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Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina



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• (1220)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)): This meeting is now called to order, starting with the acknowledgement that in Ottawa we're meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on April 29, 2021, the committee continues its study on the sex trafficking of indigenous peoples.

To ensure an orderly meeting, remember to have the language of your choice selected. Using the globe icon at the bottom centre of the screen, select "Floor", "English" or "French". If you are changing back and forth when speaking, you won't have to make any more adjustments. Just leave it on.

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I must inform the committee that pursuant to the standing order adopted on March 9, 2021, all witnesses have completed a technical pretest.

With us this afternoon are department officials. I will start with the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and Michelle Van De Bogart, director general.

Ms. Van De Bogart, would you please go ahead with your testimony? You have six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Van De Bogart (Director General, Law Enforcement and Border Strategies, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting me today to speak to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. My name is Michelle Van De Bogart. I'm the director general of the law enforcement and border strategies directorate in the community safety and countering crime branch at Public Safety Canada. My team and I are responsible for leading the Government of Canada's efforts to combat human trafficking.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude that I'm currently in Ottawa on the unceded, unsundered land of the Algonquin, and I would also like to acknowledge that we recently all learned the devastating news about the uncovering of a mass grave of indigenous children on the grounds of the former Kamloops residential school. I would like to recognize and honour the lives of these children and the heartbreaking hardships that their families must have endured.

The Government of Canada takes the issue of human trafficking very seriously and is committed to strengthening our efforts to combat this horrible crime. In September 2019, the Minister of Public Safety launched the national strategy to combat human trafficking, which brings federal efforts together under one strategic framework, supported by an investment of \$57.22 million over five years and \$10.28 million ongoing.

The national strategy is based on the internationally recognized pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution, partnerships and empowerment. This last pillar focuses on enhancing supports for victims affected by this crime. In addition, in 2018, the Government of Canada announced \$14.5 million over five years and \$2.89 million ongoing to create the Canadian human trafficking hotline. This hotline is a toll-free service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, that refers victims to local law enforcement, shelters and other supports. It is able to field questions in more than 200 languages, including 27 indigenous languages.

Human trafficking is a complex and highly gendered crime with root causes that include poverty, racism, wage inequality, lack of education and lack of employment opportunities, all of which we know indigenous people experience disproportionately compared to other Canadians. Echoing what we heard during the pre-inquiry design process, the national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls identified human trafficking and sexual exploitation as a key issue.

In addition, the MMIWG calls for justice to reinforce the need to address the disproportionately high rates of violence against indigenous women and girls, including sexual trafficking and sexual exploitation. Through the national strategy to combat human trafficking, the Government of Canada is taking action through various measures to address human trafficking among vulnerable populations.

The Minister of Public Safety named Shirley Cuillierier as the special adviser to combat human trafficking. She is to advise him and raise awareness of the issue. The special adviser is actively engaged with the department, partners and stakeholders to strengthen efforts to combat the sexual trafficking of indigenous people.

I am pleased to speak about the Government of Canada's investment of up to \$22.4 million to fund 63 organizations' anti-human-trafficking efforts. Thirty-three of these organizations serve indigenous people, and 10 are indigenous-led projects. These 63 projects will increase access to services and support for victims and survivors, raise awareness of human trafficking among youth at risk and develop innovative technological ideas to combat human trafficking.

Raising awareness of human trafficking among Canadians is critical. Public Safety launched an awareness campaign entitled "Human Trafficking: It's Not What It Seems" to educate the public, especially youth and parents, about human trafficking. Indigenous-specific focus groups were held in order to ensure that their perspectives were included.

It is important to ensure that victims and survivors receive specialized services to support their recovery and healing. Public Safety is working to develop guidelines for service providers and community organizations, including specific guidelines to support indigenous survivors. In addition to the guidelines, Public Safety is supporting the development of training tools for frontline service providers in the hospitality and transportation sectors, and in other key sectors, in order to educate them on the signs of human trafficking and how to report it.

Finally, in order to inform and influence federal anti-human-trafficking efforts, Public Safety is establishing a survivors advisory committee, including indigenous survivors, to draw upon their lived experiences and expertise. Public Safety is looking to the anti-human-trafficking-related calls for justice in the final report of the national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls to inform how the national strategy can further strengthen efforts to combat the sexual trafficking of indigenous people. We will also look to the standing committee study on this important issue.

I thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thanks very much for your testimony.

Next, we have Mr. Sam Jaroudi from the RCMP, officer in charge of the vulnerable persons unit, for up to six minutes.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Sam Jaroudi (Officer In Charge, Vulnerable Persons Unit, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Mr. Chair, I just want to let you know that the RCMP does not have a statement for today; however, I would like to say that the RCMP remains committed to supporting national and local efforts to effectively combat human trafficking by investigating, disrupting and bringing to justice those involved in these crimes.

The RCMP's national human trafficking section centrally facilitates the RCMP's efforts to counter human trafficking through awareness, education and community outreach, as well as building and enhancing partnerships, supporting operations, and advancing operational policy and general external reporting.

The RCMP supports the Government of Canada's national strategy to combat human trafficking and remains committed to addressing human trafficking in collaboration with federal and provincial

governments and agencies and government organizations, as well as law enforcement partners.

The extent of human trafficking is difficult to assess due to the classified nature of these offences and the reluctance of victims and witnesses to come forward to law enforcement. However, we are committed to working in partnership with everyone I mentioned.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

From the Department of Justice, we have senior counsel Nathalie Levman.

Nathalie, you have up to six minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Levman (Senior Counsel, Criminal Law Policy Section, Policy Sector, Department of Justice): Thank you for welcoming us all to your study of sex trafficking of indigenous peoples.

I speak with gratitude from the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

The Department of Justice works closely with Public Safety Canada, which leads the national strategy to combat human trafficking, as you've just heard. In particular, Justice Canada is responsible for the criminal law framework governing human trafficking. That framework addresses human trafficking through a range of offences, including offences that specifically target human trafficking conduct.

While the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act includes an offence that addresses transnational human trafficking, the Criminal Code contains specific offences on human trafficking that address transnational cases as well as those that occur entirely within Canada. The main human trafficking Criminal Code offences prohibit recruiting, transporting or harbouring of adults or children to exploit them or to facilitate their exploitation by someone else. Exploitation occurs when a reasonable person who was in the victim's circumstances would believe their physical or psychological safety would be threatened if they failed to provide their labour or services, and this includes sexual services.

In determining whether exploitation occurred, courts may consider a broad range of factors, including whether the accused used or threatened to use coercion, deceived the victim, or abused a position of trust, power or authority.

Other trafficking offences prohibit receiving a material benefit from trafficking children or adults and withholding or destroying travel documents to commit or facilitate trafficking. This is regardless of whether those documents are authentic.

These are all serious offences, with maximum penalties of up to life imprisonment. More severe penalties are imposed when the victim is under the age of 18 years. Moreover, sentencing principles require courts to give primary consideration to the objectives of denunciation and deterrence when imposing a sentence for an offence that involves the abuse of a person who is vulnerable because of personal circumstances, including because the person is indigenous and female.

Other charges are often laid in trafficking cases, such as sexual assault, uttering threats, intimidation and extortion, because human trafficking is an offence that often involves the extraction of another person's labour or services over time. Traffickers may commit these other offences to maintain control over their victims while they extract labour or services from them.

Traffickers may also be charged with sex trade offences in sex trafficking cases, such as procuring others to provide sexual services and profiting from others' sexual services. Individuals who purchase sexual services from trafficking victims may be charged with the Criminal Code offence that prohibits purchasing sexual services, regardless of whether they knew that the person from whom they purchased sexual services was a trafficking victim.

Through Justice Canada's victims fund, the department provides \$1 million annually in funding for projects and activities that focus on the needs of victims and survivors of human trafficking. Since 2012, the department has funded 47 human trafficking-related projects by community organizations and law enforcement agencies. These projects include improved services for victims of human trafficking, training for law enforcement officers and frontline service providers working directly with victims of human trafficking, and support for labour trafficking victims.

I'd be very happy to answer any questions you may have on the criminal justice system's response to human trafficking.

Thank you very much.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Next we'll have a presentation from the Department of Indigenous Services. I'm not sure who will present, but please go ahead.

Mr. Ian Kenney (Acting Director General, Social Policy and Programs Branch, Department of Indigenous Services): It's Ian Kenney here. I'll start, and I'll be brief to allow my colleagues to share a few remarks.

