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INVISIBLE WOMEN: A CALL TO ACTION

A Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada

Report of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women

**Stella Ambler
Chair**

MARCH 2014

41st PARLIAMENT, SECOND SESSION

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**A Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous
Women in Canada**

**Report of the Special Committee on
Violence Against Indigenous Women**

**Stella Ambler
Chair**

MARCH 2014
41st PARLIAMENT, FIRST SESSION

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THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN

has the honour to present its

FIRST REPORT

Pursuant to the Order of Reference of Tuesday, February 26, 2013, the Committee has studied violence against indigenous women and has agreed to report the following:

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Invisible

Your eyes, they curve around me.
I watch you try so hard to find your way past me.
Your sight is like rushing waters,
Moving beside me, behind me, pushing over me,
Indirectly consuming me.
They say the path of least resistance makes rivers and men crooked.

I am here. I have resisted. I am resisting.
I did not make you crooked.
What is it about you structural giants?

What is it about your pockmarked protection?
What is it about your false perceptions?
What beliefs have you bound to my body?
What pathologies have you painted the pigment of my skin?
What bad medicine did your forefathers use to make me invisible?

You don't want to see me.
What's worse is that you have the choice whether or not you see me.
I become a casualty of your blindness,
Subjected to your one-sided absent-mindedness because you've been given a privilege
called selective vision.
You weed out the colours that don't match your peripheral preference, and,
I am not part of your rainbow, your twisted-light promises for better tomorrows.

My face can be plastered on posters telling you what I was last seen wearing,
With fitted descriptions, a location to give you bearings, and,
You can choose to look past me, and go on, uncaring.

My raven's hair and heritage does not sound alarm bells.
It does not stir you to look for me.
Because you have never really seen me.
You've seen me all right. You've seen me on street corners,
Lips red like sirens, dreams broken like sidewalk syringes,
Neurotic like Catholic church windows,
Submissive and silent.

You see me in welfare lines, hands open wide, waiting for what's coming to me,
Drinking death-causing concoctions behind dumpsters.
You see me as a standing statistic, a living, breathing, heaving stereotype.
You see me in the bar, another joke for you and your friends.
Just another squaw, but if you want to get laid, I'm your Pocahontas.

You see me as dispensable.
This is how you see me.

Undeserving of stars,
Deserving of starlight rides and pleasurable times.
Funny how you fail to see me when I'm face up,
Lips puffed, body bloated and battered, bruised beyond recognition.
Still not gaining your attention.

Come on, baby, and dance me outside.
I think she was just looking for a good time.
I heard she lived a risky lifestyle.
It was inevitable, some say.
This is how you see me.

Never somebody's daughter, never somebody's mother, never an aunt, a sister, a
friend.
Never am I seen as strong, as proud, as resilient.
Never as I am.

Finally, given the stars,
Laid to gaze at them on back roads and in ditches,
On ghostly stretches of forgotten pebbled pathways.
Your vastness swallows me.
Do I fall in your line of sight? Do you see me now?
Because I get this feeling that your eyes, they curve around me.

by Helen Knott

Recited by Connie Greyeyes at a meeting
dedicated to the families of victims held by the Special Committee
on Violence Against Indigenous Women, 9 December 2013

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A. THE COMMITTEE'S APPROACH

When they appeared before the Special Committee on Violence against Indigenous Women* (hereafter the Committee), families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls presented a diversity of situations which led to the tragic loss of their loved ones. The Committee members were deeply moved by the tragedies that had befallen these families, and the lasting effects on those who were left behind.

Family members spoke of the many measures they had taken to come to terms with the violent deaths or disappearances of their loved ones. All of their stories spoke about the lengths to which they went to achieve closure. Some have never found closure.

Family members organize vigils and walks in memory of their loved ones. The need to keep the memory of the loved ones alive speaks of the great tragedy at the heart of the story of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women — the silence within which this tragedy happens. It is the tragedy of not being heard when they called out for help, not being heard when they reported someone missing. That silence is part of the ongoing trend of mainstream society saying to Aboriginal people that they don't count; it joins the resounding silence of the other tragedies which Aboriginal people have lived through at the hands of other Canadians — the residential school system, the large-scale removal of Aboriginal children from their families in the 1960s, the ongoing marginalization and racism. It is that silence which needs to be broken. It is that silence which the Sisters in Spirit initiative aimed to break by documenting the stories of these women as mothers, daughters, sisters and friends.

In 1996 John Martin Crawford was convicted of murder in the killings of three indigenous women, Eva Taysup, Shelley Napope, and Calinda Waterhen, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Warren Goulding, one of the few journalists to cover the trial, commented. I don't get the sense the general public cares much about missing or murdered aboriginal women. It's all part of this indifference to the lives of aboriginal people. They don't seem to matter as much as white people.¹

The following comments provide insight into the feeling of abandonment felt by many of the families of the victims we met:

Who cares about us brown people? Does anybody care? I'd like to know. Because that's a death, that's a murder. And those two men are still walking around today to torture other people. Where is justice for our people? It just doesn't exist, does it?

(Brenda Bignell, speaking on behalf of seven missing and murdered members of her family)

* Because it is the commonly used term in Canada, the term "Aboriginal women" will be used throughout the report, except in quotes.

1 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 30 May 2013 (Michèle Audette, President, Native Women's Association of Canada).

When I see another mother, another child, another brother, another son, gone missing and murdered here in Canada, nobody seems to care about us brown people. Nobody seems to care. We have to do it on our own...

Our children are being targeted ... We have to stop it. So I'm asking you. I've been here for a long, long time doing this. I'm asking you, please back us up. Let's make a loud ruckus and change this in Canada.

(Susan Martin, mother of Terrie Ann Dauphinais, murdered on 29 April 2002 in Calgary)

1. A Forceful Call for Action

One wish expressed by several families and witnesses who appeared as part of the study was that the report include recommendations that would make a real difference to the lives of Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Witnesses urged the Committee to not just write yet another report. Michèle Audette of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) told the Committee:

In 20 years, we have seen it, committees, briefs, reports and so on. I would like you, Ms. Ambler and all the members of the committee, to ensure that this time, things are different and that the committee's recommendations are different. We are not just going to choose recommendations that are the least costly or the recommendations that are short term, or simply choose them based on a political capital. I'm asking you to find solutions here that all Canadians can benefit from in the short, medium and long term.²

Tracy Porteous of the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia echoed Ms. Audette's remarks:

I'm not going to take the time today to articulate the great volumes of research that have been created about what needs to be done on this subject. In fact I want to caution you about concluding these meetings with recommendations for more studies or more reports. Throughout the first decade of 2000, EVA BC — which is the short form for my organization — working in partnership with the Pacific Association of First Nation's Women, and BC Women's Hospital, held a number of meetings with Aboriginal women across the province, all looking at and having discussions about the issue of violence against women, and what Aboriginal women felt needed to be done. We studied the issues very carefully over number of years and we produced two reports, the latter of which is called "Researched To Death". I think that report alone speaks to what many of our Aboriginal sisters believe today: that many governments are willing to fund studies and reports but very few are willing to stand up and fund and support the long-term infrastructural solutions to the problem at hand.³

Building on all the research that has already been done, and reflecting on the testimony of the witnesses, the Committee seeks instead to identify practical, action-oriented solutions to increase safety of Aboriginal women and girls across Canada.

2 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 30 May 2013. Similar remarks were made by many of the witnesses we heard from, including Bridget Tolley (Co-Founder, Families of Sisters in Spirit) and Mary Teegee (Executive Director, Child and Family Services, Carrier Sekani Family Services).

3 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 6 June 2013 (Tracy Porteous, Ending Violence Association of British Columbia).

2. Solutions that must be tailored to the unique circumstances of each community

Even though many Aboriginal communities have similar experiences with the root causes of violence — domestic violence, human trafficking, substance abuse, prostitution, poverty, limited access to health and social services, racism and the after-effects of the residential school system, — some witnesses emphasized that violence manifests itself differently in each community depending on the way these factors interact and each community's culture, geography and situation.

Aboriginal people in Canada include the Inuit, First Nations and Métis people. Some live in rural and remote communities, or the Far North, while others live in urban areas. As one example, pointing out the importance of attending to these differences, Tracy O'Hearn of Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada told the Committee:

We want to tell you first about the different circumstances and priorities of Inuit women. Their culture, their language, and the geography of their communities are unique. They live largely in 53 communities across the Arctic. They're all isolated. They all fly in and fly out. There's very limited infrastructure, as we've heard someone mention before. There may or may not be a social worker, any sort of a health intervention worker.⁴

This diversity of experiences makes it impossible to develop solutions solely at the national level. The most important role the federal government can play is to support initiatives coming from communities themselves. The witnesses told us loud and clear that no single solution would end violence against Aboriginal women and girls. A universal model should not be imposed. Instead, communities should be helped to acquire the tools they need to find their own solutions. Communities are in the best position to identify local priorities and develop tailored solutions, as evidenced by the statements of many of the witnesses who appeared before the Committee:

To achieve positive and sustainable change, solutions have to come from the community. Imposing solutions or quick fixes from the outside will not have a lasting impact. Communities need to be supported and sometimes assisted in moving toward their goal, but the vision, plan, and desire to move forward has to come from the community itself.⁵

[T]he communities need to be able to tackle their issues in a culturally appropriate manner. They are the best judges of what will work.... The fact that the needs were first of all identified by the community is one of the most important factors in the success of such projects. The communities are in the best position to tell us what the relevant needs are, at this point in their process.⁶

4 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 6 June 2013 (Tracy O'Hearn, Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada).

5 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 2 May 2013 (Shawn Tupper, Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Safety and Partnerships Branch, Public Safety Canada).

6 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 23 May 2013 (Linda Savoie, Director General, Women's Program and Regional Operations Directorate, Status of Women Canada).

[W]e really need to go in and engage communities. We can't just go in and tell people what they need. We ask communities what they need, what they think is not working, and what they think is working. I think that's one thing we forget, that we don't have the key to open every lock. Some people have their own keys that already work or don't work, and they just want support in how to recut a key, if we need to give that to them.⁷

All-inclusive programs have to be delivered from the ground up. In other words, the Aboriginal people should be fully immersed and consulted on the situations, from their community right into the urban centres or the municipalities.⁸

B. MANDATE AND REVIEW PROCESS

On 26 February 2013, the House of Commons unanimously passed the following motion:

That the House recognize that a disproportionate number of Indigenous women and girls have suffered violence, gone missing, or been murdered over the past three decades; and that the government has a responsibility to provide justice for the victims, healing for the families, and to work with partners to put an end to the violence; and that a special committee be appointed, with the mandate to conduct hearings on the critical matter of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada, and to propose solutions to address the root causes of violence against Indigenous women

The Committee met for the first time on 26 March 2013, and organized its study along three main themes: violence and its root causes, front-line assistance, and preventing violence against Aboriginal women and girls. In a rare move, the Committee also assigned special status to the native Women's Association of Canada as "expert witnesses," providing them with the opportunity to participate in all meetings of the Committee for the duration of the study and report.

The Committee agreed that NWAC be invited to speak at the beginning of each of the three themes (violence and its causes, front-line assistance, preventing violence against Aboriginal women and girls) and that it be welcome to attend all public meetings. NWAC agreed to be an expert witness, then subsequently appeared at the committee on Thursday, 21 November 2013 voicing displeasure with their role in the Committee. In order to address their concerns the Committee then agreed to the following motion:

It was agreed, — That a representative from the Native Women's Association of Canada be invited to attend all proceedings of the Committee as an expert advisor and expert witness to the Committee.

That the representative be requested to attend each meeting of the Committee and to provide their comments orally or in writing subsequent to each meeting and that the comments be appended to the Committee's testimony.

That in relation to their participation, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodations and living expenses be reimbursed to the representative.

7 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 13 June 2013 (Ruth Proulx, Therapist and Community Outreach Coordinator, Pace Sexual Assault and Crisis Centre).

8 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 5 December 2013 (Chief Cameron Alexis, Assembly of First Nations).

Despite indicating it agreed to the terms of this motion, NWAC failed to provide their comments to the Committee and did not appear at any further meetings, without explanation.

An important part of the Committee's work was to listen to family members of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls tell the story of their loved ones and their experiences with the justice system and victim support services during a special meeting on 9 December 2013. Families openly shared their stories with the Committee with a view to ending this violence that many women and girls in their communities have experienced. The Committee was greatly touched and impressed by their strength, generosity, courage and resilience.

The Committee also held 13 meetings in which it heard from prevention experts and front-line service providers.⁹ In this report we summarize the comments we heard during these meetings, mainly regarding the shortcomings raised in the protection of Aboriginal women and girls against violence, and we present our own recommendations. The testimony of the families had at its core a strong cry that their mothers, daughters, sisters and friends matter. Their courage and endurance in holding onto that conviction found echo among the members of the Committee. With them, the Committee is outraged at the violence which befalls so many Aboriginal women.

⁹ The list of witnesses who appeared before the Committee is in Appendix A, and the list of briefs is in Appendix B. The Committee also decided to fully reproduce the evidence it heard during the special session set aside for families of missing and murdered women and girls in Appendix C.

CHAPTER TWO — SCOPE AND SEVERITY OF VIOLENCE AGAINST ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CANADA

Aboriginal women and girls are among the most vulnerable in Canadian society.¹⁰ Statistics show that they are significantly disadvantaged, particularly with regard to access to housing, education and employment. Aboriginal women and girls are also more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to be victims of violence both within the family unit and outside their home.

Violence against Aboriginal women and girls is a serious concern for us all. The Committee learned that many of them are exposed to violence on a daily basis. Throughout our study, witnesses discussed the many factors that increase the vulnerability of Aboriginal women and girls. These factors, discussed in the next chapter, are complex and interrelated.

From the outset, it is important to mention that the statistics available in Canada on violence against Aboriginal women and girls reflect only part of a much more serious problem. The scope of the violence is not fully understood nor is it quantified. The under-reporting of incidents of violent victimization, particularly in cases of domestic violence, is a long recognized problem in Canada. However, under-reporting is probably a more serious problem in the case at hand because of the historically strained relationship between the police and Aboriginal communities and the difficulty still today that members of these communities have trusting police and believing the police will protect them.

Police were viewed in those days as the people who came and took the children away. We're still living with that. We're still trying to convince communities that we are there to support and help them. The residual effect of those beliefs is still common in a lot of our communities, so it's an uphill battle for us to convince them that we need to move beyond that.¹¹

A. TROUBLING FINDINGS

Year after year, data released by Statistics Canada shows that Aboriginal women and girls are more likely to be victims of violence than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

10 For example, see the testimony of Jeffrey Cyr, Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres, 5 December 2013.

11 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 28 November 2013 (Chief John W. Syrette, President, First Nations Chiefs of Police Association).

One manifestation of this violence is the violence done to them in their own homes. The General Social Survey (GSS)¹² of 2009 found that, like in 1999 and in 2004,¹³ the rate of domestic violence targeting Aboriginal women is at least twice what it is in the general population.¹⁴ The survey also found that Aboriginal women who were victims of domestic violence reported injuries more often than non-Aboriginal women. They are also more likely to say they fear for their lives.

Violence against Aboriginal women and girls is largely perpetrated by an acquaintance of the victim, usually a man. This situation is similar to that of non-Aboriginal women. However, Aboriginal women and girls are much more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to be victims of violence at the hands of strangers who take advantage of their vulnerabilities.

All forms of violence combined, the GSS shows that:

- Aboriginal women are three times more likely to be the target of violent victimization than non-Aboriginal women;
- the majority of victims are Aboriginal women between 15 and 34 years old;¹⁵
- in many cases, the violence is not an isolated event, as more than one-third of all Aboriginal female victims were victimized two or more times.¹⁶

Based on data collected by the police, Aboriginal women are also more likely to be murdered. Between 2004 and 2010, they accounted for at least 8% of homicide victims, despite accounting for 4% of the total female population in Canada.¹⁷

Some witnesses told the Committee that Aboriginal women and girls are also greatly over-represented as victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Many of them work as prostitutes to support themselves and their children; others are victims of trafficking and forced by pimps to work as prostitutes.

12 The two primary objectives of the General Social Survey (GSS) are to gather data on social trends in order to monitor changes in the living conditions and well-being of Canadians over time and to provide information on specific social policy issues of current or emerging interest.

13 For the reference to the GSS of 1999 and 2004, see the testimony of Lisa Hitch (Senior Counsel, Family, Children and Youth Section, Department of Justice), IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 25 April 2013.

14 Shannon Brennan, "[Violent victimization of Aboriginal women in the Canadian provinces, 2009.](#)" *Juristat*, Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 85-002-X, 2011.

15 "In particular, close to two-thirds, 63%, of aboriginal female victims were aged 15 to 34. This age group accounted for just under half, 47%, of the overall female aboriginal population." IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 2 May 2013 (Lynn Barr-Telford, Director General, Health, Justice and Special Surveys Branch, Statistics Canada).

16 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 2 May 2013 (Lynn Barr-Telford, Director General, Health, Justice and Special Surveys Branch, Statistics Canada).

