27 employees test positive for COVID, 17 of whom were on the front line.

Will there be a second wave? I am not a doctor, but I don't think we can take anything with COVID-19 for granted.

● (1900)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

Madam Khera is next.

Ms. Kamal Khera: Thank you, Madam Commissioner.

There have been some calls for the reconstructing of the RCMP to remove contract policing or to remove the designation “Royal” or to rename the force in other ways that would distance it from Canada's past. Is the RCMP aware of these calls, or do you have any mechanism currently in place to examine them?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I think under our modernization efforts, as I said, no stone will be left unturned, and one of them is a review of contract policing.

I do have to say, having now been in this position and having been exposed to police agencies from around the world, that our motto, as much as it is sometimes criticized, is the envy of most police agencies because of its flexibility and nimbleness in times of crisis.

I can give you numerous examples. One was that of the manhunt in northern Manitoba, where we could bring resources in and not make the rest of the province vulnerable because we had to move resources around. We could bring fresh resources in. There were the fires in Fort McMurray, and a terrorism file that we had in Kingston. It takes a lot of specialized resources, which you can't afford to have in each area. We could draw from each province and bring those specialized resources in, deal with the file, and then they could return to their place.

It is a great model, but it needs to be resourced accordingly, and we have to make sure that it's in the proper footprint with the proper resources.

Thank you for that question.

Ms. Kamal Khera: Thank you. I'd like to give the rest of my time to Mr. Greg Fergus.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Ms. Khera.

I have a quick question. You mentioned at the beginning of your opening comments that 99% of RCMP interactions involve non-lethal interventions. Is that correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Actually, it's 99.9%.

Mr. Greg Fergus: It's 99.9%, even higher.

Wouldn't that then make us rethink the approach that we take? I mean, should we plan for that 0.1% or should we have police officers approach a situation in a way that would calm spirits down and clearly de-escalate things, or do they need always to go in fully armed and ready to go and raise the tension?

Commr Brenda Lucki: That's a great question. Thank you for that.

They have to be prepared for everything, but your point is well taken. In 2016, we introduced de-escalation and crisis intervention for that very reason. Our calls related to mental health are growing exponentially. We were looking at the statistics, and there are close to 10,000 calls a month or more just on mental health crises.

Mr. Greg Fergus: That said, are we putting too much emphasis or too much of a burden on the RCMP to handle those kinds of telephone calls, or is it better for us to look at having other services that are better funded, such as more specialized services on mental health or on drug addiction that could work in co-operation with the RCMP to respond to those situations?

Commr Brenda Lucki: In a perfect world, I would say yes.

When I was the district officer in northern Manitoba, in Thompson, we policed half of the province, and in that entire half of the province, there was not one addictions centre, so anybody who needed addictions counselling had to go down south. Therefore, I would say yes, in a perfect world, if those resources were available, but when you look at Toronto or Ottawa or the Lower Mainland, it's a different story than it is in the majority of the areas we police.

In Nunavut, we have seven or eight two-person detachments, and there are no social services. Any time social services are needed, people usually need to go to Iqaluit, because those other communities do not have them. The police are the first responders for all of those, and that's the reality. It's not a fair reality, but it is reality.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Could I presume, then, that you would agree that we need a big rethink in terms of how to increase security in the larger term, the larger understanding of Canadians, by taking a look at who should specialize in what and what resources should be directed as a result?

• (1905)

Commr Brenda Lucki: There are a lot of schools of thought. People are saying that maybe when we are recruiting, we should be recruiting people from the social services industry and bringing them over to the police. That's one aspect, integrating the services together for a better response.

Looking at our training academy, you mentioned focusing on de-escalation, if, in fact.... As I said, 0.073% of our interventions are with a use-of-force option. We need to put that balance back on de-escalation skills, communication skills and connecting with people in crisis.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Madame Michaud, you have two and a half minutes. Then we'll have Mr. Angus for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Commissioner, do you have with you the figures or statistics for the past few years on the number of times the RCMP have stopped persons from cultural minorities or Indigenous people, compared to non-Indigenous people?

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: No. Actually—and I think I mentioned it earlier, when Minister Blair was here—it was always believed that to be bias-free, you should not collect racial data. Now we are rethinking that, because, as I said, in order to bring change to marginalized or racialized communities, we need to have that data.

As I said to Mr. Angus, we are going to work with the Privacy Commissioner to see how we can collect those statistics and how we can use those statistics to alter our police delivery.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

I feel that it can feed certain stereotypes, as you say, but at the same time it can document phenomena like racial profiling, for example. What do you have to say about that?