I am Ian Kenney, acting director general of the social policy and programs branch at Indigenous Services Canada. Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide remarks here today. I will speak with you about ISC's family violence prevention program.

This program is a fundamental part of the department's mandate of providing health and social services to promote the safety and well-being of families in indigenous communities. The program

contributes to the efforts to ultimately eliminate all forms of violence. It also plays a role in fulfilling the minister's commitment to grow and maintain Canada's network of shelters that serve individuals who are fleeing domestic violence and/or sexual exploitation.

The family violence prevention program supports the operation of a network of 46 shelters that serve indigenous communities across the country. These shelters provide emergency support and a vital place of refuge for indigenous women, children and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people fleeing instances of violence, including sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

The program also supports the delivery of indigenous family violence prevention projects, both on and off reserve, in priority areas that include human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Recently, the Government of Canada announced \$44.8 million to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation over five years to build 10 new shelters in first nations communities on reserve and two in the territories. ISC will be investing an additional \$40.8 million in operational funding for these new shelters over the next five years and \$10.2 million annually thereafter. This will bring the number of shelters in ISC's network to 58.

Furthermore, the fall economic statement committed \$724.1 million to launch a comprehensive violence prevention strategy to expand access to a continuum of culturally relevant supports for indigenous women, children and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people facing gender-based violence. This strategy will support new shelters and transitional or second-stage housing for first nations, Inuit and Métis people across the country, including on reserve, in the north and in urban areas.

I might also add that this includes the construction and operation of new emergency shelters for Inuit women and children across Inuit Nunangat, as well as in urban centres. These new investments will be jointly delivered by ISC and CMHC.

Thank you.

• (1235)

The Chair: Is there anyone to follow up with your group?

Go ahead, Ms. Nepton.

Ms. Nathalie Nepton (Director General, Child and Family Services Program, Department of Indigenous Services): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for inviting us to be here today.

My name is Nathalie Nepton. My comments will focus on the work we are doing within Indigenous Services Canada that has to do with child and family service reform for first nations children and families.

Although the indigenous population up to the age of 14 makes up 7.7% of all Canadian children, they represent 52.2% of the children in care. We also know that studies have highlighted that having been in a child welfare system was the most common feature among women and girls who entered into prostitution.

We recognize the relationship between investing in the safety and well-being of children and achieving improved outcomes for these children, their families and their communities. For this reason, Indigenous Services Canada is committed to ensuring that families at risk receive support and prevention services designed to maintain familial support systems and to keep children in their communities and connected to their language and culture.

The first nations child and family services program has received significant investments over the past years to support the program and to make it truly child-centred, community-directed, and focused on prevention and early intervention. Recently we have brought significant changes to the program. Most notably, upon reaching the age of majority, youth in care can continue to benefit from the program for an additional two years. This ensures that they have the support they need to transition into adulthood on a healthy path.

Other recent progress toward achieving the goal of reducing the number of indigenous children in care includes the federal indigenous child and family services legislation, “An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families”, which came into force on January 1, 2020. The act establishes such national principles as the best interests of the child, cultural continuity and substantive equality to help guide the provision of child and family services in relation to indigenous children.

Simply put, the act provides a path for indigenous peoples to choose their own solutions for their children and families and to create a better future for the generations to come.

All told, the child and family services reform sector of Indigenous Services Canada is focused on ensuring healthy, strong and prosperous indigenous families and children, thus reducing their vulnerability to negative outcomes, such as being victims of the sex trafficking trade.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Now, we have very limited—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

We can't hear the interpretation well when Mr. Jaroudi is speaking. Would it be possible to resolve the situation so that I can hear it better, please?

Mr. Sam Jaroudi: Okay.

[*English*]

Can you hear me better now?

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Yes, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We're very tight for time.

I don't have Jamie, who is the first Conservative questioner, or Gary. Who would like to start?

Mr. Viersen, go ahead.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to begin with the RCMP or the justice department with regard to the conviction rates. We see that fewer than one in 10 human trafficking charges result in a finding of guilty. The vast majority of those charges are stayed, withdrawn, dismissed or discharged.

I'll start with the RCMP. Is there a significant challenge with securing justice for trafficking victims?

Mr. Sam Jaroudi: I would suggest that this is more a question for Justice. The RCMP does the investigation and prepares the files for the prosecutor. We are not involved in the process afterwards.