17 Ibid.

We know that sexual exploitation is present in mining and resource extraction projects around the world. We're not sure yet of what's happening in our communities. We've heard anecdotally of 42 Inuit women who have been trafficked through Ottawa in the last four years. Trafficking routes include transit across the Arctic, across the east coast of Canada, as well as to Las Vegas and Miami.¹⁸

Diane Redsky, Project Director, Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada, Canadian Women's Foundation, argued that many girls in Canada are first trafficked into forced prostitution when they are 13 years old. She added:

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

It doesn't end there, though. When they are no longer of value to a trafficker, they become the women in the survival sex industry: 40 years old, poor, and dying. Women's bodies are not equipped to handle the physical and psychological trauma of being sexually exploited and trafficked, whether by circumstances or by force.¹⁹

Kim Pate, Executive Director, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, told the Committee that we have an obligation to take all forms of violence against Aboriginal women seriously, "including sexual violence, not just in the family, not just in a domestic sphere, but also in the context of the increased commodification of women and girls."²⁰

B. DISAPPEARANCES AND MURDERS IDENTIFIED BY THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

There is no official data on the number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. The figure most commonly used to reflect the magnitude of this problem comes from research conducted by NWAC through its Sisters in Spirit initiative. This initiative, which received a federal grant of \$5 million over five years, was intended to address the root causes, circumstances and trends related to the disappearances and murders of Aboriginal women and girls and to raise public awareness about the violence against them.

This first initiative, which ended in 2010, identified 582 missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls across the country.²¹ However, these are only the known cases. The

18 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 6 June 2013 (Katharine Irgaut, Manager, Abuse Prevention, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada).

19 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 6 February 2014.

20 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 30 January 2014.

21 The 582 cases that have been reported in Canada and entered into the database are discussed in NWAC's April 2010 report entitled [What Their Stories Tell Us](#). To be included, the Aboriginal woman or girl must be missing or have died as a result of homicide or negligence or in circumstances family or community members consider suspicious. These circumstances include incidents that police (and sometimes coroners) have declared natural or accidental but that family or community members regard as suspicious.

actual number may be much higher, according to NWAC's Director of Safety and Violence Prevention, Irene Goodwin.²²

The murders and disappearances of Aboriginal women and girls do not belong to the past, insisted Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). He noted that this tragedy is still unfolding today.

The circumstances of the murders and disappearances identified through the Sisters in Spirit initiative are varied. Lisa Hitch of the Department of Justice reminded the Committee that the cases:

range from the victims of serial killers ... through to domestic violence circumstances, family violence circumstances, cases where women have died either crossing highways, because it's the only way to go home, or have disappeared from highways. There are a lot of instances of women who were fully employed and are missing or murdered, in circumstances that were very different from the circumstances that were looked at in the Oppal commission [British Columbia's Missing Women Commission of Inquiry]. There were a lot of young girls who were going to school. There are a number of instances where people died of exposure.²³

According to information gathered by NWAC, 70% of disappearances and 60% of murders occurred in urban areas. Moreover 87% of missing or murdered women and girls were mothers of at least one child.²⁴ This finding is troubling, especially since NWAC's research shows a cycle in which "a mother would go missing, and then the daughter would go missing years later. In some particular family lines, several individuals have gone missing."²⁵ These cases also impact the many children who now have to live without a mother.

Of the 582 cases in the database, 39% occurred after 2000, while 17% occurred in the 1990s. Homicide charges were laid in only 53% of cases. In other words, nearly half of these murder cases remain unsolved, a low percentage compared with the Canadian average. According to data from the 2010 homicide survey, 75% of homicides were solved by police.²⁶

The lack of progress in missing persons cases increases the suffering of families who still hope for news. Charlene Belleau of the AFN told the Committee about the impact of unsolved cases on victims' families:

22 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 30 May 2013 (Irene Goodwin, Director, Violence Prevention and Safety, Native Women's Association of Canada).

23 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 25 April 2013 (Lisa Hitch, Senior Counsel, Family, Children and Youth Section, Department of Justice).

24 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 30 May 2013 (Irene Goodwin, Director, Violence Prevention and Safety, Native Women's Association of Canada).

25 Ibid.

26 To be classified as a "solved homicide," the police have either laid or recommended a charge against the accused, or the accused has died by suicide or other causes. Tina Hotton Mahony, [Homicide in Canada, 2010](#), *Juristat*, Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 85-002-X, 2011.

The alleged perpetrators in most cases are still out there, because police haven't been able to resolve those cases, so families continue to live in trauma from the loss of their daughters.²⁷

From the research gathered through the Sisters in Spirit initiative, of the 261 known cases where criminal charges were laid, 23% of women and girls were killed by a current or ex-partner and 6% by a family member. Approximately 17% of these women and girls were killed by an acquaintance and 16% by a stranger. Lastly, in half of the cases for which information was available (149 cases), the missing women and girls were not involved in prostitution.²⁸

NWAC continues to gather information on new cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls. However, it is difficult to collect reliable data and conduct the necessary investigations to clarify the circumstances of the disappearances and deaths and determine whether the victim was Aboriginal if the victim's ethnic identity was not already established. In March 2013, NWAC put the number of cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls at 668. In her appearance on 30 January 2014, a representative of Human Rights Watch Canada, Liesl Gertholtz, noted the following about the number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls:

Recently published research indicates that the number of missing and murdered indigenous women across Canada may be over 800, but comprehensive data collection efforts are hampered by the fact that there is currently no precedent for the standardized collection of ethnicity data by police forces in Canada.²⁹

Several witnesses called for the establishment of an independent public inquiry into the issue of missing or murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, adding their voices to those of leaders of national Aboriginal organizations, premiers and leaders of provinces and territories and several international organizations.³⁰

Witnesses expressed several objectives for the desired independent public inquiry, including:

- allowing victims' friends and family to be heard and communities to start on the path toward reconciliation;

27 IWFA, 2nd session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 5 December 2013 (Charlene Belleau, Assembly of First Nations).

28 Highlights of NWAC's 2010 report entitled *What their Stories Tell Us* are in a draft working document called [Draft Justice Framework to Address Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls](#), approved in November 2013 by federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for justice and public safety to facilitate ongoing dialogue with Aboriginal groups and organizations and other partners.

29 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 30 January 2014 (Liesl Gertholtz, Executive Director, Women's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch Canada).

30 The establishment of an independent public inquiry to shed light on missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada has been recommended in several international reports, including a report by Amnesty International (Amnesty International Canada, [Stolen Sisters](#), consulted on 28 February 2011) and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Concluding observations of the Committee: Canada, CEDAW/C/CAN/CO/7, 7 November 2008).

- educating the Canadian public about the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls;
- developing a coordinated national action plan to address such violence and its causes; and
- establishing benchmarks for evaluating initiatives aimed at ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

Other witnesses, including Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, believe that the needs of Aboriginal communities are too dire to spend money on establishing such a commission, saying it would be better to use the money to fund community services and programs:

Every day, I hear stories about girls being raped and girls being beaten — every day — and instead of the government spending millions of dollars in hearings over the next couple of years, we need your help now, today, to hear us as Aboriginal people, and to put some money into the police forces to find who's responsible for the violence, for the missing and murdered women and girls.

We need funds and resources to develop awareness and education programs on the reserves and in schools, programs about violence and the missing and murdered women, because some of these women come from the reserves. They have really big dreams of starting school, but they get grabbed by a pimp and the next thing we see is that they're in the newspaper because they've been murdered.

What I'm asking for most is the protection from violence for the women and children and to find who's responsible for the violence and the murdered women. The government and the police services have the responsibility to provide justice for victims and end the violence.³¹

C. THE NEED TO COLLECT DATA ON INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

Following the completion of Sisters in Spirit in 2010, funding has been provided through Evidence to Action and Evidence to Action II, to build on the information learned through the first project and to support communities in their response to the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls. A number of witnesses criticized the decision not to continue funding for the original project.³²

In Budget 2010, the Government announced that it would establish a national database for missing persons and unidentified remains as part of the new Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains. Even though such a database would obviously be helpful in solving missing persons and murder cases, some witnesses said they feared that this database will not adequately capture the

31 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 13 June 2013 (Marie Sutherland, as an individual). Ms. Sutherland works for the Native Women's Transition Centre and for high-risk groups.

32 Because disappearances are not in themselves offences under the *Criminal Code*, Statistics Canada does not collect data on them.

Aboriginal identity of the victims. The NWAC representatives stressed that there are “substantial gaps in the collection by the RCMP of information on the Aboriginal identity of victims, which makes this a poor source of information.”³³

Lynn Barr-Telford, a Statistics Canada official, noted that police officers do not often collect information on Aboriginal identity because of the operational difficulties of definitively establishing a victim’s background and conflicts between privacy legislation and policing policies. Rebecca Kong, Chief of Statistics Canada’s Correctional Services Program, also spoke about Aboriginal people’s reluctance to share this information with police, emphasizing the following:

Part of that is having the community buy-in and having public relations and public education campaigns to explain to the indigenous people there the advantages of providing that information.

The issue of collecting information on Aboriginal identity of victims through police-reported data had been long-standing. From 2001 to 2010, Statistics Canada worked with partners in the policing community and in the ministries across the country to try to improve the information. We tried to put in place some recommendations. We did some consultations with communities in Saskatchewan. In the end, there were still issues regarding internal policing policies around providing the data and concerns about the quality of the information based on visual identification. There were also concerns in terms of the actual collection of the information and whether that question is always asked.³⁴

A number of witnesses expressed concern about this lack of reliable data on the Aboriginal identity of victims. They believe that police officers should systematically collect information on the Aboriginal identity of victims and alleged perpetrators. Such information would provide a better picture of the experience of Aboriginal women and girls in the justice system and contribute to finding solutions that meet their needs. Ms. Porteous, Executive Director of the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia, pointed out during her appearance that “we need to have that information if we’re going to be developing appropriate and useful public policy.”³⁵ In the same vein, Mr. Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, National Chief of the AFN, said the following: “Police services need to work together to produce verifiable numbers on incidents of violence against Indigenous women and girls so that progress can be measured.”³⁶

33 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 30 May 2013 (Irene Goodwin, Director, Violence Prevention and Safety, Native Women’s Association of Canada).

34 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 2 May 2013 (Rebecca Kong, Chief, Correctional Services Program, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada).

35 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 6 June 2013 (Tracy Porteous, Executive Director, Ending Violence Association of British Columbia).

36 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 5 December 2013 (Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations).

CHAPTER THREE: ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

This chapter discusses the factors which make Aboriginal women and girls more vulnerable to violence and, more importantly, what needs to be done to prevent this violence from occurring.

The root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls are varied, complex, and interrelated. Much of what the Committee heard has been repeatedly identified in other reports: domestic violence, human trafficking, substance abuse, prostitution, poverty, lack of housing and poor living conditions, lack of prevention services such as mental health services, and the ongoing legacy of residential schools. In fact, throughout the study, witnesses have highlighted that much is already known about violence against Aboriginal women. Some said that the question has been “researched to death”.³⁷ Although we will not go into depth on the social and historical factors which render Aboriginal women so vulnerable to violence some of the key factors are worth noting.

Preventing violence against Aboriginal women and girls requires an acknowledgement of these root causes and a concerted effort to address them. This requires the engagement and determination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike, as Assistant Commissioner Kevin Brosseau, of the RCMP, highlighted:

[T]he underlying causes ... leading to violence are complex and multi-sectoral, and in fact need everyone to be standing shoulder to shoulder and arm in arm to deal with them.³⁸

A. THE LEGACY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The legacy of residential schools and the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their families by the child protection system in the 1960s have led to a breakdown of the family and the community for many Aboriginal people. This breakdown is manifested in a number of ways, including violence and addiction. Several people spoke about this in their testimony:

Even if we didn't go to the residential schools, our generation, I'm sad to say, is still affected by what happened there. I won't tell you my personal story, but it's everybody's story across Canada for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women in our generation who are still affected by that era³⁹.

37 In fact, *Researched to Death* is the title of a report written by the Pacific Association of First Nations Women, Ending Violence Association of British Columbia & BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre, [Researched to Death: B.C. Aboriginal Women and Violence](#), Final Report, Sponsored by the British Columbia Ministry of Community Services and Minister Responsible for Seniors' and Women's Issues, 9 September 2005.

38 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 13 June 2013 (Commanding Officer, “D” Division).

39 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 30 May 2013 (Michèle Audette, President, Native Women's Association of Canada).

I think what you're seeing here in listening to all these stories is the direct result of how this country has treated Aboriginal people from the get-go. The rippling effects of residential school, the breakdown of our families, have had a tremendous impact on all of us.⁴⁰

B. POVERTY AND HOUSING

While some First Nations communities are benefiting from economic development, many others experience high levels of poverty. For example, Mary Teegee, Executive Director, Child and Family Services, Carrier Sekani Family Services told the Committee about her community in northern British Columbia where there is a 90% unemployment rate. As she reminded the Committee “We know that's a root cause of violence.” Jeffrey Cyr, Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres, also noted that:

[P]overty and social exclusion among the urban aboriginal population in Canada are very serious issues that impact many thousands of children, youth, and single families in their daily lives... Furthermore, poverty and social exclusion are linked to violence in our communities.⁴¹

Ms. Redsky also discussed the link between poverty and violence during her appearance, noting the following:

[T]here is a strong link, as you are aware, between poverty and violence against women. Of all Aboriginal women, and this is first nation, Métis, and Inuit women, 36% live in poverty. This is much higher than the average of 9% for all Canadians.⁴²

The high levels of poverty and lack of housing limit the options available to women experiencing violence. Women are sometimes forced to stay with an abusive partner because they have nowhere else to go. The Committee has heard that those who leave their communities, or leave an abusive household sometimes find themselves homeless, or forced into the sex trade. Irene Goodwin of the NWAC noted:

[S]ocio-economic challenges that can impede their safety and welfare and lead to increased risks of sexual exploitation or human trafficking, or to falling victim to violence that may lead to their disappearance or death.⁴³

40 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 9 December 2013 (Connie Greyeyes, as an individual).

41 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 5 December 2013 (Jeffrey Cyr, Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres).

42 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 6 February 2014 (Diane Redsky, Project Director, Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada, Canadian Women's Foundation).

43 IWFA, 1st session, 41st legislature, *Evidence*, 30 May 2013 (Irene Goodwin, Director, Violence Prevention and Safety, Native Women's Association of Canada).

In the same vein, Marie Sutherland noted:

They come from abusive situations on the reserve, where there is no help for them, so they choose to leave to find a safe place. They meet a man who is very nice to them. The next thing you know, they're using drugs and alcohol, being raped, and being beaten⁴⁴.

The Committee heard that the *Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act*, which was brought into force in December 2013, will play an important role in strengthening the rights and protections available to Aboriginal women in the event of a domestic dispute. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth, noted:

When that act was proclaimed in December — and it was a long time coming — I felt, very much so, that it would create a new remedy, or clarify a remedy, which is a protective order that could be obtained under that act and executed on a reserve to allow women and children to remain in the home, even if they were not, for instance, the holders of a certificate of possession of that property or a location ticket under a reserve *Indian Act* land system. That legislation is important.⁴⁵

C. RACISM

Racism adds to the vulnerability of Aboriginal women to violence. It shapes the experience people have with services which should help them; shapes the ideas and expectations of service providers, whether or not this is intentional on their part; and it shapes the response of the wider community to incidents of violence

Some witnesses illustrated the painful reality of a larger society which minimizes the experience of missing and murdered Aboriginal women:

We have two missing girls from 2008 and still they're not found. We lost a little baby lion on the reserve two years later. We had a search party. We had the police. We had helicopters. We had game wardens. We had everything. When these two human beings went missing, we had nothing. There were no dogs, no search party, no police, no media. What do we do when this happens? Who do we go to?⁴⁶

In two separate instances in 1994, two 15-year-old indigenous girls, Roxanna Thiara and Alishia Germaine, were found murdered in Prince George. The body of a third 15-year-old indigenous girl, Ramona Wilson, who disappeared that same year, was found in Smithers, in central British Columbia, in April 1995. Only in 2002, after the disappearance of a 26-year-old non-indigenous woman, Nicola Hoar, while hitchhiking along a road that connects Prince George and Smithers, was there media attention all over Canada. Her

44 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 9 December 2013 (Marie Sutherland, as an individual).

45 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 13 February 2014 (Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative, British Columbia, Representative for Children and Youth).