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, it would definitely help us to look at the racial disparities and obviously at ways to address them. Those statistics would be crucial for that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

According to the 2019 Public Accounts of Canada, the RCMP spent a significant amount of money, more than double the amount spent the previous year, on class action settlements.

I know you probably do not have the numbers with you, but can you tell me more about the allocation of those amounts? Specifically, has the RCMP had to compensate victims of police violence, either as the result of court orders or settlement agreements?

What does spending that money mean for taxpayers?

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: I don't have those statistics.

Much of our litigation—not much, but.... For example, our fleet is not insured. Because our fleet is so big, it would be too costly, so whenever we deal with any type of vehicle collision, it is through litigation, through that settlement, which is actually much cheaper than carrying insurance. Because police officers do high-risk driving, it's elevated rates, obviously, even though we are trained to do that high-risk driving. That's just one example.

Unfortunately, I don't have the specific statistics for you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Michaud.

Mr. Angus, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Charlie Angus: We're not under the RCMP in Treaty 9; it's OPP and NAPS, but we have many two-person detachments with young people, very idealistic. They're living in great isolation, servicing without support for mental health, in the midst of an opioid crisis, and then a suicide crisis hits. We're seeing kids nine and 10 years old dying. The police are in there all the time dealing with it. We've had a number of traumas. We've had a number of suicides. People don't like to talk about it, but there's an effect on the front line.

What do you have to ensure the mental health of the workers who are on the front lines? Some of the highest suicide rates in the world would be in the communities you represent.

Commr Brenda Lucki: When we speak about the mental health and well-being of our members, we can't do enough, absolutely.

Actually, we're doing a longitudinal PTSD study that is the first of its kind in the world. We are following the cadets for five years out of the training academy to see what triggers PTSD so we can be better at prevention. We also have operational stress injury clinicians in each province.

Maybe I could pass it over to Gail. I know—

• (1910)

Mr. Charlie Angus: No, sorry, we don't have enough time.

Commr Brenda Lucki: There's no time for Gail.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I'm sorry about that.

Certainly the junior rangers in our region are a lifeline, but I want to close here on the effects of COVID. Many of our communities had to shut down entirely. They did enormous work to keep COVID out, but under enormous pressure. This just ramped up the pressure.

What are the terms and conditions the police face in going into communities that are shutting themselves down and insisting on very strong isolation?

Commr Brenda Lucki: When COVID started, every police officer who went into the territories had to self-isolate outside of the communities, in Winnipeg or Ottawa. We did not want to be bringing COVID into the northern communities. We still have that. All of our relief workers self-isolated before they went there; absolutely.

When we talk about mental health, it's interesting; the numbers have spiked since COVID. It's a very difficult situation. We are so-

cial human beings. We need to socialize. When you take that away.... The indigenous population has had social distancing ceremonies. Nobody's used to that. I just watched my sister's wedding on Zoom on Saturday. I had an unfortunate.... My nephew committed suicide during COVID, and I have yet to go home to be with my family. We have had no celebration, so the effects are devastating. It's something that we will never fully understand, and I'm sure it will be long term.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

I have a chair's prerogative question.

The RCMP is about to enter into a relationship with the union, which has been a long time coming. In the United States, and possibly even in other police forces here in Canada, the unions have frequently been a huge problem, particularly in protecting officers who by any other circumstances should have been let go.

What assurances can you give as the commissioner—or possibly even the chief of human resources—that this does not become a problem and that the union is on the same page, shall we say, as the RCMP in dealing with officers who are truly a problem?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Mr. Chair, I would love to say that I could give you some guarantees. Obviously, I can't, but our union focus has been based on relationship building. I've had conversations with our union president. Unfortunately, they have not been able to go into negotiations because of COVID, but I have stressed time and time again that we have an unprecedented opportunity to be the envy of all police unions in the world, not just in North America and not just in Canada. We will base that on mutual respect and holding members to account who need to be held to account.

In those discussions, I have said that we don't want to be in conflict. I will take a nudge any time, but I won't appreciate getting thrown under the bus. Our relationship was one of mutual respect, and we want to guard that. Our relationship before with our divisional representatives was exactly that. We have decided to work together to do this so that we do have one of the strongest and fairest police unions we can have.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Commissioner, and your colleagues.

That brings our first meeting on this topic to an end. I would remind all parties that witness lists are to be submitted by the end of Thursday.

Is that correct? Okay.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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