Ms. Nathalie Levman: I'm not sure if you've had a chance to review the new human trafficking Juristat that was released in early May, but it does speak to some of the issues you've just raised. It raises issues also about whether or not human trafficking cases end up with convictions for other charges when the elements of the human trafficking offence cannot be made out. We know that happens in some cases, and we know that other offences are regularly charged in human trafficking cases, as per my comments.

I'm responsible for the criminal law. I'm not a prosecutor. I wish to clarify that point. I think a prosecutor could speak better to charging practices and in terms of qualitative data, but that is my understanding, having worked closely with prosecutors and reviewed various research, including the Statistics Canada report, which speaks to the issues of concern.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I appreciate that.

What are some of the more common offences used to convict traffickers, then?

Ms. Nathalie Levman: You'd have to look at the human trafficking Juristat for statistical analyses. In terms of jurisprudence, which I can speak to, sex trade offences are often charged in human trafficking cases that involve sexual exploitation, although not labour exploitation, for obvious reasons. A range of different offences, as per my comments and my opening remarks, are regularly charged in these cases. They are complex and they involve different kinds of offending, depending upon the facts of the case.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: In Canada, the weight of a human trafficking conviction often rests on the testimony of the victim instead of on the actions of the trafficker. This is due to a narrow definition of "exploitation" in Canada's human trafficking offences.

To fully align us with the UN Palermo protocol, the definition of "human trafficking" would need to be changed to no longer require proof of a victim's personal fear for their safety. Can you comment a little bit on that, Ms. Levman?

Ms. Nathalie Levman: Sure. You might be interested in reviewing some of the case law out of the Ontario Court of Appeal, starting with the A.A. decision from 2015 in particular. You'll find that the court confirms the parliamentary record that the definition of "exploitation" sets a low bar. It doesn't require proof of fear on the part of the victim but whether or not a reasonable person in the victim's circumstances would believe that his or her physical or psychological safety would be threatened if he or she failed to provide the labour or services. This is in full compliance with article 3 of the trafficking protocol, which requires three elements to be criminalized: the act, the means and an exploitative purpose. Our definition is consistent with that definition in article 3.

• (1245)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Could we bring some legislative clarity around that? It's being clarified in the courts. Is there ability to bring some legislative clarity to that?

Ms. Nathalie Levman: It's always up to those responsible for legislation to decide to amend it. I would suggest that removing the current definition could harm the very helpful case law we have that interprets it. It's not just the A.A. decision; several other decisions out of the Ontario Court of Appeal have given full effect to that definition.

I'm not saying it can't be done, and it certainly wouldn't be up to me to choose to do it, but we do have a workable definition according to Canadian jurisprudence.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Ms. Van De Bogart, much of the national strategy to combat human trafficking is devoted to prevention. What percentage of the funding goes to prevention?

The Chair: I'll have to interrupt. There are only 10 seconds left, and we're going to be going over time. Perhaps that can get picked up in a subsequent question and answer, but right now I'm going to ask Ms. Zann to go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Thank you very much. Actually, I will be getting there, so thank you for starting that question.

I want to say to begin with that I know our government has acknowledged that indigenous women and girls experience some of the highest rates of violence in this country and that the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this already dire situation. Recently we've seen deeply distressing stories in the media about the lack of proper treatment of indigenous children in care. This is unacceptable.

When women are provided the supports they need to allow them to evade potentially compromising situations, there is a lowered likelihood for exploitation. With regard to specific funding for gender-based violence prevention programming for indigenous women, funding now has been distinguished as capacity building for indigenous and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. That's because the missing and murdered women and girls inquiry necessitated that distinction. The allocated funding for this year's budget, budget 2021, represents \$415 million specifically for the Department of Women and Gender Equality, which contributes to a total of \$601.3 million to advance the national action plan to end gender-based violence.

I have a question for Public Safety.

In 2019, Canada's national strategy to combat human trafficking added the new pillar of empowerment to emphasize the important role that victims and survivors play in combatting human trafficking. Can you update our committee on what kind of work is being done under this new pillar and on what new funding is being provided to grassroots organizations to facilitate trauma-informed support?

Ms. Michelle Van De Bogart: I can speak to the monies that have been allocated to grassroots organizations, including indigenous organizations.