46 IWFA, 1st session, 41st legislature, *Evidence*, 13 June 2013 (Bridget Tolley, Co-Founder, Families of Sisters in Spirit).

name was also on a list of the unsolved murders and other disappearances along what has been dubbed the Highway of Tears. But what about the other indigenous girls?⁴⁷

Some witnesses suggested that family members are sometimes not taken seriously because of race-related stereotypes, and that this creates a situation of mistrust between Aboriginal people and the services which are there to provide help. Speaking about her family's experience with reporting their mother as a missing person, Lorna Martin, daughter of Marie Jean Saint Saveur who was reported missing in Alberta in 1987, told the Committee:

One of the first questions the RCMP asked my sister was if she [my mother] drank. Arlene couldn't deny it. She didn't lie. She said yes. He said, "They go on a drinking binge for two or three days and then they come back"...When you're full of anxiety, you're hurting, it feels like a kick in the stomach or in the head when somebody you're asking for help says something like that. Right away, any chance of trust, any line of communication is.... There's a barrier right there. You might as well put your hand up. There's no help there. They said our mom was a drunken Indian.⁴⁸

Some witnesses expressed they felt that persisting racism was at the root of inaction to address the high levels of violence against Aboriginal women:

I will say, though, that racism is still an active toxin in our society. It remains as a deadly ingredient, responsible for much of the inaction that I think we're all facing right now. I think we stand on a legacy of violence and racism left by colonization and residential schools, but that's not in the past: those attitudes exist today. I can testify, as a front-line worker and as an advocate for over three decades, that I can still see my First Nations sisters being treated differently and being treated with less respect than they deserve.⁴⁹

The Committee recognizes that we all have a responsibility in acknowledging and challenging the racist attitudes which continue to make Aboriginal women and girls more vulnerable to violence.

D. SYSTEMS AND SERVICES THAT ARE FAILING ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

The Committee heard from some witnesses that:

- There are not enough culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal women in urban areas;
- Although they experience higher levels of marginalization, many Aboriginal people live in rural and remote communities where services are not available;

47 IWFA, 1st session, 41st legislature, *Evidence*, 30 May 2013 (Michèle Audette, President, Native Women's Association of Canada).

48 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 9 December 2013 (Lorna Martin, as an individual).

49 IWFA, 1st session, 41st legislature, *Evidence*, 6 June 2013 (Tracy Porteous, Ending Violence Association of British Columbia).

- There are jurisdictional barriers between the various levels of government which result in people falling through the cracks; and
- As a result of their collective experience with the residential school system, there is a high level of distrust between Aboriginal people and services such as the child welfare system and police forces.

As a result, Aboriginal women and girls may not benefit from the level of prevention services which would be warranted by their high level of vulnerability to violence.

The findings of the Committee are consistent with other documented findings related to the way that systems and services are failing Aboriginal women and girls and making them more vulnerable to violence. Committee members and witnesses noted that much of this is widely known and reported. This is certainly the case regarding the need for prevention services. A paper synthesizing the key themes in the literature relating to the root causes and vulnerabilities leading to violence against Aboriginal women that was prepared for the Government of British Columbia in 2011 summarized the situation as follows:

Lack of culturally appropriate, community-based services, particularly in rural and remote communities, also prevents women from leaving abusive relationships and getting the help they need to heal and to establish their independence. Abusive men are equally vulnerable to the same lack of resources and supports as their victims. Distrust of mainstream child welfare and justice systems means that Aboriginal women are reluctant to report family violence and to pursue legal redress. The inadequacy of services is compounded by a lack of integration and coordination between and across funders and providers. The literature draws particular attention to the jurisdictional complexities that prevent comprehensive and seamless provision of services.⁵⁰

The lack of coordination of services among the various levels of government was raised by a number of witnesses. The Committee was reminded of Jordan's principle, which was unanimously adopted in the House of Commons in 2007. Named after Jordan River Anderson who died while governments disputed his home care expenses, Jordan's Principle, "ensures that First Nations children receive the health and social services they need in a timely manner even in the face of funding disputes between the federal and provincial governments."⁵¹ Commenting on the application of Jordan's Principle, the British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth told the Committee that:

[O]n the ground that's more of a theory than a practice. Frequently, for girls, they're just caught in that situation where everybody apparently has a responsibility, but nobody's on the ground to respond. That type of accountability is needed.⁵²

50 British Columbia, Ministry of Citizen's Services, [Stopping Violence Against Aboriginal Women: A Summary of Root Causes, Vulnerabilities and Recommendations](#), Knowledge and Information Services, Office of the Chief Information Officer, British Columbia, 23 February 2011.

51 British Columbia, Representative for Children and Youth, *Lost in the Shadows: How a Lack of Help Meant a Loss of Hope for One First Nations Girl*, February 2014.

52 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 13 February 2014 (Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative, British Columbia, Representative for Children and Youth).

The Committee heard compelling evidence about the importance of investing in Aboriginal children and addressing the gaps in the child welfare system. Cindy Blackstock, Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada reminded the Committee that:

Although we can make the argument that for other children education and child welfare are provincial jurisdictions, for First Nations children the federal government has a direct role in the provision of child welfare for 163,000 children.⁵³

The Committee heard that the First Nations child welfare system has failed in many ways and continues to render First Nations children more vulnerable. We were told, among other things,

- First Nations child welfare services are underfunded compared to their provincial equivalents;
- Women sometimes avoid reaching out to supportive services (such as calling the police, or going to a shelter) for fear of having their children apprehended;
- Young women who have gone through the child welfare system are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviour, exposing them to violence; and
- Children often come into the care of child and family services not for abuse, but rather because their families are unable to provide the necessities of life, such as adequate housing.

The Committee heard that “Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has increased funding for First Nations child and family services dramatically over the past 16 years, from \$193 million in 1996–97 to approximately \$618 million in funding in 2012–13.”⁵⁴

Furthermore, there is additional support to a prevention-focused approach to child welfare, which is now being implemented in six provinces. The Committee heard that “[u]nder the six current tripartite frameworks, more than \$100 million per year in additional ongoing funding is now dedicated to implementing the new approach.”⁵⁵

Despite this increase, First Nations maintain that they still do not have the level of funding which will allow them to do the prevention work which has been a key feature of provincial child welfare systems.

53 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 6 February 2013 (Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada).

54 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 2 May 2013 (Françoise Ducros, Assistant Deputy Minister, Education and Social Development Programs and Partnerships, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development).

55 Ibid.

E. AWARENESS-RAISING, EDUCATION AND PREVENTION

Access to a quality primary and secondary education and a safe learning environment were also identified by witnesses to the Committee as key factors in empowering Aboriginal communities to prevent violence against women and children. Ms. Turpel-Lafond noted the Budget 2014 investments in education as a positive development in this regard.

Without a doubt, the [Budget 2014] education investment is a really important one, and as that issue proceeds at the federal level, if there is the ability to get broad-based agreement and have a legislative instrument through the Parliament of Canada, that can allow us to have a more solid footing for that, with greater accountability for outcomes and results, particularly for girls. I think that will be superb, and I think that's a major investment and long overdue. I think everyone will applaud and welcome that.⁵⁶

When talking about education and prevention, it is important to distinguish between the violence that Aboriginal women and girls experience within their communities and the violence they experience at the hands of strangers. One requires education and awareness within Aboriginal communities themselves, while the other requires education and awareness-raising in the larger community. Both are necessary.

1. Awareness-raising and education in the larger community

We have seen the role that racism plays in making Aboriginal women more vulnerable to violence. Earlier in this chapter, we saw how the public outcry to violence against Aboriginal women pales in comparison to the outcry against violence against non-Aboriginal women. Rectifying this requires awareness-raising and education of the non-Aboriginal community, as well as the Aboriginal community. If we fail to do this education piece, the invisibility of Aboriginal women will continue to render them vulnerable to violence. Canadians need to better understand the reality of our Aboriginal peoples, to take responsibility for improving relations with our Aboriginal neighbours, and a growing sensitivity to the ways that our preconceived ideas render them more vulnerable to violence. This means ensuring that there are more culturally relevant programs and service in our communities, and that service providers have received adequate cultural sensitivity training. The Committee has heard that tools have been created for this purpose. For example, NWAC introduced a community resource guide which it created to raise awareness:

[T]his type of tool and resource is being utilized by a wide variety of people. We were surprised, when we did our reporting and looked at the number of people who are accessing it, by the broad range. We have the RCMP in one area utilizing this particular tool and resource to train their cadets, and we also have educators — secondary and public school teachers — who are using this particular resource for informing their student populations, and in particular native studies. We also have victims services

56 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 13 February 2014 (Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative, British Columbia, Representative for Children and Youth).

looking at this tool. They all use it differently. It's a very, very big resource with a lot of supplemental pieces.⁵⁷

The Committee has also heard that men have a key role to play in preventing violence against women. Aboriginal communities have played a key role in identifying and emphasizing a holistic approach to violence which includes men in finding solutions. Tracy Porteous, Executive Director, Ending Violence Association of British Columbia identified a best practice of men educating other men about violence:

“Be More Than a Bystander: Break the Silence on Violence Against Women”, has B.C. Lions football players speaking to young men in high schools across the province. They're also doing public service announcements for us on T.V. and radio to try to get the vast majority of men who don't commit violence to begin speaking up to the minority who do. This is my favourite program after 31 years of working in the field. Women can talk to groups until we're completely exhausted, as many of us have, but men don't listen to women. Men will listen to men.⁵⁸

2. Awareness-raising and education within Aboriginal communities

The Committee heard that, in some Aboriginal communities, violence against women was accepted as a part of life; efforts are required to challenge those assumptions, among both men and women. Witnesses told the Committee:

There was a time when it was okay for women to be treated that way, to be physically and sexually abused and all that comes with that. My community developed the attitude that women were to blame. That's one of the key areas that every community has to work on.⁵⁹

Some of the risk factors that were identified were the ongoing normalization of abuse, whether it be childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence, or just violence in general. This is just something that is commonplace. People grow up with this as being just a part of life, therefore it's easy to fall into the role of victim or perpetrator.⁶⁰

The Committee also heard that it was important that awareness-raising and education be developed by and for Aboriginal people:

As women in our communities, we have a lead role in making sure that attitudes change, and that requires a lot of prevention programs, a lot of education, but it's coming from us, the women in the community.⁶¹

57 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 30 May 2013 (Irene Goodwin, Director, Violence Prevention and Safety, Native Women's Association of Canada).

58 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 6 June 2013 (Tracy Porteous, Ending Violence Association of British Columbia).

59 IWFA, 2^d Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 21 November 2013 (Burma Bushie, Co-Founder, Community Holistic Circle Healing, Hollow Water First Nation).

60 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 13 June 2013 (Jamie Crozier, Coordinator, Caribou Child and Youth Centre).

61 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 21 November 2013, (Burma Bushie, Co-Founder, Community Holistic Circle Healing, Hollow Water First Nation).

There are a number of promising practices being implemented around the country to address violence against Aboriginal women. Despite this, there is still much to be done to support Aboriginal women and men in their work of awareness-raising, education and prevention:

Indigenous communities are recognizing the role they play and are taking action. Two friendship centre programs in particular address violence against aboriginal women. One is the moose hide campaign. This is where men wear a small patch of moose hide to symbolize their commitment to stand up against violence towards aboriginal women and children.⁶²

Examples of Best Practices For Awareness-Raising and Education

- The Alberta First Nations Regional Board for Family Violence Prevention provides an example of prevention and partnership. It manages the prevention project funding from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada for three treaty areas and has formed partnerships with other organizations in hosting a series of youth gatherings to ...
- The Lac La Ronge Indian Child and Family Services Agency in Saskatchewan delivers a comprehensive program in four schools that offer high school education. The program involves students, teachers, parents, and communities in reducing violence and risk behaviours.
- The Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach in Quebec currently delivers a multi-approach prevention project. It offers family violence education awareness workshops and radio talk shows in the community, parenting courses, training on bullying for teachers and school staff, workshops for children of alcoholic parents, and group sessions for alcoholics.

F. THE NEED TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY CAPACITY

The families we met with identified major gaps in the provision of front-line support services. The stories they told us revealed that many victims simply did not have access to the services they needed. For many of these women, front-line services could not appropriately respond to the violence inflicted on them by their partner. Others suffered from addictions and did not have access to the treatment they needed in a timely fashion.

Given that many Aboriginal women and girls move frequently back and forth between reserves and urban centres, witnesses also told us that more human and financial resources are needed to ensure the programs and services likely to help them are available wherever they are.⁶³

62 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 5 December 2013 (Jeffrey Cyr, Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres).

63 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 13 June 2013 (Mary Teegee, Executive Director, Child and Family Services, Carrier Sekani Family Services).

Some of the witnesses agreed that the capacities of Aboriginal communities should be strengthened.

Promising preventive measures

- The programs and services that work are often the result of a collective vision. One promising approach the Committee learned about is the hub model implemented in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. This program is led by the community's chief of police and establishes links between the providers of various services, including health, social and education services, in order to help vulnerable people who come in contact with the police. When a police officer responds to a situation involving a vulnerable person, the case is passed on to an interdisciplinary team whose job is to mobilize the whole range of services deemed necessary to help the person escape the problem situation. The model therefore enables police forces, social services, health services and the education system to work together so that people in need receive the services and support they need.

Those who administer programs and services on reserves also highlighted the need to provide ongoing and long-term funding for important community initiatives.

The Committee has heard that the implementation of effective solutions require a coordinated effort by the community and the various levels of government, as Charlene Belleau of the Assembly of First Nations illustrated in her testimony:

In the healing process that we've set up through our community to deal with that abuse and violence.... If we are to be successful in the work we need to do with violence against women, certainly it starts within our own communities, but also it requires working closely with the various provincial and federal jurisdictions.⁶⁴

The Committee heard about funding opportunities provided by various departments to address violence against women and public safety of communities. For example:

- Status of Women Canada's Women's Program offers a \$19-million-per-year grants and contributions program that works primarily with non-profit organizations across the country to fund community-level projects.
- Since 2010, Public Safety Canada has administered a program that enables Aboriginal communities to develop community safety plans that are tailored to the needs of each community. Budget 2010 provided \$5.7 million over five years to implement these safety plans through contribution agreements. "Generally the agreements cover the cost of a coordinator in the community, plus some funds for training or engagement

64 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 5 December 2013 (Charlene Belleau, Assembly of First Nations).

activities.”⁶⁵ Most of the agreements provide for amounts ranging from \$45,000 to \$50,000. In May 2013, the Committee learned that Public Safety Canada had completed only one community safety plan, while five more were under development. Community mobilization activities had been carried out in 25 Aboriginal communities, and 190 people had been trained to work as community facilitators or champions in their communities.⁶⁶ Given that communities are best placed to set priorities for genuine change and are central to the development of these community safety plans, some witnesses said they would like Public Safety Canada to devote more resources to the program so that more communities can benefit from it. Budget 2014 provides \$25 million over five years beginning in 2015–2016 to continue the initiatives launched in Budget 2010, including the community safety plan development program.

- Budget 2012 provided \$175 million over two years to fund proposals that support innovative partnerships between First Nations, provinces and the federal government to improve K-12 education on-reserve, and to support second- and third-level K-12 education service delivery on reserve. Included in the \$1.9 billion investment in Budget 2014 for K-12 education on reserve was a further \$160 million over four years beginning in 2015-16 for these types of proposals.

Federal officials acknowledged that these funding opportunities experienced uptake challenges. Testimony from witnesses such as Linda Savoie of Status of Women Canada confirmed that it would be a good idea to review the programs to make them more accessible to communities:

I would say that at this time, it is probably difficult for the communities to know where to turn. It is very important that within the federal family, the agencies and departments provide clear information concerning what is going on and who can do what. Even if we are making great strides, there is certainly room for improvement in coordination and complementarity.⁶⁷

Like a number of witnesses, Ms. Savoie underscored the fact that eliminating violence against Aboriginal women and girls is a shared responsibility. Consequently, the efforts of other levels of government, Aboriginal peoples, civil society and other interested parties are required.

65 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 2 May 2013 (Shawn Tupper, Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Safety and Partnerships Branch, Public Safety Canada).

66 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 2 May 2013 (Kimberly Lavoie, Director, Aboriginal Corrections Policy Division, Public Safety Canada).

67 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 23 May 2013 (Linda Savoie, Director General, Women's Program and Regional Operations Directorate, Status of Women Canada).

CHAPTER FOUR — PROTECTING VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE AND SUPPORTING VICTIMS' FAMILIES

As shown in Chapter 3, numerous factors put Aboriginal people, particularly women and girls, at greater risk of violence. According to witnesses, there is a need to address these factors through targeted measures and the introduction of a social safety system that is at least equivalent to that which serves the rest of Canadians. However, no system is perfect, and if we are to protect Aboriginal women and girls in a fair and equitable manner, we must also ensure an appropriate response when an act of violence is reported. The following chapter examines the resources and services that are called into action when an act of violence or a disappearance is reported.

Throughout the study, witnesses pointed to significant shortcomings in the protection given to Aboriginal women and girls who are victims of violence. Generally speaking, Aboriginal women who are trying to flee an abusive situation, especially women living on reserve or in rural or isolated communities, face considerable challenges: emergency and support services are lacking or inadequate; women often have difficult relationships with the police; and they fear losing custody of their children if they turn to the authorities. Witnesses also emphasized that there have been serious breakdowns in communication between the police and the families of missing and murdered women and girls.

A. CHALLENGES TO PROTECTING VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Many Aboriginal communities, particularly First Nations and rural or isolated communities, are ill-equipped to assist girls and women who are victims of violence. These communities face a number of daily challenges, including the lack of a continuous police presence, a shortage of shelters and second-stage housing for abused women and their children, and limited resources to ensure their safety over the long term. In many cases, emergency services are underfunded and unable to meet peoples' needs on a "round-the-clock basis".

The Committee heard that access to emergency shelters and second-stage housing is far from equal across Canada. Many Aboriginal women living on reserve and in rural or isolated communities have no safe place to go when they need it. Michèle Audette, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada, described the situation on First Nations reserves:

How come we have 633 First Nations communities and we only have [41] shelters to protect women and children—[41] shelters here in Canada?⁶⁸ We have nyet, zero second

68 According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, there were 41 shelters for abused women on reserves in Canada in 2013.

housing houses to which women can go afterwards. A shelter is just to protect you; there is no real healing process there or empowerment for the women.⁶⁹

Women living in Inuit communities also have very limited access to emergency and second-stage housing. Tracy O'Hearn, Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, told the Committee that more than 70% of Inuit communities do not have a shelter for abused women and children. For example, Nunavik has three shelters to serve 14 northern villages. This poses a major problem, said Ms. O'Hearn, given the seriousness and extent of family violence. As she told the Committee, "[F]amily violence continues to be the most significant issue in Inuit communities."⁷⁰

Some witnesses stated that shelters on First Nations reserves also receive less funding than others. Anita Olsen Harper, a consultant with the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, stated that, "In some places they are funded half of what mainstream or provincially funded women's shelters are."⁷¹

The situation is critical, and many witnesses said they are hoping for additional government funding so that all women and girls who are victims of violence can get timely access to the protection and support they need. Witnesses called for action on two fronts. First, there is an urgent need to increase the number of shelters and second-stage housing on reserve and in rural or remote communities. Second, the funding for existing shelters must be increased. Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo spoke on the type of funding that First Nations require:

[T]here need to be immediate increased investments in front-line services and shelters on reserve and in rural areas so that every First Nations woman and girl experiencing violence has access to immediate support.⁷²

According to the testimony, the lack of a continuous police presence in many Aboriginal communities fails to protect Aboriginal women and girls who are victims of violence by making them more vulnerable. This issue was raised by many witnesses, including John Domm, Chief of Police in Rama, Ontario.

With ... a lack of policing presence there is no law. It's a sense of lawlessness. It's a lack of a sense of security and safety. Even if you wanted to report it who are you going to report it to? If you do report it who's going to be there to safeguard you? Who's going to

69 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 21 November 2013 (Michèle Audette, President, Native Women's Association of Canada).

70 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 6 June 2013 (Tracy O'Hearn, Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada).

71 IWFA, 2nd Session 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 5 December 2013, (Anita Olsen Harper, counsellor National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence). It is worth noting that the funding for emergency shelters provided by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada through its Family Violence Prevention Program is available only to Aboriginal people living on reserve. Most Aboriginal communities in the territories do not have access to this funding.

72 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 5 December 2013 (National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, Assembly of First Nations).

be there to help you? And it's not just for the first few hours or the first day but the next day, and the day after that, and the week after that.⁷³

Committee members heard that the financial and human resources allocated to policing in Aboriginal communities are largely inadequate, whether services are provided by First Nations, the province or the RCMP. Witnesses called on all levels of government to increase funding for policing in these communities. According to Chief Domm, it would also be beneficial to create a dedicated position within all Aboriginal police services to deal with female victims of violence.

The funding of police services is an important issue for many Inuit and First Nations communities. The Committee heard that this is a particularly pressing issue for communities that manage their own police services through the First Nations Policing Program (FNPP). The FNPP is a national policing program for Inuit communities and First Nations reserves. There are two main types of policing agreements under the FNPP:

- self-administered agreements, where a First Nation or Inuit community manages its own police service pursuant to provincial policing legislation and regulations; and
- community tripartite agreements, where a dedicated contingent of officers from an existing police service, typically the RCMP, provides policing services to a First Nation or Inuit community.⁷⁴

The FNPP is funded according to a cost-sharing formula, with 52% of costs being covered by the federal government and 48% by the provincial government. The FNPP is not intended to replace policing services usually provided by the province or territory, but rather to provide Inuit and Aboriginal communities on reserve with police services that are professional, effective and culturally appropriate. Evaluations of the FNPP are generally positive.

Other witnesses stated that funding levels for the FNPP are clearly inadequate, especially given the geographic and socioeconomic conditions facing many Inuit and First Nations communities. The Committee also heard that First Nations police services must receive the necessary support and funding if they are to provide a service comparable to that enjoyed by the rest of the Canadian public.

73 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 28 November 2013 (Chief John Domm, Rama Police Service).

74 As part of the community tripartite agreements, the Inuit or First Nations communities are to create and maintain a community consultative group to provide liaison and maintain a dialogue between the community and the police. The committee also helps to identify objectives, priorities and priorities for policing.

B. REPORTING ACTS OF VIOLENCE OR DISAPPEARANCES

The RCMP traumatized my life in the past, back in my drinking days. They hurt me. They didn't protect me. Every time I got involved with them the only way that they had to deal with my anger issues was to throw me in jail, or get hit one way or the other.⁷⁵

I've lived quite a painful life. I have been gang-raped, and raped. I have been beaten up. I did go to the police, and was dismissed. I'm standing there at the hospital with my lips cut open, black eye, knowing and telling them who did it, but they're telling me that alcohol was a factor, that we were probably drunk. I can't tell you what that does to a person after hearing it so many times.⁷⁶

Throughout its study, the Committee heard credible and very moving accounts from victims' families, women and stakeholders. Their testimony indicates that the police do not always take incidents of violence involving Aboriginal people very seriously. A number of witnesses also complained of the hateful and racist remarks that the police made to them. This type of remark makes it very difficult to build a relationship of trust between Aboriginal people and the police.

The Committee heard testimony that police forces share best practices for how they investigate missing person's cases with First Nation's police institutions. In Ontario, training that is offered to the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) with respect to missing persons investigations is also made available to all of our First Nation policing partners. Police organizations also indicated to the Committee that they were unaware if the percentage of resolved cases relating to murdered and missing aboriginals differed from that of the mainstream population.

Most of the victims' families who met with the Committee said that they felt the police had treated them unfairly. They also had the sense that the police had not made every effort to solve the case of their missing or murdered family member. In many instances, the police did not seem to take the report seriously. The following testimony illustrates the sense of injustice that many families felt with regard to their treatment by the police.

When my sister went missing, she was reported missing, but it was 10 days before her case was even looked at. My other sister, Tina, was told that she was probably out there somewhere; that's what the police told us, that they weren't going to do anything right now, that she'd turn up, she always did. My sister was exploited at a very young age. She used drugs to cope. Claudette wasn't a person who wouldn't keep in contact with her family. She always phoned someone. She was really close with my sister Tina and stayed with her a lot of the time, but Tina hadn't heard from her. A report was made, and 10 days later.... Only because we started putting pressure on the police did they start looking into her case.⁷⁷

75 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 9 December 2013 (Lisa Big John, as an individual).

76 *Ibid.* (Connie Greyeyes, as an individual).

77 *Ibid.* (Bernadette Smith, as an individual).

The night we reported Denise missing the one officer had the nerve to say to the other officer right in front of Glen and me, "She's probably downtown doing whatever she has to do to get her next fix."⁷⁸

The second night that she went missing, my sister said, "My daughter is not the kind of person to go out and prostitute herself, get drunk, and be rowdy and disappear — not my daughter." Her daughter was going to university. Nobody believed my sister. The RCMP said, oh no, she's doing her own thing — the audacity. If one of your children was missing, you would know your daughter or your son so well that you would know that they would come home or not come home. You'd know. All of us know our children and what they're capable of. My sister knew her daughter was not the kind of girl to go out all night long. Sure enough, four years later, the RCMP made a statement and they found out who killed my niece. They found out who killed her because he had told on himself. He was bragging about how much he despises native people.⁷⁹

A recurring theme in the testimony is the failure by police to respond to acts of violence against Aboriginal women. Carole Brazeau, National Project Coordinator for the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, commented on this issue:

The role of the police is to serve and protect, I believe. When women do call in cases of family violence, it is important that the police intervene. It is a criminal act. We did have reports from shelter directors that in certain communities the police were not intervening. It would be important for them to intervene.⁸⁰

Lastly, while the Committee did not receive any specific data about sentencing in cases involving violence against Aboriginal women, some witnesses were outraged by the light sentences given to offenders who abuse Aboriginal women.

Six months before Denise was murdered, I barely got my younger daughter out of the exact same situation. He had taken a baseball bat to her face. She had to have full facial reconstruction, and she has brain damage. He got three months in jail — that was all, three months.⁸¹

... judges and the police making deals. What about the families, the ones who suffer? They're the ones suffering today. We're the ones suffering today. We carry that every day. We go to bed with it at night, and we get up with it in the morning.⁸²

C. IMPROVING POLICE INVESTIGATIONS

A commission of inquiry was established in British Columbia after Robert Pickton was convicted of murdering six women. Part of the mandate of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry was to determine the reasons why the Vancouver Police Department and the RCMP failed to arrest this serial killer sooner, despite numerous

78 Ibid. (Amy Miller, as an individual).

79 Ibid. (Brenda Bignell, as an individual).

80 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 5 December 2013 (Carole Brazeau, National Project Coordinator, National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence).

81 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 9 Decembre 2013 (Amy Miller, as an individual).

82 Ibid. (Brenda Osborne, as an individual).

cases of women reported missing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside between 1997 and 2002. In the Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, published in September 2012, Commissioner Wally Oppal pointed to a number of shortcomings in the handling of these cases, particularly with respect to report taking and follow-up on reports of missing women, police investigative strategies, information sharing between police services, the lack of cultural sensitivity and training among officers, and the failure of internal review and external accountability mechanisms.

The Committee heard a limited amount of testimony concerning the status of police investigations into cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. That being said, several of the families that appeared before the Committee were critical of the slow pace of police investigations concerning the fate of their loved ones. One of these families felt that some of the evidence that could perhaps have made it possible to find their loved one was lost because police services failed to react promptly.

In a report entitled *What Their Stories Tell Us: Research Findings From the Sisters in Spirit Initiative*, the NWAC, much like the British Columbia Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, argued that overlapping areas of police jurisdiction impeded the effective resolution of some investigations.

NWAC has found that overlapping and unclear jurisdictional areas of RCMP, First Nations, municipal and provincial police forces has impeded effective resolution of some cases. Family members have shared stories about jurisdictional conflicts when attempting to file a missing persons report outside their community of residence. For example, while one police service says the report needs to be filed in the city where their loved one went missing, the other maintains the report should be filed with police in her home community. Jurisdictional issues such as this act as a tremendous barrier to families and loved ones who try to make a missing persons report, but also to the investigation into a case.⁸³

To enhance the effectiveness of police investigations into cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls, witnesses recommended that standards and procedures be developed on how police forces should deal with these cases. These standards and procedures should provide for the rapid launch of multipartite investigations so as to enhance cooperation between police services. According to Human Rights Watch, these procedures should include surveillance mechanisms to oversee the entire police investigation into the case of a missing or murdered Aboriginal woman or girl from the moment such an incident is reported. Goals should be set to review the police response to cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls at regular intervals so as to compile and release to the public a report on best practices and lessons learned.⁸⁴ This is important for families. As Westley Flett noted :

83 Native Women's Association of Canada, [*What Their Stories Tell Us: Research Findings From the Sisters in Spirit Initiative*](#), 2010, p. 38.

84 Human Rights Watch, brief submitted to the Committee, 13 February 2014.

I have a sister who has been missing for four years already. It's really hard every day not knowing whether she's alive or gone.⁸⁵

Witnesses also emphasized the importance of improving training for police officers on the history and socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal people so they can interact with them in a more appropriate manner. Such mandatory training would be given to both new recruits and existing personnel. Chief John Domm of the Rama Police Service felt that police training should place particular emphasis on violence toward Aboriginal women and girls.⁸⁶ Several witnesses felt that, to be effective, training should be developed in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations and human rights advocacy organizations.⁸⁷

During her appearance before the Committee, Susan O'Sullivan, the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, urged the government to create a missing persons index of DNA information — a recommendation echoed in the recommendations of the Report of the British Columbia Missing Women Commission of Inquiry. The 2014 federal budget proposes the creation of this databank. This national DNA missing persons index will supplement the work currently being done at the RCMP's National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains. The announced funding will also serve to support police forces and coroners' offices that submit samples of unidentified remains and personal effects belonging to missing persons, and to facilitate the comparison of DNA profiles thus collected against those of samples from the National DNA Data Bank. The Committee hopes that the creation of this index will bring some reassurance and peace of mind to the family members of those reported missing.

D. JUSTICE SYSTEM ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

The handling of complaints is a key aspect of the relationship between the police and Aboriginal people. During the course of the study, witnesses related that they had been victims of misconduct and improper treatment at the hands of police officers. The Committee also spoke with representatives of Human Rights Watch. In February 2013, this organization published a report entitled *Those Who Take Us Away — Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada*, which documents alleged cases of violation of Aboriginal women's and girls' rights in northern British Columbia. In particular, the organization pointed out the following problems: under-protection of Aboriginal women and girls; failure to promptly investigate certain reports; abusive policing and failures in accountability.

On 15 May 2013, in response to the troubling allegations made in that report, the Chair of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP initiated a public interest investigation into the conduct of RCMP members involved in carrying out policing duties in

85 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 9 December 2013 (Westley Flett, as an individual).

86 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 28 November 2013 (Chief John Domm, Rama Police Service).

87 See among others: Human Rights Watch, brief submitted to the Committee, 13 February 2014.

northern British Columbia.⁸⁸ This independent investigation was on-going at the time of publication of the present report.

Some witnesses told the Committee that police forces need to be made more accountable to the communities they serve. Human Rights Watch stated that meaningful police accountability required independent civilian investigations of all allegations of serious misconduct by police officers.⁸⁹ Tracy O'Hearn advocated the creation of an ombudsman to oversee people who work in law enforcement and the justice system. This ombudsman would be responsible, among other things, for reporting to the public on matters and concerns pertaining to racism and other systemic problems.⁹⁰

E. IMPROVING SUPPORT TO THE FAMILIES OF VICTIMS

We live with this pain every day. We carry our hurt and suffering with other people, and nobody is there...⁹¹

When I see another mother, another child, another brother, another son, gone missing and murdered here in Canada, nobody seems to care about us brown people. Nobody seems to care.⁹²

These excerpts from the testimony given by Brenda Osborne, the mother of Claudette Osborne, who went missing in Manitoba in July 2008, and by Susan Martin, the mother of Terrie Anne Dauphinais, who was murdered in Calgary on 29 April 2002, bring to light a feeling shared by many of the families we met. The loved ones of these missing women feel abandoned and have the impression that nobody cares about missing Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

The families of these women want to be heard. They would like the Canadian public to know the stories of their missing loved ones. They also want to be kept informed of progress in police investigations and to receive financial and psychological support throughout this trying time.

The Committee heard testimony illustrating the lack of respect shown by some police officers in their exchanges with the families of victims. It is not surprising to see people lose confidence in the police when they encounter this kind of treatment.

My wife was phoning the officers in Winnipeg one time. One of the officers on the other line said they were not a babysitting service. She was crying out on the other end saying why couldn't anybody help us out. We didn't think about it for a while — we were just in

88 Information on this investigation is available in the "[Ongoing Investigations](#)" section of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP website.

89 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 30 January 2014 (Liesl Gerntholtz, Executive Director, Women's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch Canada).

90 IWFA, 1st Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 6 June 2013 (Katharine Irgaut, Manager, Abuse Prevention, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada).

91 IWFA, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, *Evidence*, 9 December 2013 (Brenda Osborne, as an individual).

92 Ibid. (Susan Martin, as an individual).

shock. We started calling the RCMP again in Winnipeg asking could they please help us out, give us a little bit of information. They kept putting us on hold all the time. We got no answer there from anybody. So we just went out on the streets and started putting all these posters up, talking to other people.⁹³

We were always calling to find out if there were any updates on Claudette's case. We weren't asking for information on the case because we know that they can't give that out. What we were asking for was some accountability to us, to say that they were working on it and that they were actively out there searching for her. Communication broke down and we had to get the chief of Claudette's first nation to come out and facilitate dialogue with the police and us.⁹⁴

Some witnesses made recommendations to improve communication between police forces and the families of victims. All were in agreement on the need for better training of police officers who are responsible for communicating with families.

We also need to train our police officers to deal with family members and not say, well, your daughter was a prostitute.⁹⁵

Liaison officer positions should also be created. The mandate of these officers would be to communicate with the families of victims and to establish clear policies and practices regarding the transmittal of information to the families of missing or murdered people.

Lastly, some witnesses proposed that a fund be created to assist families with expenses related to the loss of a loved one. In particular, this fund could serve to reimburse expenses incurred for the psychological support needed to cope with the disappearance of a loved one.

The 2014 budget supports the implementation of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights as well as the DNA Missing Persons Index. According to the Budget document, this bill of rights "will stand up for victims of crime and give them a more effective voice in the criminal justice and corrections system."⁹⁶ It will provide victims with online resources that will help individuals access, among other things, the federal programs and services available for victims of crime. The index once created would help bring closure to the families of missing persons through DNA matching.