In 2020, under the national strategy to combat human trafficking, both Public Safety and Women and Gender Equality Canada were awarded up to \$22.4 million. That money allowed us to support 63 organizations working to address human trafficking and to support at-risk populations and survivors.

Speaking specifically from Public Safety, we received up to \$8.4 million out of that initial \$22.4 million. We are supporting 20 projects that work to prevent and address human trafficking and support survivors. Out of those 20 projects, 15 serve indigenous populations.

Among the types of projects we are currently supporting, some of those organizations are delivering empowerment programs for at-risk youth pilot projects, and also youth hackathons. Youth hackathons are pretty amazing to me, because students, software developers and socially responsible technology companies are brought together and they develop ideas on how they can use social media to target and combat human trafficking, which of course is directly.... All of us are on social media, but we know that the young are drawn to it.

Those are some examples of the monies going to grassroots organizations to deal with empowerment.

• (1250)

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you. That's very interesting.

I have a question regarding the RCMP and public safety. It's to anyone who would like to answer.

We know that human trafficking generates large sums of profits, and we know that under DRAP, the previous Conservative government's cuts led to the disbanding of all 13 integrated proceeds of crime units, units that had been dedicated to addressing money laundering. Recently, \$98 million was approved for the RCMP with teams in B.C., Alberta, Ontario and Quebec City. What work is being done to focus on the money-laundering aspect within the crime of sexual human trafficking? Could the RCMP perhaps answer that?

The Chair: There are 30 seconds left.

Mr. Sam Jaroudi: Unfortunately, I cannot respond on money laundering. It's not my area of responsibility. However, if you wish, I can provide the response in writing afterwards.

Ms. Lenore Zann: All right.

Is there anybody else here, perhaps from Public Safety, who wants to comment on that, please?

The Chair: We're right out of time.

Ms. Blaney, in order to ensure that you get your question in, we'll have to extend. We're not able to extend too much, but are we agreed that we will extend the meeting?

All are in favour. We'll extend briefly after one o'clock. Right now we'll go to Madame Bérubé for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am on the territory of the Cree and Anishinabe of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou in Quebec.

My question is for Ms. Van De Bogart.

Ms. Van De Bogart, you mentioned a hotline earlier. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this hotline that people can use to report cases of human trafficking?

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Van De Bogart: Thank you for the question. I hope you can hear through the translation.

The hotline is a toll-free service. I mentioned that it's available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It refers victims to local law enforcement, to shelters and to other supports and services. Because it's available all the time—and, as I mentioned, in over 200 languages, 27 of them indigenous—it allows an opportunity for people to call and obtain all sorts of information and to have specific supports put in place that they might need.

We speak about victims, but this service allows people to find avenues for shelter or perhaps for addressing issues around sexual and physical abuse and domestic violence, and they can get information from law enforcement as well.

The hotline has trained operators, and they are trauma informed. There is an understanding and a recognition when they are speaking to these individuals of how to interact with them and how to support the victims and be able to direct them to the supports that they require.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: I have another question for you.

Do indigenous people use this service? Is it consistent with their culture? Do you have any statistics on this?

• (1255)

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Van De Bogart: The hotline does keep track of some information. I do not have it at my fingertips, but I would be happy to get back to you on what's possible.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: My next question is for all of you.

Do you have any recommendations for improving the ability of government institutions and indigenous organizations to identify potential victims and locations of human trafficking?

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Van De Bogart: One of the things I want to speak to you about is one of the pillars of the national strategy, specifically about building capacity and working with our partnerships.

We're working in collaboration with federal, provincial and territorial partners. I work with my colleagues in other departments to strengthen, to share ideas and to inform. Part of that is consultation and conversations with grassroots organizations, elders, indigenous leaders and indigenous organizations to try to find ways that we can respond and offer support.

The voices of those who are survivors and those who have been impacted by human trafficking are important in order for us to build, to strengthen and to continue to grow in offering support through Public Safety.

Mr. Sam Jaroudi: For the RCMP, I would say that building trust with communities is the most important thing in tackling this issue.

As mentioned earlier, victims and witnesses and their families are very reluctant to come to law enforcement. However, we've built a lot of networks and relationships and we participate in a lot of community events and discussions on human trafficking to have that exposure between police and the public, and hopefully that plays out over time.