The Committee encourages all initiatives that enhance support for victims of crime. It is the hope of the Committee that the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights will take into consideration the specific experience of Aboriginal victims.

93 Ibid. (Westley Flett, as an individual).

94 Ibid. (Bernadette Smith, as an individual).

95 Ibid. (Susan Martin, as an individual).

96 Department of Finance Canada, [The Road to Balance: Creating Jobs and Opportunities – Economic Action Plan 2014](#), 11 February 2014.

CHAPTER FIVE — WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE: THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The mandate of the Special Committee was to conduct hearings on the critical matter of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada and propose solutions to address the root causes of violence against Indigenous women.

It is clear from the testimony and documentation received that measures to address the problem of violence against Aboriginal women and girls must take the following into account:

- women must actively participate in developing solutions;
- solutions must be holistic in nature;
- programs and services must be culturally and geographically adaptable;
- solutions must be developed and offered at the community level — we must help communities acquire the tools they need to find their own solutions.

The Committee recognizes that to adequately address the issue of violence against Aboriginal women and children requires a partnership based on respect and engagement between the federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments and First Nations, Métis and Inuit people.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends:

Awareness Campaign

Recommendation 1

That the federal government learn from the stories of the families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls and work with the provinces, territories and municipalities to create a public awareness and prevention campaign focusing on violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

Support for the family of victims

Recommendation 2

That the federal government continue strengthening the criminal justice system to ensure, among other things, that violent and repeat offenders serve appropriate sentences.

Recommendation 3

That the federal government maintain its commitment to develop the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights including initiatives aimed at making the criminal justice system more responsive to the needs of victims, such as keeping them informed and providing them with appropriate standing, access and assistance throughout the process.

Recommendation 4

That the federal government implement a national DNA-based missing person's index

Support for communities

Recommendation 5

That the federal government continue to support K-12 education on reserve as an important tool in combating the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

Recommendation 6

That the federal government continue to support programming and legislation that allow Aboriginal communities to respond to violence.

Recommendation 7

That the federal government examine options to address poverty as a root cause of violence against Aboriginal women and girls by empowering Aboriginal people through economic development opportunities and jobs and skills training.

Recommendation 8

That the federal government engage First Nation communities to examine how to improve supports for shelters and front-line services on reserve for victims of violence.

Recommendation 9

That the federal government support provincial, territorial and First Nation childcare agencies in their responsibility to ensure effective and accountable service delivery.

Police Services

Recommendation 10

That the federal government in cooperation with municipal, provincial and territorial governments examine the possibility of collecting police

data on violence against Aboriginal women and girls that includes an ethnicity variable.

Recommendation 11

That the federal government engage Aboriginal communities and municipal, provincial, and territorial governments to examine options to improving procedures among police services to facilitate multipartite investigations.

Recommendation 12

That the federal government encourage Aboriginal organizations, the Canadian Police College and municipal, provincial and territorial governments to improve police officer training, including continuing education, to foster cultural understanding and sensitivity.

Violence against women and girls

Recommendation 13

That the federal government continue to take appropriate action to reduce human trafficking and to reduce the violence and harm associated with prostitution.

Other supports

Recommendation 14

That in implementing the public awareness strategy on substance abuse, the federal government target support to Aboriginal communities.

Recommendation 15

That the federal government examine opportunities to improve the incorporation of best practices into existing programs and services available to Aboriginal women and girls.

Moving to action

Recommendation 16

That the federal government implement all of the recommendations above in a coordinated action plan.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

41st Parliament – Second Session		
Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Hollow Water First Nation Burma Bushie, Co-Founder, Community Holistic Circle Healing Robyn Hall, Co-Director, Community Holistic Circle Healing	2013/11/21	1
Native Women's Association of Canada Michèle Audette, President		
First Nations Chiefs of Police Association Doug Palson, Vice-President, Dakota Ojibway Police Service John W. Syrette, President	2013/11/28	2
Rama Police Service John C. Domm, Chief of Police		
Assembly of First Nations Cameron Alexis, Alberta Regional Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, National Chief Charlene Belleau	2013/12/05	3
National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence Carole Brazeau, National Project Coordinator Anita Olsen Harper, Consultant		
National Association of Friendship Centres Jeffrey Cyr, Executive Director		
Ontario Provincial Police Susanne Decock, Superintendent, Aboriginal Policing Bureau		
As an individual Lisa Big John Brenda Bignell Wesley Flett Connie Greyeyes Patricia Isaac Sharon Johnson Susan Martin Lorna Martin Amy Miller	2013/12/09	4

41st Parliament – Second Session

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual Glen Miller Brenda Osborne Robert Pictou Bernadette Smith	2013/12/09	4
Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies Kim Pate, Executive Director	2014/01/30	5
Human Rights Watch Canada Liesl Gerntholtz, Executive Director, Women's Rights Division Meghan Rhoad, Researcher, Women's Rights Division		
Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime Sue O'Sullivan, Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime		
Zebra Child Protection Centre Robert Hassel, Chief Executive Officer		
Canadian Women's Foundation Diane Redsky, Project Director, Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada	2014/02/06	6
First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director		
Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative, British Columbia	2014/02/13	7

41st Parliament – First Session

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>Department of Justice Lisa Hitch, Senior Counsel, Family, Children and Youth Section</p>	2013/04/25	3
<p>Department of Public Safety Kimberly Lavoie, Director, Aboriginal Corrections Policy Division Shawn Tupper, Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Safety and Partnerships Branch</p>	2013/05/02	4
<p>Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Françoise Ducros, Assistant Deputy Minister, Education and Social Development Programs and Partnerships Jo-Ann Greene, Senior Policy Advisor, Lands Modernization Directorate Sheilagh Murphy, Director General, Social Policy and Programs Branch</p>		
<p>Statistics Canada Lynn Barr-Telford, Director General, Health, Justice and Special Surveys Branch Cathy Connors, Assistant Director, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Rebecca Kong, Chief, Correctional Services Program, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics</p>		
<p>Status of Women Canada Sébastien Goupil, Director General, Policy and External Relations Linda Savoie, Director General, Women's Program and Regional Operations</p>	2013/05/23	5
<p>Native Women's Association of Canada Michèle Audette, President Claudette Dumont-Smith, Executive Director Irene Goodwin, Director, Violence Prevention and Safety</p>	2013/05/30	6
<p>Ending Violence Association of British Columbia Tracy Porteous, Executive Director</p>	2013/06/06	7
<p>Ngwaagan Gamig Recovery Centre Inc. Rolanda Maniowabi, Executive Director</p>		
<p>Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada Katharine Irngaut, Manager, Abuse Prevention Tracy O'Hearn, Executive Director</p>		

41st Parliament – First Session

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual Colleen Cardinal Marie Sutherland	2013/06/13	8
Caribou Child and Youth Centre Jamie Crozier, Coordinator		
Carrier Sekani Family Services Wendy Kellas, Coordinator, Community safety Mary Teegee, Executive Director, Child and Family Services		
Families of Sisters in Spirit Bridget Tolley, Co-Founder		
Royal Canadian Mounted Police Tyler Bates, Director, National Aboriginal Policing and Crime Prevention Services Kevin Brosseau, Commanding Officer, "D" Division Shirley Cuillierrier, Director, Federal Policing Partnership and External Relations		
PACE Sexual Assault and Crisis Centre Ruth Proulx, Therapist and Community Outreach Coordinator		

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

41st Parliament – Second Session

Organizations and Individuals

Amnesty International

Miller, Jack R.

Congress of Aboriginal Peoples

First Nations Chiefs of Police Association

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada

Human Rights Watch Canada

41st Parliament – First Session

Organizations and Individuals

Caribou Child and Youth Centre



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women

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EVIDENCE

Monday, December 9, 2013

Chair

Mrs. Stella Ambler

Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women

Monday, December 9, 2013

• (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC)): Welcome, everyone. Thank you so much for being here, committee members and, most of all, families and special guests. We are honoured and pleased to have you here, and I think I speak on behalf of the committee.

To begin, I'd like to say that we, as a committee that was struck unanimously by the House of Commons, are in a unique position to look at this issue of violence against aboriginal women, and in particular the missing and murdered women, that tragic situation that we are here to discuss today.

This meeting is also unique so I'd just like to tell you that, by way of a vote, this committee decided to do things a little bit differently. Instead of having our usual very formal meeting with just a couple of witnesses, we wanted to do it this way and allow for a more informal conversation with you, whose lives have been affected so drastically and tragically by these events. We want to hear from you today.

I also want to open the meeting by saying that this will be very informal. We won't have the question and answer period we usually have, because we want to hear from you.

I'd like to start the meeting off with a prayer from our elder Robert Pictou from Cape Breton, and then we'll hear a few remarks from a couple of committee members who have messages from families who couldn't be here. Then I'm going to open up the floor and allow you to speak. I know that it will all work out. Please do be respectful of the fact that we have a number of people in the room who would like to talk as well. We have two hours and hopefully that will give everyone enough time to tell their stories. Finally, we're here to listen, and we want to hear from you. We are absolutely honoured and privileged that you would come here. We know that many of you have come from very far away and we're very pleased to have you here.

If there are no questions about that, we will begin with you, Robert.

Mr. Robert Pictou (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in Mi'kmaq*]

We ask the Creator to forgive us, to have pity on us, and to help us, especially the ladies here today who have lost their daughters, lost their mothers, lost their sisters, and lost the fair sex as all we men say. The women are the fair sex. I ask the Creator to help us with what's going on here today.

[*Witness speaks in Mi'kmaq*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Niki would like to bring a message from a family who wanted to be here today but couldn't make it.

Go ahead.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you, Madame Chair.

I'd like to share a message about the Nepinak family. Gail Nepinak and Joyce Nepinak had been invited to this committee and, unfortunately, were denied their ability to get here.

This committee was struck to recognize a national tragedy—the missing and murdered indigenous women. We all know that one of the recurring themes is the way in which missing and murdered women haven't been counted, that statistics haven't reflected them, that reports haven't reflected them, where their voices have been ignored or silenced.

I have to say that as a member of Parliament, I was absolutely ashamed that systemic racism and discrimination once again reared its ugly head; in this case, to prevent a family from being heard.

Gail Nepinak is the sister of Tanya Nepinak, who is one of the women presumed to have been killed by a serial killer in Winnipeg about a year and a half ago. Gail is a spokesperson of great strength that I, and many people and the women here from Manitoba, know. She was personally invited to attend this committee, and, unfortunately, when she and her mom came to the airport with posters of her sister, ready to go to tell the story, they were told by Air Canada that they didn't have all the ID needed. They were told that, despite having copies of the formal House of Commons invitation, despite having e-tickets that came up in the computer system, and despite having a member of Parliament to vouch for them. It's not that they didn't have ID; they were told that they didn't have all the right ID.

What I would say to this committee and to people tuning in is, the way families and people are being re-victimized has to stop. It's as though Canada sees even the families as invisible people. The Nepinaks assured me that they will not stop speaking. I'm frankly horrified and ashamed that they weren't given the opportunity to speak at the national level at this committee. I hope this committee will find a way to bring them here, to speak to them. I hope this committee will come up with recommendations that will seek to break down the barriers that keep the Nepinaks in pain, and keep so many families across this country on the sidelines, and that try to silence them.

They will not be silenced. And with our help, their voices must be heard.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thanks, Niki.

Jean, you have a letter you'd like to refer to.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): I'm not going to read the whole letter because I want to make sure that the family members who are here.... I will circulate the letter to the clerk for all committee members. It's from Gladys Radek. She wanted to say that her involvement with missing and murdered women began when her niece, Tamara Lynn Chipman, disappeared

from the northernmost tip of the Highway of Tears, Prince Rupert, B.C., on September 21, 2005.

In her closing, she said that “at this time I would like to offer my prayers and condolences to all the families who have lost loved ones through this system. A special thank-you to my brother Tom Chipman for allowing me to carry the torch for Tamara and all the others who have gone missing and been murdered along the Highway of Tears and across the nation. Although Tamara remains missing today, the search will never stop, and Tamara will never be forgotten.”

I will circulate that to the committee members.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll ask for a person to be brave enough to get us started, and then I'll let you take it from there.

Oh good, we've got a feather. Is that from you, Carolyn?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): No, Sharon is going to share her feather with the committee.

The Chair: Thank you for bringing that, Sharon. Please go ahead.

Ms. Sharon Johnson (As an Individual): *Bonjour.*

[Witness speaks in Ojibwa]

Hello, everyone. My name is Sharon Johnson. I come from Thunder Bay, Ontario. I'm from the Seine River First Nation. I'm Ojibwa from the Treaty 3 area.

I was invited to attend by NWAC this past weekend. It was my first time attending their dialogue for families. I found it very helpful to attend the event, although I didn't really know what to expect.

In doing this, I'm speaking on behalf of my family for the loss of my younger sister, Sandra Johnson. It doesn't... It gets somewhat easier, I guess. It gets somewhat easier, and I think that through just continuing to sit with families at gatherings like this, I'm finding that it's what I can do to make sure my little sister is not forgotten. This flag I have here is from a memorial walk that I started with an elder in Thunder Bay. We started the memorial walk in 2005. My sister was murdered on February 13, 1992, so it's been 21 years now, pretty close to 22 years in February.

Since starting the memorial walk, I've had a lot... It's been growing. In a way, it's good to see the families coming forward with their stories, but at the same time, it's sad, because we shouldn't have to be doing this. We shouldn't have to be walking to make sure that people don't forget that a sister, a mother, a daughter, or a granddaughter was murdered or has gone missing.

For me to sit here today for my little sister Sandra, I just hope that it brings healing to the people, to other people like me and to other families like mine, and that some day we'll know, and we'll put closure to our grief.

• (1115)

We don't know if that's ever going to happen, but in the meantime waking up every day to remember that we don't know the answers, it's hard to get up and walk every day and do what I need to do. So many times throughout the years since I started doing this memorial walk, every time we finish a walk, I tell myself, “That's it. I'm not doing another one,” because the work is too hard, organizing the walk and just everything else I'm invited to do. I

always say, “That's it. I'm not doing another one. It's too hard,” and then I get a phone call or an e-mail saying, “Sharon, do you want to come and help out? Do you want to come and join us?” I just say, “Yes, sure, I'll come. I'll come and do it,” and I'm doing it again.

I think that's because it's in here, it's in my heart. I carry my little sister in my heart, and I know that every time I agree to do something, she is right here beside me and she's telling me that it's okay.

I'm going to leave it at that now. I'm just going to share a little story here about this eagle feather, this white feather. This was given to me to do the work for our missing and murdered women. It's the same feather you see there on the flag for our memorial walk. I carry it with me everywhere I go and I hold it when I pray. This one here was given to me by my brother so I carry that, too. I'm just going to pass it along for other family members to use.

Thank you, *meegwetch.*

• (1120)

Ms. Bernadette Smith (As an Individual): Good morning, everyone.

My name is Bernadette Smith. I'm from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

My sister is Claudette Osborne. She's on this poster here. I was going to bring a picture, but I didn't know if they would let me in with the glass or not. This is my sister here on the end, and we actually know every single one of these families. We've connected in Manitoba in the same way that Sharon is talking about, doing the work supporting these families, because there's not enough support out there for these families, and it shouldn't have to always be on us to do that.

My sister went missing July 24, 2008. When my sister went missing, she was reported missing, but it was 10 days before her case was even looked at. My other sister, Tina, was told that she was probably out there somewhere; that's what the police told us, that they weren't going to do anything right now, that she'd turn up, she always did. My sister was exploited at a very young age. She used drugs to cope.

Claudette wasn't a person who wouldn't keep in contact with her family. She always phoned someone. She was really close with my sister Tina and stayed with her a lot of the time, but Tina hadn't heard from her.

A report was made, and 10 days later... Only because we started putting pressure on the police did they start looking into her case. We found out a few days later that my sister Claudette was at a hotel on McPhillips and that she had been with a long-distance truck driver. At that point, my sister had just given birth to her youngest daughter, Patience, who was two weeks old when her mother went missing.

My sister was not well. She was hemorrhaging from giving birth. Her baby was apprehended at the hospital, even though she had gone into treatment for 10 months and had been working toward changing her life and making it better for her kids. But after spending eight months in treatment and giving birth to her child, our system didn't feel that was enough. They took her child.

My sister's partner moved to Emerson, Manitoba, just to get her away from the pressure of what goes on in the city and the drugs. They had a son together. She had been living in the home with her son as well. They had visits back and forth from the treatment centre my sister was in.

When they apprehended her daughter from the hospital, they gave her partner a choice: either Claudette would go home with him or Patience would go home with him. They talked about it. Matt wanted Claudette to come home because he knew that together they could work to get Patience back home with them, and that she needed to be home for their son, Iziah. So Claudette went home.

But the pressure of the guilt was too much for her. She left Emerson and went back to the city. She went back to the street and to drugs.

That night she called my sister Tina. She said that she was with this truck driver and that he was trying to push himself on her, and that she felt unsafe and wanted to be picked up.

• (1125)

But my sister had a pay-as-you-go phone and she didn't have minutes on it so she didn't get that message until a couple of days later when she put minutes on it. That's how I knew my sister was at this hotel. At this hotel they had video surveillance so when the police went to investigate my sister's case, and finally went and visited this hotel, it had been written over. The evidence was gone.

After that we had to continually...it was very one-sided. We were always calling to find out if there were any updates on Claudette's case. We weren't asking for information on the case because we know that they can't give that out. What we were asking for was some accountability to us, to say that they were working on it and that they were actively out there searching for her. Communication broke down and we had to get the chief of Claudette's first nation to come out and facilitate dialogue with the police and us.

It was ten months before.... My sister had a phone card, not a physical phone card but she knew the number of it. We had told the police that she'd had this number and that perhaps she used it when she had left the hotel and that would provide some answers. Because of our laws and the Freedom of Information Act and whatever else, they weren't able to get a warrant to access those records. Ten months later they were...after diligent work and our family constantly putting pressure on. And there were numbers on there that were disconnected. My sister was addicted to drugs, she was on crack cocaine. There were numbers on there that were tied to alias names, so it would be "Jack Frost" for instance. By the time they accessed those records those phones had been thrown away, they were no longer in service. Again, valuable information had been lost because of policies that are in place.

My sister is now a part of a project called Project Devote in Winnipeg. This project came out of families feeling like there wasn't enough being done in our city. What happens in Winnipeg is there are four missing persons investigators and on any given day they have more than 80 cases that they are investigating. How do four officers investigate 80 cases and give each one of those cases the attention they deserve?

It's so frustrating because it's not that they are not doing their job; we know that there are officers out there who do care and who do the best they can, but there are limited resources.

Claudette has been gone now for five years. We don't know where she is and we don't know what happened to her. We don't have any answers.

• (1130)

It's just really hard not knowing day-to-day where she is. I think we lose ourselves in doing for others, because it's all we know. It's really hard for us, because we get so wrapped up in doing, doing, doing, and sometimes we don't take care of ourselves and we need somebody else to do it. We need more resources out there for our police, for our women who are in domestic relationships. We need more resources for our women to get off the streets. My sister waited a year to get into treatment. She tried continually to get into treatment. It took a whole year. Now you tell me.

I just want to say thank you for listening and inviting us here. I really hope that you take what we're saying, what we're sharing, and you put it into something, but not into a report. I'm tired of reports. I'm sorry. It's report after report that sits on a shelf somewhere. I want tangible action. I want something to come out of this that you're going to take and you're going to actually put into place so that we're not increasing these numbers.

I have an 11-year-old daughter, and she's five times more likely to walk out the door and be murdered or not come home. That's not fair. Somewhere, and I always go back to that reconciliation.... Our people have been pushed and pushed and pushed, and we're still being pushed. We're peaceful people.

Thanks for listening.

• (1135)

Ms. Brenda Osborne (As an Individual): My name is Brenda Osborne. I'm here on behalf of my daughter who has been missing for the last five years. Her name is Claudette Osborne. I have numbers on who was murdered. Too many, I guess I could say. I don't know whether any of you sitting with us together today have daughters who have been missing or murdered.

Helen Betty Osborne was murdered at the park or in the school. My uncle was shot by a woman who never went to jail. My cousin was murdered. The guy did five years. Felicia Osborne went missing going to school in Winnipeg trying to be a teacher to try to help young people because she loved kids. She went missing going home for lunch. She never made it home. Six months later we found her leg and her arm. That's all we found and buried.

My daughter's missing, and we don't have any answers. We don't have any leads or tips at all. I try to go out and do my own investigations. I go late at night. I ask questions about who she knew out there. The police stopped me from doing it because they told me I was going to be charged for prostituting the girls because I was feeding them something because some of those girls are on the street. They are hungry, so that's what I did. I made sandwiches and I brought juice for them just to have that gift. At the same time I was asking questions about my daughter, who she knew, and the police told me I was going to be charged for prostituting the girls out there. They chased me away. I couldn't do it anymore because I didn't want to get thrown in jail for that.

I'd rather do something else. We do vigils and have gatherings. We get together with other families and support each other because there is no support for our family.

Every year I do a walk from Norway House to Winnipeg. A couple of years ago I was here in this same room. Two years ago I walked from Norway House to Winnipeg, and from Winnipeg to Ottawa here. That time they told us what kind of help they could offer us. We're still waiting for that help. There is nothing.

There are families like the Nepinaks. They are suffering with their loss because they don't know whether her sister has

been....She's one of the ladies we get together with once a week just to hang on to each other. The only thing we have in life.... For myself, I only have hope. That's all I have because I can't say my daughter was murdered. I don't know.

Today I'm honoured to be here because I wanted to state that we need to be heard, and we need help. We do these walks every year. It doesn't matter who it is. We do it for all missing and murdered. I guess that's my life. I dedicate that to them every day. It didn't matter how hot it was; it didn't matter if it was raining. We walked all day long, sixteen hours a day. Who's going to do that for us? Nobody.

• (1140)

We come here today for her. It seems like the murderers get away with murder. Roberta McIvor was murdered, and the girl only did two years.

This guy who's going to jail now supposedly killed two women, but see, what I didn't understand is that they never brought up that one woman was pregnant. This guy was given 20 years. He did two years and he's going to get out in eight. Is that fair for us? We're the ones suffering every day, and he's going to get out.

The justice system has to change.

We live with this pain every day. We carry our hurt and suffering with other people, and nobody is there.... I get mad when somebody says, "How are you today?" How am I supposed to feel? I can't say, "I'm good."

The murderers are getting away with murder and they laugh about it. You kill somebody.... You drag somebody out from their car, you cut their throat first, you drag them out, and then you run them over, and you call that an accident? That's no accident. That's murder, and she was in jail for two years for that.

I don't wish that.... You go for trial for murder, you know...judges and the police making deals. What about the families, the ones who suffer? They're the ones suffering today. We're the ones suffering today. We carry that every day. We go to bed with it at night, and we get up with it in the morning.

Thank you very much for listening.

• (1145)

Ms. Brenda Bignell (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in Ojibwa*]

Thank you for inviting me. I really appreciate being here, and I look forward to sharing my story with all of you. I had to write down my story because I'm way too emotional to be able to just speak from my heart. Life is hard, life has been hard.

The first thing I want to talk about is mothers. I want to talk about women as parents. As women, we give birth to men and women and children—boys, girls—you know, that's our role; that's what we do; it's our life. I want to talk about how my mother felt when her son went missing and was found murdered seven months later. That's really difficult to have to go through. He died on my birthday, 40 years ago.

It's like yesterday when someone goes missing. It's like yesterday when you watch your mom and dad suffer, and you see the pain on their faces. How does the family function? How does the family function when the parents are lost? How does that happen? You know, as a child you go deep inside yourself, and you look at your mom and dad, and you think, and you wonder: "How

do you keep on going, Mom and Dad? How can you look after the rest of us when one is missing?"

I'm not here only to talk about women. I have men to talk about because as women, we give birth to men. My brother Clark was the first one murdered. The police have the nerve to tell me, 35 years later, after I discover—after I get a phone call from a man telling me, "We know who killed your brother." What does the RCMP do? They phone and tell me, "Shut up. Don't talk to anybody about this." I know who killed my brother, and people know who killed my brother. Will those two men ever be on trial? Not likely, not freaking likely, because who cares? Who cares about us brown people? Does anybody care? I'd like to know. Because that's a death, that's a murder. And those two men are still walking around today to torture other people.

Where is justice for our people? It just doesn't exist, does it?

That's just one man, and that's just two parents, my mom and my dad, but we all suffered, us brothers and sisters. We all suffered, suffered so much. My brothers can't even walk across the river because my brother was thrown into that river. That's how he died; he took a beating and they threw him over the bridge. Seven months' later, his body washed up, all swollen. There was my brother. But the people who knew he was missing knew where he was, right? The family knew where my brother was, but they never told anybody. Why would they want to? They committed a crime; they killed a human being. But it's shameful that the RCMP would tell me to keep quiet. That is the most sinful part of our existence as Canadian citizens—when the RCMP tell you, "Keep quiet. Don't talk about this anymore."

Now, we all know that we the native people are the bread and butter of this land. I know that. We know that. We've been kind, we've been generous. I'd like to see some of that generosity come back to us.

My niece Daleen went missing. Just so you know what it takes to find one missing person; for four years, my sister put out a quarter of a million dollars.

• (1150)

If my sister was not the superintendent of schools, if her husband was not an educator, a teacher, both making lots of money.... Both saved all their money all of their lives thinking that when they get old, they're going to retire. Where did their retirement dollars go? To finding their daughter, who was dismembered, burnt. That's how we found my niece, how my sister found our niece.

But on that quarter of a million dollars that she spent, would the provincial or federal government ever invest a quarter of a million dollars per family? It took my sister four years, and it took the heart and the compassion of my white brothers and sisters across this land to help my sister.

I don't walk here alone; I don't live here alone. We live here together as brown and white people and all colours of people. We live together. We need to show each other the conscientious minds and hearts that we have by taking care of one another.

When my sister's daughter went missing that first night, we were there the very next day. I went from The Pas to Saskatoon. I had to hike there. That's a 350-mile trip, one way. I walked there. I drove there. I've been to Saskatoon many times to go and help my sister, but that night, the second night that she went missing, my

sister said, “My daughter is not the kind of person to go out and prostitute herself, get drunk, and be rowdy and disappear—not my daughter.” Her daughter was going to university.

Nobody believed my sister. The RCMP said, oh no, she's doing her own thing—the audacity.

If one of your children was missing, you would know your daughter or your son so well that you would know that they would come home or not come home. You'd know. All of us know our children and what they're capable of. My sister knew her daughter was not the kind of girl to go out all night long. Sure enough, four years later, the RCMP made a statement and they found out who killed my niece. They found out who killed her because he had told on himself. He was bragging about how much he despises native people.

That's pretty sad when racism is so thick in this country of ours that this person could actually brag about killing a native person—brag about it. The very nerve of that individual. That guy's in jail right now thanks to my sister and her quarter of a million dollars. The RCMP didn't help. They did in the long run, but it was the detectives who she paid from the get-go...and I was there, sitting with her and negotiating how much she was going to pay that detective. It costs a lot of money. It costs a lot of money to get into the hearts and minds of my white brothers and sisters so that you can think about us as a people.

She put out 89,000 shiny, glossy flyers in Saskatoon. That cost her \$8,000 for 89,000 flyers. Who put out those 89,000 flyers? Her two boys and her two grandchildren. Four people put out 89,000 flyers to help find her daughter.

I couldn't help. It hurts me that I couldn't help, but we all do the best we can when it comes to finding a missing family member. It takes a lot of energy out of us.

There's my niece Daleen.

There's my almost stepmother.

My dad is a World War II veteran, a sniper, and he and mom didn't get along so dad decided that he would have a second wife. The second wife had the most bitter, toughest life that she could ever have.

• (1155)

It's not that my dad induced that life on her. She had one like that before she went to my dad. One winter night she left Pukatawagan, and no one has seen her since. But nobody could care less either as to where she was. Nobody could care. Nobody cared. There wasn't even a search. Nobody walked. Nobody looked. Nobody wants to know, I guess. But that's Elizabeth Dorian. She's out there right now, lost. Nobody has the manpower, the time to go look for her. For all we know, she might have fallen off a bridge. She might be in the river right now. She might have been taken by animals. We don't know. And until there's an investigation on that woman, then we will never know. But I think her children, two of her children—my half-brother and my half-sister—deserve some closure as to what happened to their mother. Even if all we find are bones, it's something to give those two—my half-brother and my half-sister—a future, an optimism that life could be better, that it could get better.

There's Andrew Flett, another one of my cousins. He's male. Again, he was up in northern Manitoba. He's been missing for two years now. My cousin's daughter, Amanda Bartlett, is another

family member. I've come to you with seven names today just in my family alone of people I've lost, who are missing. That's what I've come to this table with. It's the pain that our family is living through right now. And they don't have a quarter of a million dollars like my sister Pauline. They don't. They have to depend on the resources of the province, the federal government, women's organizations, our own communities, and anything that we can pull up to help our people find their missing loved ones.

But finding the money: that's the biggest job there for our people. When you go out to start finding someone to speak for you and to help you look, that is hard to find too, because commitment is tough. So I agree with Brenda, that you have to do things yourself. Who else is going to do it? Who else is going to walk those 16 or 20 hours for us? Nobody is going to do that except us. That's the way our system is today. And I guess it's right too. Because that is our family and it is right that we are the ones who come to their defence. It is right. It is good, and I like that. It sure made me proud to be able to do eight years. My sister created an awareness walk for four years. When her daughter was found she did a four-year memorial run after that. But she's tired.

To the lady who said, “I'm tired”, we know how that feels—to be tired, to be exhausted. We know how it feels to not be able to sleep for 20 hours at a time. You're lucky to be able to sleep three or four hours in a night—that is a blessing to be able to sleep three or four hours in one night. That's amazing if you can go to sleep and wake up really energized because you had four hours of sleep. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Creator. I've been blessed.

I would really like to see an inquiry into the RCMP and the injustices that have happened to our people and the lack of caring and attention. I really need to see a national inquiry into the loss of our children, our sisters, our mothers, our brothers. We really need that. I would like to see that.

[Witness speaks in Ojibwa] That's all I have to say for now. Thank you.

Mr. Wesley Flett (As an Individual): Hi, my name is Wesley Flett, and I'm from The Pas, Manitoba. I have a sister who has been missing for four years already. It's really hard every day not knowing whether she's alive or gone. Brenda and I came from the same community to speak out on behalf of our brothers and sisters.

Millie was a good-hearted woman. She helped out anybody in the streets who needed help. Just to see her made you smile. She tried to help them to go back to school and get off the streets. One day I came back to the city for medical reasons. I went to see her in the morning at her apartment in the Winnipeg area and nobody answered the door for the whole day I was there. I must have gone back and forth about ten times that day. The next day I did the same thing. So we put in a missing-persons report to the RCMP in the Winnipeg area.

We did all we could, all our family, her siblings. She has four siblings. We put posters up for my sister in Winnipeg and all over. This is what we did just to get some answers for her and our family. We needed to get some answers from somebody.

My wife was phoning the officers in Winnipeg one time. One of the officers on the other line said they were not a babysitting service. She was crying out on the other end saying why couldn't anybody help us out. We didn't think about it for a while—we were just in shock. We started calling the RCMP again in Winnipeg asking could they please help us out, give us a little bit of information. They kept putting us on hold all the time. We got no

answer there from anybody. So we just went out on the streets and started putting all these posters up, talking to other people.

We had a conference in The Pas. This one girl lost one of her sisters for five years. By word of mouth, just by talking to others all over Manitoba, we found that lady who was missing for five years. Now they're together again. I don't think you'd be able to split those people apart again. These are the kinds of stories we like to hear. It's so hard to speak. Most people don't have to walk the streets just to get a little information. They'll say they didn't see her. Or sometimes when you walk the streets, you might see another person who looks like her. You call out to them, but it's a different person. It's so hard to sound out "sister".

• (1200)

We're just living on a day-to-day basis right now. It's kind of hard. My sister was really a humble woman. We're not going to give up searching for my sister. We're still out there in the streets putting up posters, talking to other people. We're not going to give up. We have big posters for missing ladies here; we get that word out there too. There are beautiful ladies out there who are missing. They didn't get home. We're still putting information out there to try to get them home, to get the closure done. It's so hard, especially when a loved one is missing or even if your neighbour's friend is missing for just a couple of hours or even a whole day. You want to know where that person is all the time.

Every time my sister used to go out of town, she'd give us a call to tell us where she was going and when she'd be back. That one summer she gave us a call to say she was going there. I told her to take care of herself and to phone when she got home, and she did. Then one day, as I said, we went knocking on her door. The last couple of weeks we were there. My sons were there and my cousins were there knocking on her door. We thought she went to the store and back, but she didn't make it home at all. She's still out there. We don't know where she is.

We're not going to give up finding her, or put closure to the family and all of that. That's one thing I'm never going to do—never give up. We need help from everybody.

We've been talking to people. We did this walk from The Pas to Winnipeg for two straight years. The oldest elder was 78 years old. She walked with us from The Pas to Winnipeg. We had athletes, runners, and even a small child. She was young; she walked with us. Their mothers walked with us. Their brothers walked with us. Anybody who wanted to walk with us was welcome to walk with us. These are the kinds of people we need to keep up our hope, and all that.

Even the chief and council when we were heading to Ottawa here told us to keep up the good work. He wants you to do your best. Even the parliament in Winnipeg told us the same thing. Everybody back home is asking what we're going to do. You have to do this. You have to do it. You have to do another one.

It's a really hard job to do, to get everybody and to organize everything, what needs to be done. But I'm not going to give up. I'm not going to give up searching. I'm not going to give up for anybody, for dismissing our murdered people here—women, brothers. I'm still going to do the hard work ahead of me.

But I just got diagnosed with cancer in February last year. I'm still fighting even though I'm sick. I'm going to get healthy again. I'm never going to stop.

• (1205)

The Creator gave me strength to keep on going, and that's what I'm going to do.

I'd like to thank all of the committee members here.

From The Pas, Manitoba, I'm Wesley Flett. Thank you very much.