We recognize that it's not something that can be achieved overnight, but we're working hard on that aspect. We're also supporting that approach by training our police officers and employees in general on being culturally sensitive, as well as utilizing trauma-informed approaches.

The Chair: You have one minute.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Could you share with me some best or promising practices for protecting indigenous victims?

[*English*]

Mr. Sam Jaroudi: I don't know if Public Safety or the other representatives speaking about shelters want to add anything to that. From an RCMP perspective, we definitely work on two levels. The first is at the local level with local partners, as I mentioned, to strengthen relationships that then benefit the victims. We are utilizing a victim lens approach as well as a trauma-informed approach.

Then within the same scope but from a national perspective, we work, for example, with the ombudsman of victims of crime. We are currently developing a victims rights card that would be presented by police officers to victims to advise them of their rights.

There are a lot of projects, a lot of practical things ongoing at the local level, but we're also initiating at the national level to be able to support frontline police and their interactions, as mentioned, in a culturally sensitive, trauma-informed manner with a victim lens.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

To conclude, we have Ms. Blaney for six minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Chair. Thank you for giving the committee a few extra minutes so I could ask my questions.

I'm going to ask this question and I'm going to allow whoever the best person is to respond. I'm just giving you a heads-up before I start.

There was a submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in 2018. The Native Women's Association of Canada stated that:

Some of the recurring themes that contribute to the recruitment of indigenous women into human trafficking include:

- Precarious housing and poor living conditions
- High rates of unemployment, unstable employment, and low working wages
- Lack of access to social and economic resources and programs
- Prior exposure to human trafficking and the sex trade from a young age (through family or friends)
- Family violence and the impacts of colonialism (such as residential school experience and intergenerational trauma)

I'm just wondering if I could get a few specific examples of how this is being addressed by the federal government, if it is at all.

• (1300)

The Chair: Who would like that?

Ms. Michelle Van De Bogart: It's Michelle from Public Safety Canada. I apologize; I can't see other people. I'm not sure if it's appropriate for me to speak at this point.

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Ms. Michelle Van De Bogart: What I would say is what I mentioned in my opening statements, all of which basically just mirrored all of what you just highlighted.

We know the complexity of human trafficking. I would say that the Government of Canada first started with the introduction of the funding for the hotline that was launched in May of 2019. That was followed by the national strategy to combat human trafficking, which is a five-year project. There are some concrete examples that I can share with you.

First and foremost, when we were developing this strategy, we ensured that we did regional and national consultations. Those involved conversations with elders, indigenous leaders and indigenous communities—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm really looking for something concrete. I'm not trying to be rude, but I am looking for something concrete. I understand the process, but the point is that some very clear things are contributing to women continuing to go in this direction and being forced in this direction. Housing and employment are key things, so what about those?

A hotline isn't that.

Ms. Michelle Van De Bogart: Sure, certainly.

I wonder if my partners who manage specific programs may be able to give you your answer. We do provide money and we support grassroots organizations, but from a public safety perspective, it's about allowing those organizations to be able to manage their programs. I wonder if perhaps my colleagues would be best to answer that question.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That would be great. Thank you so much.

Ms. Nathalie Nepton: I'm hoping that from a program perspective, this will help.

As I indicated earlier, I work in the area of first nations child and family services programming. Over the past years and most recently, as I've indicated, there have been significant investments made into our programs to allow for the extension of supports, as I stated earlier, for children aging out of care and maintaining those supports for an additional two years to help them find their way or get on the right path to avoid falling into those pitfalls that you've mentioned.

As well, we've also looked at our program, and we have acknowledged, as you have indicated, the effects of colonization, historical trauma and cultural dislocation—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay, fair enough; I think that's good. It's not really answering the question, so I'm just going to move on.

In the same report, the Native Women's Association also talked about identifying and assisting indigenous victims and survivors of human trafficking and exploitation and how that effort has been greatly hindered by a lack of disaggregated and cross-jurisdictional data.

We hear this again and again. In every report that we do, data continues to be the big challenge. I'm wondering if there's been any work done on that and if the importance of indigenous ownership of the data collected in relation to the indigenous experience has been recognized. I also wonder how the fact of cross-jurisdictional data can be addressed. This continues to be an issue.

I only have one minute left, so I would really appreciate it if whoever can answer that best would please step up. We don't have a lot of time.