• (1210)

Mr. Robert Pictou: My name is Robert Pictou. I'm from Chapel Island First Nation. It's way down in Nova Scotia.

My daughter's picture is here. She's been missing for 20 years and eight months. She left behind seven children. Five of those seven children don't remember what their mother looks like.

She's missing up in Maine. The *Bangor Daily News* put out the news of what happened, and I saw a lot of contradictions in there. I don't have a lot of education, but then I have traditional ways, which to me are better. I know who did it, but I can't prove who did it. To prove who did it, you've got to have the body. The body is not there. The one who did it went around bragging, saying that she never will be found.

When we go on powwows, I go up to Caribou, Maine, and I see my granddaughters. I bring them information and some pictures of what their mom looked like. They sent me pictures the other day on the laptop, and one of them is the spitting image of her mom.

I believe—I'm not asking anybody else to believe, but I believe—it's my dead daughter being reincarnated, with all the physical aspects of her face, the way she was. My daughter had a mark on this tooth. When I looked at the picture of her daughter, which would be my granddaughter, I saw she had a mark on that tooth—just the opposite. Coincidence? Say what you may, but I see all of her actions, as she's growing up now, that my daughter had when she was younger.

Twenty years is a long time to suffer. You have hatred, but you ask the Creator every night, [*Witness speaks in Mi'kmaq*], Creator, take some of the hate away. You know, he took a lot of it away, but the anger is still there. Native people are very, very, very forgiving, but we don't forget. We don't forget. I know that my daughter is walking in the spirit world.

They say don't do this, don't do that, don't have hate, don't stir up anything. I have many beliefs. I was introduced to a friend who told me, here, take this and read it and do it. She gave it to me and I looked at it. I said, yes, I have to go and see them. She was a psychic.

• (1215)

What I felt in my heart for 20 years, I kept there. I didn't want to share it with anybody.

I made arrangements to see the psychic. My son came down from Vancouver, and we went there. Sometimes you watch TV and they have this *Long Island Medium*, all dressed up, her hair all curled up, and they have a big fancy house. She's got great big cars. Her son has a motorcycle, and her daughter is finished college. I didn't know what to expect when I went up to see that lady.

She lived in a rundown apartment. I knocked on her door and she let me and Robert in. I looked around. There was a trunk in the corner and on that trunk was where she had her television set.

She said, "I don't have much, but it's mine. I know what you came for."

As she was talking she wasn't even looking at me or my son. She was just writing down. I don't even think she knew what she was writing down. She said the spirit of my daughter was guiding her hand.

Then she passed me the paper. I showed it to my son, and we paid her and thanked her. A lot of that hatred I had in my heart for 20 years, a whole lot of it went, but not all of it. She told me that all of the time I was there my daughter's spirit was circling her all the way around, back and forth, and kept on talking to her. As she was talking to her, she was telling her what to say. She in turn was telling us, me and my son.

You go there and you don't expect anything, and then something like this comes up. How did she know this? She's living in Truro; that's down in Nova Scotia. This psychic's in Truro and my daughter was murdered in Bangor, Maine, almost 600 miles away. She never knew her, still doesn't know her. The psychic didn't know her.

I carry the paper with me all the time, *The Bangor Daily News*. When the state police was called to a disturbance in a bar and grill in downtown Bangor, Judy's bar and grill, they found my daughter laying there bleeding. She had a cut over her eye, a cut in her lip, and a big bruise on top of her head. They asked her what happened.

She said, "My husband and my brother-in-law beat me up." They asked, "What for?" She said, "They were drunk."

About that time the men showed up. Her husband was put into the police car in the back seat and he tried to kick out the back window. He was taken to the Bangor lock-up. My daughter was taken to the hospital in Bangor, Maine. My daughter was one who wouldn't leave her children for more than two or three hours at a time. She wouldn't leave them overnight alone. While she was in the hospital for observation, it was not known to anybody that the beating had given her a bad concussion. This is what the psychic told me.

• (1220)

She wasn't one to stay in that hospital. She got out of the hospital and started hitchhiking home. That's about an hour-and-a-half drive in a car. At the same time, her husband was let out of jail. For me, I believe that her husband and her brother-in-law had the car, picked her up, put another beating on her—this is what I was told—and with that one concussion that she already had, they killed her. They didn't know. They didn't mean to kill her. There were three men involved: her brother-in-law, her husband, and another person.

They hid her in the building until nightfall. At nightfall, in the dark of the moon, they turned around and put her on a little boat. They took her way out in the ocean. It was at one of those times when the high tides come in. They stripped her and wrapped her up in a bedsheet that had a floral design.

When they were going out to the ocean or out to the bay, one of them was awful sick, sick all the time, just throwing up. When they got out there, they threw her in, just like a bag of potatoes. They came back and burned every stitch of her clothes. Years later, they bragged about it, saying, "They're not going to find her, they're not going to find her."

But I went to the traditional teachings. I went to a man who understands a lot of these things. He told me to sit down on the bed, which was all eagle feathers. I was to sit down there, but he said, "Don't sit on the eagle feathers". I sat down on that bed, and he

said, "What's on your mind right now, if you ever start to carry it out, you'll spend the rest of your time in prison". I just looked at him and said that my mind was all right, that there was nothing wrong with my mind. He said, "Yes, you can go outside and you can tell somebody that, but you can't tell me". He said, "I know what's on your mind. You should leave it alone. The Creator will look after it."

Well, I couldn't leave it alone, but I still didn't want to bother those two men, because in my teachings, if you turn around and harm those two people, it's going to come back on you, and it's going to come back on you twice as hard. I left them alone.

I found out later that the one who killed her was her brother-in-law. He suffered for a long while. He contracted AIDS and he died of AIDS. The other one, her husband, can't have a minute's peace because the spirit of my daughter is bothering him so bad. He gets drunk, and when he gets drunk and tries to sleep, he just keeps on hollering her name all the time. That's because she's bothering him all the time. That's what she told the psychic. She told the psychic that he'll never have a minute's peace. She said, "I'll haunt him till the day he dies".

I want to thank everybody here, especially the women who invited me and my friend up here from Nova Scotia, and I thank everybody for sharing their stories.

[*Witness speaks in Mi'kmaq*]

• (1225)

Ms. Patricia Isaac (As an Individual): My name is Patricia Isaac and I'm from Membertou first nation.

Virginia Sue Pictou was my cousin. The smile that you're seeing on her in this picture, she gave me that same smile when I first met her. That was in Maine in the 1980s. My giju', my mom, she was just about to pick blueberries. Virginia came up to me with the same smile, and she said, "I'm Virginia, and I'm your cousin. My mom is your aunt." We chatted a bit. I was surprised, I was overwhelmed. There were so many people in the field and she spotted me. I said, "Wow, I have a cousin." And I'll never forget her smile. I would never forget her smile.

In 2009 I had a Sisters in Spirit vigil for Virginia and there was a good turnout. I turned 48 at the time, and had 40-odd people there— including men and children. It turned out really good.

Then I got invited to NWAC up here in Ottawa and I did a digital story on Virginia.

I spoke to NWAC this weekend. Me and Robert were there, and we asked them if there was any way they could write a letter to the Maine state police or the FBI, to get them to intervene. I'm hoping the district attorney or someone there will get involved in Virginia's case. The case is still open, and they could do another investigation. I hope they can do something. They have to access to her case and everything.

I can't travel from Cape Breton all the way to Maine. I can't do that. I'm in Canada and they're in the United States. There are barriers. I don't know much about laws in the United States. I really don't know. I'm stuck. I'm hoping the letters will go through and we'll get answers. Me and Robert will get answers and the family will get answers. I'll be the voice for Virginia. I'll keep searching for her, asking questions.

I would like to thank the families of NWAC as well as the committee. Thank you for inviting me, and I hope you'll help this story to continue.

Thank you.

Ms. Susan Martin (As an Individual): Good morning.

I would like to acknowledge that we are sitting on unceded Algonquin territory, which is our land.

I would like to thank the committee. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family. This is my family that stands behind me and picks me up when we hit rock bottom, because it is a struggle every day.

A lot of the MPs know who I am. My name is Susan Martin. My daughter Terrie Ann Dauphinais was murdered on April 29, 2002, in Calgary, Alberta, leaving three small children behind.

Before Terrie was murdered, she called the Calgary police department on March 8, 2002, to lay charges for domestic violence against my son-in-law. No one was charged, no one was removed from the home. My daughter told her friend out in Alberta, Theresa Ross, who had my grand-babies for six months after my child was murdered, that she was going to pay for it. Ken told her that she was going to pay for it.

My child was brutally murdered 52 days later. She was naked downstairs in the front door like a display of a piece of garbage, with her three children locked up in the house for 12 to 14 hours. The baby was 10 months old. Another two hours and my grandson would have died.

Gideon and Gabriel were upstairs locked in the bedroom. When the police apprehended the babies, Gabrielle told them that their dad locked them in their room. My two oldest grandchildren were full of pee and poo and were screaming to let them out, let them out. The baby was crying, [*Inaudible—Editor*] away from his mom's dead body.

I've been fighting this fight for 11 years. You guys have known I brought my child up to Parliament Hill, her remains. I've been doing this for eight years. I've asked for change. I've asked for help. Bernadette, Brenda, and I, and my granddaughter Kaden, went to the memorial on Friday night for the murdered women of Montreal. What do I see? A new mom telling her story of how her child was brutally murdered in domestic violence. Her head was barely there, the guy cut her, and she was barely hanging on with her daughter standing there.

Lots of times I want to throw in the towel and say I can't do this any more, Creator, I don't want to do this any more. Like Robert said, we have anger. We can't show it to the public, we have to address it in a proper way. When I see another mother, another child, another brother, another son, gone missing and murdered here in Canada, nobody seems to care about us brown people. Nobody seems to care. We have to do it on our own.

I do vigils here in Ottawa in my child's name. It comes out of my husband's and my pocket. It doesn't come from begging other family members to help me. Or I sell my jerky. Jean knows that, Carolyn knows that. People know that I do it on my own. We have to do it on our own because we've been begging for help.

I have to give, and I will say it, I said it on October 4, Stephen Harper a little bit of credit for actually assisting the families so that families don't lose everything, but the families are still struggling. We still need more help to have a roof over our head, to have food

in our stomach, to pay our bills, because it is a process every single day getting out of bed and dealing with the world. It's a very hard issue.

We also need to train our police officers to deal with family members and not say, well, your daughter was a prostitute. I don't care what that person.... No one has a right to take another human being's life and only get five years for that human being's life. A person who's trying to feed their family and writes a rubber cheque gets more time than a child molester, a murderer, or a rapist. What is wrong with this country? What is wrong with this country?

Look at how many...if you filled this room up, there are over 6,000 on the database, 6,000 men, women, and children on that database, and nothing's being done. A life should be worth a life here in Canada. These perpetrators don't change.

Where are my grand-babies? I got to see my grand-babies twice. They're in Saskatoon with the killer. I'm still waiting for justice. My husband's still waiting for justice. The police in Calgary told us that if my husband went there to camp on the doorstep and address the situation they would apprehend him and put him in jail. That's bullshit. Sorry for the language, people. That's bullshit.

● (1230)

That's my child. Not only that, Terrie's my second baby. This family knows this. Yesterday it was 34 years since I put Terrie's sister in the ground out in Calgary—34 years ago. Sherry died due to health problems. Terrie didn't die due to health problems. Terrie was murdered. Terrie's life was taken away, and these perpetrators need to answer for it. Not five years, not two years, not three years—they don't change people. They don't change, so quit listening to them. Quit listening to them because now it's the children who are left behind who are being targeted.

My grand-babies, Brenda's grand-babies, Bernadette's daughter, Amy and Glen's grand-babies, Lorna's daughter, Connie's family.... Our children are being targeted. Pauline and Herb Muskego's grandchildren are going to be targets. It has to stop. We have to stop it. So I'm asking you. I've been here for a long, long time doing this. I'm asking you, please back us up. Let's make a loud ruckus and change this in Canada.

Our women shouldn't be homeless. There should be no one homeless in Canada. Everybody should have a roof over their heads, food in their tummy, and clothes on their back, but it seems to me—and it's not directed at all of you guys—if you're corrupt, you get rewarded. When you misplace money, and you steal, and you lie to Canadian citizens as a mayor or a politician, yay, let's give you a million.

Well, you know what? I don't care about that. I want justice for our loved ones. I want this to stop, and I want this committee to stand behind the families, the people who are walking and bringing awareness. I want you guys to say, "Enough is enough", because guess what, people? You work for us. You work for Canadian people.

I'm asking, as a Canadian Cree Sioux woman, help us. Help us change it. Help us stop it so that I won't see a new family member here, so I don't have to come back here and address this, so I don't have to stand on Parliament Hill for eight hours telling my child's story. If it saves a woman's life, which I've done, yay. Thank you, Terrie. Thank you, my baby.

How do women and men go missing off the face of the earth without a trace? I did a search when Laura Spence and Nicole—I'm

trying to remember the last name—went missing up in Maniwaki. I worked 16 hours. I got a call from a friend telling me what was happening because she knew it would fuel a fire underneath my butt. Guess what? I stopped work, and I put my food away because I came out. I walked until two o'clock in the morning putting up posters. The word “no” would not come in my vocabulary. People couldn't believe me, how fast I walked and how fast I moved.

I'm 53 years old. People were younger than me, and I was beating them. I had only two people say no to me, and I said “Shame on you. What if that was your mom, your auntie, your daughter, or your sister?” “Oh, we can't do that ma'am. Put it out on the post.” “No. I want it here because the people see it.” People don't look at posts. As soon as there's a woman gone missing we should also have an amber alert. I don't care how old you are, it's like Pauline's sister said. We know our children. There should be an amber alert.

Facebook, media... It's the families who find our loved ones. It's our families who connect and say, “Okay, we got this and this on missing...” Am I right, families? It's the families who know when one of us is down. We might not know which one it is, but all of a sudden you'll see a text or something on Facebook if you don't have a cell phone or a phone. Are you okay? Each one of us will answer yes, we're okay, but really we're not okay because it is a struggle.

If you look at me...I didn't bring a picture of my child. Jean and Carolyn know what my child looks like. My daughter looks like me. I am a survivor of domestic violence as a child and in my first marriage, and now I question myself. If I had let my first husband take my life like he tried to, would my baby be alive? Those are what-ifs. That's a mother's what-if. What if I had done it differently? What if I had let my first husband kill me? What if I had let my childhood kill me? I came from a very abusive family at a very young age. If I had let my parents kill me....

• (1235)

That always preys on my mind and in my heart, always.

So I don't want to see this anymore. I don't want to be here anymore, but I will as long as there's another person who's gone missing. You will always see my face and I'll always be positive, and I'll always make you feel what we feel on a daily basis. Because trust me, every night I go to bed and I ask the Creator to give me the strength, the eyes to see, the heart to feel, the ears to hear, and the voice to speak the truth—because people don't like the truth. The truth hurts.

Meegwetch.

Thank you.

• (1240)

Ms. Amy Miller (As an Individual): First of all I have to thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Amy Miller and I'm from Kitchener-Waterloo.

My story starts before Denise was murdered. Six months before Denise was murdered, I barely got my younger daughter out of the exact same situation. He had taken a baseball bat to her face. She had to have full facial reconstruction, and she has brain damage. He got three months in jail—that was all, three months. But we did get her life.

Six months later, in a two-year common-law relationship my daughter Denise was bruised and battered and beaten to the point where she had been taken by ambulance to the hospital more than once. The police would go there, they would pick her up, take her and bring her to my house or to her children's house, battered and bloody, traumatizing the five-year-old, or they would take her to a friend's house, because they thought “Oh, they just need a night apart”, where this was a two-year, non-stop violence, horrific violence.

Once they took him out. He was put in prison for three months, and he was given six months' probation. In that probation order it stated, “No alcohol, anger management course, stay away from Denise, stay away from the apartment”. I found out after the fact that he left the courthouse, he stopped and picked up two 40-ouncers, went back to the apartment, and was let in.

At that time we had a detective—that we didn't know we had for nine and a half months. There was no communication between us and the police. Finally, after two months, I got a family meeting, and he said write down whatever questions you want and I'll answer them, as long as they don't impede the investigation. After the third question, I said, “Why was his probation not revoked when they were called back when she was beaten again?” He was very arrogant. He sat with his hands behind his back and he said, “Well, I honestly haven't read the file.”

What detective is given a file and doesn't read it? I don't understand that. These guys are supposed to be working now on her murder case, and they were just letting it slide. They weren't communicating with us. We would go for over a year without communication. There was one night an officer called, and Glen and I had agreed that we would not allow Denise to come back into our home again because all we were doing was putting a band-aid on it, because she would go back. She definitely had battered-wife syndrome, which the police are supposed to be well-trained in. That's a laugh. They didn't care.

Why wouldn't they take him out? In two years, he was taken out once, and his probation was not revoked.

• (1245)

What's wrong with that picture?

One night, this female officer phoned and coerced Glen for close to 45 minutes to allow us to have Denise come to our home. I was in bed. I threw the blankets back, and you couldn't have peeled me off the ceiling. I said, “No fucking way.” I went over to the office, pushed star 69, and retrieved the number that she called from.