Ms. Nathalie Levman: I'm wondering if you would like to hear from Statistics Canada on these issues. There is data out there and a lot of it has been spearheaded by indigenous groups, but I think this is really a question for Statistics Canada. I note that they're not here.

• (1305)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay, I'm done with my questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Blaney.

Members of the committee, Ms. Butt, the director general of Women and Gender Equality Canada, has been able to join us.

We have an absolute hard stop of 1:15, so I will allow the clerk to ensure Ms. Butt is technically attached to our committee and I'll allow her to make a brief statement.

Mr. Clerk, can you deal with that?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Naaman Sugrue): Yes, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Butt, I'll ask you to introduce yourself and tell us where you are calling from. If interpretation agrees they can hear you adequately, we'll proceed with your opening statement. Please go ahead.

Ms. Alia Butt (Director General, Policy and External Relations Directorate, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Hello, this is Alia Butt, director general of policy and external relations, Women and Gender Equality Canada.

Can you hear me all right? My deepest apologies. It seems that our systems weren't compatible with the INAN committee's Zoom, but I think we've sorted it out now.

Would you like me to go ahead with my remarks?

The Chair: We're getting a nod.

Please go ahead. Thank you for joining us.

[Translation]

Ms. Alia Butt: Good afternoon.

I'd like to acknowledge at the outset that I am participating in this call from Ottawa and that I am on the unceded traditional territory of the Anishinabe Nation.

Thank you for welcoming me here today so that I can share a few observations for your study on sex trafficking of indigenous peoples.

We know that indigenous women and girls, women who are newcomers to Canada, Black and racialized women and those living in poverty are at particular risk of being trafficked.

In fact, according to Statistics Canada, in 2019, 95% of victims of human trafficking identified by police in Canada were women and girls.

[English]

Human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation is a form of gender-based violence. WAGE is leading the government's efforts to develop a national action plan to end gender-based violence. Budget 2021 committed an investment of \$601.3 million over five years to advance this national action plan, which will be achieved in collaboration with indigenous partners, provincial and territorial governments and civil society. WAGE will receive \$415 million of this investment, including \$105 million over five years to enhance the gender-based violence program, which includes efforts to stop human trafficking.

WAGE has been working closely with Public Safety Canada to support the national strategy to combat human trafficking. Last year, WAGE launched a call for proposals to support organizations on the front lines to develop and implement promising practices to enhance supports for at-risk populations of victims and survivors of human trafficking.

We approved 43 projects to receive \$14 million in funding. Some of the projects we funded include one by the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, which is working to develop and implement the Nova Scotia indigenous human trafficking prevention strategy that will advance knowledge and enhance empowerment supports for at-risk populations and survivors of human trafficking in Nova Scotia. Also, there is the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association, which is working to develop and implement an indigenous, youth-led, culturally relevant prevention training and education program that will advance knowledge and awareness and empower at-risk indigenous youth and indigenous survivors of human trafficking in Alberta.

We are also striving to ensure that organizations that provide critical services to victims and survivors of gender-based violence are supported through the pandemic. For example, last year, as part of the government's COVID-19 economic response plan, we at WAGE provided \$90 million in funding to women's shelters, sexual assault centres, women's organizations and other organizations, providing supports to over 800,000 women and children experiencing gender-based violence across the country.

We also work closely with Indigenous Services Canada to ensure there are supports to indigenous women and children experiencing gender-based violence. As part of the budget 2021 investments that I just mentioned, \$200 million will continue to support this critical sector. Another \$55 million has been specifically earmarked to bolster the capacity of indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ organizations to provide gender-based violence prevention programming aimed at addressing the root causes of violence against indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

Through all of our program and policy work at WAGE, we continue toward advancing gender equality by removing systemic bar-

riers, preventing and addressing gender-based violence, enhancing women's economic security and increasing women's representation in leadership roles.

Thank you. Again, my apologies for the issues at the onset of the meeting.

● (1310)

The Chair: No problem, and thank you.

Members, obviously we have to leave now, but the clerk has advised me that he will accept further questions to submit to all of our witnesses today, if you have them. Please feel free to submit further questions.

Witnesses, thank you all so much. We all have busy times, but this is such an important topic. We want to thank you for your participation today.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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