I was very polite. I said, “Is this an officer?” She said, “Who is this and how did you get this number? This is my private cell number.” I said, “Is this an officer?” She said, “Yes, it is. Who is this?” I said, “This is Denise's mother.” She said, “Oh, well, we're en route to your house right now.”

I said, “No, you're not.” She said, “Well, your husband said we could bring Denise over.” I said, “Well, let me put it this way. I'm her biological mother. Glen's the stepfather. I have the seniority, and I say that you are not bringing her to our house. You are taking her back to her home and you're taking him out.”

She said, “Well, can't we come and talk?” I said, “No.” She said, “Can we leave her there until her sister can come up from Niagara to pick her up?” I said, “No, I don't have Jennifer's cell number.” She said, “Oh, well, Denise has it.” I said, “That's just

great. You use your private cell number but remember to block the number, and you call and you keep Denise in safe custody until she can come up and pick her up, or do your job, go back, take him out, lock him up, and let her be in a safe home."

To this day, I don't know what happened to Denise that night. I remember getting many, many phone calls during the night. When he was passed out, she would phone and she'd say, "Mom?" I'd say, "Yeah?" She'd say, "Mom, I'm scared, I'm so scared." I'd say, "Do you want me to come over?" She'd say, "No, that will just make things worse."

Well, little did I know that he had a Yale lock on the inside of the apartment and he held the only key. The police had to know this. They were in and out of that apartment all the time. Nothing was done, absolutely nothing. This went on and on until New Year's Eve of 2006. He phoned me and my two daughters and said, "Is Denise there? I'd like to wish her a happy new year." I said, "Isn't she with you?" He said, "No, but I know she's in town, and I know exactly where she's going to be tonight."

He found her. He hunted her down like an animal and he viciously took her out into a deserted area and he murdered her. This was three days after she had the strength to leave him, never to go back to him again.

And yes, I too contacted a psychic, only my psychic was from Scottsdale, Arizona. When I contacted her, I told her the situation, and she said that he begged her that night. He begged and begged her to come back home, and she looked him straight in the eye and said, "I'd rather be dead." Of course, he flipped out, "If I can't have you, nobody's having you." He murdered her and then he put her body in the Grand River, and we did not find her for three and a half months.

During all this time, I was fed up with having no contact from the police. I phoned the ombudsman and he gave me two organizations, to have the Waterloo police investigated.

- (1250)

One was the Ontario independent police review board. The other was the Ontario Civilian Police Commission. I sent my complaint to them to have Waterloo Regional investigated. No one was investigating the case, and these few companies pass this information, the complaint back and forth and back and forth until finally one came back and said, "Your time limit is up."

Where's the time limit on murder? On an investigation? Where is the time limit? He didn't tell me. Eventually, I heard back from the Ontario Civilian Police Commission. They said that this little chip with my complaint on it, that goes into the computer, had just been misplaced. So who was supposed to investigate the Waterloo Regional Police?

I let it go for a while. Next thing I know, we are granted two new detectives, who dragged their ass too. There was no communication with them. They would not phone, either. Our first detective was excellent. He would come and have coffee with us every three months just to keep contact, just to let us know they were thinking of us. After that, there was no contact. They lied to the newspapers saying that they have liaisons, that they're in touch all the time. Our liaisons only told us when to go to court, when to go to the prelim, and when to go to the pre-trial. That's all they did. There was no one there, no communication.

One day, Glen went down to the cop shop and asked to speak to the chief of homicide.

The girl behind the counter said, "What for?"

Glen said, "Well, why should I tell you? You're just the secretary. You tell him to get out here. I want to talk to him."

He came out, and Glen said, "All you have to do is phone Amy once a month, just once a month to make contact so that she knows you are still working on the case." Did we get a phone call after that? No. Nothing.

Finally, in July 2011, four and a half months after Denise was murdered, I phoned the cop shop on a Sunday. I phoned the two detectives and left a message. I said, "This is Amy Miller, and there is a day where you are going to regret hearing my name. As of now, you are fired. I do not want any contact from you whatsoever. I do not want you downstairs buzzing to get into my building. I don't want you e-mailing me. I don't want you calling me."

I thought I was pretty safe in saying that because they never had contact with me before. The next day, I got three phone calls from the one detective, and three phone calls from the other saying they wanted to talk to me about the message I left on their machines. I'm standing there in a rage. What fucking part of no contact do you not understand? You've been fired! I don't want anything to do with you. Of course, I didn't pick up the phone.

The next day, there was a write-up in the newspaper how every spring, I go down to decorate Denise's tree. I laminate her pictures, frame them. I laminate poems and I frame them.

- (1255)

I decorate the tree with flowers and ribbons, and I celebrate her life because I honour her. She had the strength to get away from him physically and then she had the strength to get away from him emotionally. "I'd rather be dead."

That day, that second day the newspaper trudged all the way down this huge rugged hill down to the flood bank and they took pictures of me with Denise over my shoulder and the flowers and then they interviewed me. I told the public exactly what I thought about our police force. They are incompetent. They know absolutely nothing about battered-wife syndrome. Why continue to take Denise out? I always thought that the person who was the batterer was to be taken out, not the person who was battered. That doesn't make any sense but then we're dealing with a police office here.

In that interview I told the public what the police were doing, what they weren't doing, why they weren't doing it, and I also told the police that when they were fired I was going to go the *The Fifth Estate* and I was going to take my story right across Canada. The night we reported Denise missing the one officer had the nerve to say to the other officer right in front of Glen and me, "She's probably downtown doing whatever she has to do to get her next fix".

He didn't know her. He had no right to say that. How inappropriately we have been treated by the police. When the woman said, "Denise is more your problem than mine", I said, "How do you figure that?" She said, "Well she's your daughter", when they wanted to bring Denise to our house and I said no. I said, "You have me there, she is my daughter, however, this is your job. Every day, everybody has a bad day on their job and this just happens to be yours, you deal with it." She hung up. I was going to phone back but I thought I'd probably get charged with harassment or something. So I didn't.

People, when you are reporting a missing daughter the police force should be there to do everything and anything they can. I was raised to believe that the police force was there to help, serve, and protect. Did they protect my daughter? After two years of abuse did they protect my daughter? She was a wrongful death. They could have stopped it. The one detective said to me recently, "Amy, when the trial is all over I will sit down and I will tell you everything". There's nothing he can tell me that justifies my daughter's life. I don't care if they were waiting to make a big drug bust on him or what, nothing is going to justify my daughter's life.

When I am finished with the trial next month I am going public with my story because when she offered me money I didn't accept it. That was blood money. That was shut-up money. That was go-away money, and I sent her away and because I didn't sue her they have not heard the last of me.

- (1300)

I am going public with my full story once this trial is over. Someone has to be held accountable for what these police officers are not doing. It's about time that people started listening. It's not just an aboriginal woman/girl issue; this goes along with white women too, and Hispanic women. In Kitchener, we have had murders where there have been white women cut up and dropped in dumpsters. Denise was murdered in 2006. Two years later, a friend of hers had a father who was a high-profile criminal lawyer. They got her murderers jailed in two years. Two years is all it took for a high-profile criminal lawyer. Why is it taking me seven years of fighting?

I'm very upset with these parties who are not wanting to help make justice responsible. I believe they should bring the death penalty back because if it was back, people would think twice before they murdered again.

Thank you very much for listening to me.

The Chair: I want to let everyone in the room know that it is 1:00 p.m. I want to make sure that everyone is able to make their comments, but there are a few members, I know, who have 1:00 p.m. meetings that they weren't able to switch around. Some of them have indicated to me that they will come back and join us, either for the lunch or for the remainder of the meeting, but I just wanted to let you know that's why they're leaving.

Thank you, and please continue.

Ms. Lorna Martin (As an Individual): Hi. My name is Lorna Martin.

I'm here to share my mother's story. Her name is Marie Jean Saint Saveur, and she's a member of the Bigstone Cree Nation in Wabasca-Desmarais, Alberta. I'm also a member of the Bigstone Cree.

My mother went missing in 1987. It's been 26 years. We just spent three days with the Native Women's Association of Canada in a family gathering. This work is exhausting and I'm exhausted today, but I'm honoured, and I will always step up to the plate to share my mom's story. All our family lives in Alberta, in Edmonton. I have a sister in Lillooet, B.C. I usually get to share her story, because I have the biggest mouth sometimes. Sometimes there's one family member who, for whatever reason, can articulate things on behalf of the family.

My mother attended the St. Martin Residential School on Bigstone Cree Nation. She had her Cree language. My big sister Sharon was here on the weekend, sharing some more stories about

our mother, because Sharon and my mom were really close in different ways. Sharon is my half-sister, but we grew up together in the same home, and Sharon's first language was Cree, so my mom could speak with her. I think when our people speak the language it always connects them more closely.

Sharon just mentioned something about the women in my mom's side of the family, which really explains how I remember my aunts. They're considered to be good medicine women, healers, and also when they walk into a room, they bring light, positive, good feelings, and good, happy energy that radiates in the room. Growing up, I always had that energy where I could...

Maybe my mom was on her way to the Edmonton mental health hospital after almost taking her life the night before. I heard some of the nightmare stories of her and her siblings being in residential school. She had a daily struggle with her life, because of those nightmares that were inflicted on them by the nuns and the priests and the people who worked at those schools. Her brother was blinded in one eye at the age of eight from being punched down the stairway by a nun at the school, and her sister also mentioned that they were locked in closets, because they maybe didn't want to go to bed, or, you know, they were just being little kids. Those are the things that my mom had to.... She drank because those memories are challenging for people to deal with on a daily basis.

- (1305)

At the time of her disappearance, she'd had a life of alcohol abuse. When she was reported missing, the RCMP came to take a report from my sister Arlene from Edmonton and poor Arlene mentioned the date and time she last saw our mother. One of the first questions the RCMP asked my sister was if she drank. Arlene couldn't deny it. She didn't lie. She said yes. He said, "They go on a drinking binge for two or three days and then they come back". My sister's fiancé at the time—he's not a native, he's Tom Pearson from Athabasca—asked what that meant, what that had to do with Mary being missing.

Tom is not my brother. Tom was my sister's fiancé. So that was the response from the RCMP, in asking for help in finding our mom, we met up with that type of racial weirdness from them. When you're full of anxiety, you're hurting, it feels like a kick in the stomach or in the head when somebody you're asking for help says something like that. Right away, any chance of trust, any line of communication is.... There's a barrier right there. You might as well put your hand up. There's no help there. They said our mom was a drunken Indian.

We didn't know what to do. That was in 1987 and the Native Women's Association of Canada wasn't there. They were there but missing and murdered women weren't being talked about. There were no resources. No one knew how to help. I had just moved to Ontario that year. I followed my husband and was pregnant with our second child. Over that year, I couldn't really help. My second son was born with congenital heart failure, so he had open-heart surgery at two weeks of age. I had to attend to his delicate, precious little life. He's a healthy young man now.

The RCMP poster about missing persons and unidentified remains still has misinformation. Some of that information excludes things like her birthdate, stuff like that. There is some non-factual information because some of that information came from her common-law husband, her boyfriend at the time. We believe, and the RCMP told my sister they believe, he murdered her

because he burned her clothes. This man told the police that he burned my mom's clothes and that he also cashed her last paycheque.

• (1310)

He was there at some investigation by the RCMP. They found out that he had been violent towards some of his ex-women, like his ex-wife. He pistol-whipped her. The last woman he was living with in B.C., where he fled to after my mother...he told the RCMP that the last time he saw her she had jumped in a truck with some truckers and was heading to B.C. So he had his children, they were adults and they were living in B.C. The last woman he lived with in B.C. after my mom, she disclosed to the RCMP that she was very scared of him as well. He broke down her door, busted it down, after being told not to come back, to leave the house. So they had evidence on him. Actually, he died in a car accident, a head-on collision, right around the time they started doing more of an investigation on him.

Right away they should have gone on him full force when he said that he burned his clothes. I heard another family mention that the person burned the person's clothes. I don't know what that means, but I'm sure a criminal homicide investigation unit would know what that means.

I know as well that it takes a lot of money to...when people go missing, when people are murdered. I know, because my husband was murdered in 1998, and we had three young boys at the time, so I know what that is. And the murderer as well, we all know who it was; he was the family of Ted Rogers, Ted Rogers of Rogers Communications.... It was his nephew. So we know how much money that family has, and I'm pretty sure that's why he got off and he's walking free. Bringing that up again is the hard thing, because one of my sons was also abused by that same person who murdered his father.

Speaking for myself, the family, you know...the person is murdered...for the family, it takes away a lot of their life force, and the physical pain, to be under that type of duress and stress, works against your immune system. I know that. I am fortunate to have very well-educated people in the family on my husband's side to help me, even when my mother went missing. I have a sister-in-law who has a Ph.D. and a brother-in-law who was very well educated and knowledgeable about the law, and his contacts, and their energy, and the things they knew...what to do to help me when my mom was missing.

But still.... They would always ask about her, like, "What happened to your mom?", and who was helping me...I don't know. There was no one helping me find her. She was one of the first women registered with the Native Women's Association of Canada. From that point on, that was the place where I could talk about my mom after all those years. That was started in 2005, and all of a sudden these people wanted to hear about my mom. That was a new and welcome thing.

• (1315)

For years I wasn't able to share my mom's story on Parliament Hill or even go around all those women at the vigils. It was really scary for me. I didn't know what to say. I was scared to share my loss and all the different feelings, the anger. But over time I listened to them. I got educated about the things I could do and shared that with my family out west.

So I became very organized with my information. It made me feel good and stronger. There's strength in numbers. I feel stronger

when I'm around other family members. You get your information organized and polished, and you have the spiritual energy of your loved ones.

My mom frequently comes to me in dreams. That's good; they're very loving dreams.

I miss her so much.

That's all I can say now.

Meegwetch. Hai hai. Thank you.

• (1320)

Ms. Lisa Big John (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in Cree*]

First of all, my name is Lisa and I come from a Cree nation in Edmonton, Alberta. My sister was Mona Lee Wilson, who was brutally murdered by Robert Picton. That was his last victim.

I'll start off with the painful journey I had to live through for a number of years. I'm very tired. I always wanted to come here and for my voice to be heard. One of my biggest dreams was to come here and to be heard, to speak for my sister and to be her voice. When she was alive, she got pushed out of the way. She was a nobody to society. She lived in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside for a number of years. We came from a broken home as well. I came from a violent system in a community I had to leave. I had to run away from there because I wasn't protected there at all. I was brutally raped there when I was eight years old. All that stuff I had to experience in my journey, going through the evil cycle of life.

The worst that I heard here today from the families...a lot of them I have something in common with, with their past violence. I was also in relationships where there was domestic violence and I just about died. Over the years I've tried to overcome my pain. I'm very bitter. I've been fighting the system for these words to be taken seriously. It just about destroyed me, the aftermath of my sister's death and the issues that I had tried to overcome over the years.

I've had my sobriety for 15 years. I quit drinking to honour my sister's memory. There's a lot of things that went on over there that weren't right for those girls in Downtown Eastside. There's a lot of injustice that was done over there.

I was also involved in the inquiry a couple of years ago in Vancouver. It came to nothing. I wasn't too impressed with what I saw. There was a lot of betrayal in that inquiry that I had to experience. A lot of people tried to bring me down. I'm finally starting to come out of that little dark hole where I used to hide. I can't say anything to anybody because I was so used to standing there taking abuse from people, like the RCMP. The RCMP traumatized my life in the past, back in my drinking days. They hurt me. They didn't protect me. Every time I got involved with them the only way that they had to deal with my anger issues was to throw me in jail, or get hit one way or the other.

• (1325)

I've seen a lot of things in my life. I've lived on the street as well. When I started to become strong was when I first became a *kookum*, a grandmother, at the age of 45. The love I have for my grand-kids is what keeps me going strong.

My future doesn't deserve a violent world. This violence continuously goes on, from violent to violent to violent.... I'm worried about my future life.

As these people say about the cops.... I saw their actions back in my drinking days. It is unbelievable, unmanageable, the way they talk to people and the way they disrespect street girls. "Unmanageable" is the word I have to describe what they have done.

I've been failed a lot by the system. I've tried to take action, continuously take action to do what I have to do. The community I come from is not a caring community. It's all about them. It's all about them taking care of their families. Where are we in that circle? We're nowhere. We've been outcast.

I've been shovelling out, taking care of my family and me for many years, fighting just to live on this land. With what the government gives me, I shouldn't be living like that—shovelling on this land, living like that, living on somebody's else's rights—when I have a lot of rights to have a good life with my grand-kids and my future.

There are a lot of things that need to be corrected by the system, especially the law. That's what they're there for, to serve and protect. They do protect a lot of people, but the majority of the serve and protect that I've seen is not there. I've tried so many times, over and over, to try to do something about this corruption of justice that I live with.

I also live in a city that's very racist, Edmonton. There are a lot of racists in Edmonton. I back away from a lot of people because of their attitudes. There's a lot of betrayal, a lot of evilness. People have to start realizing that something needs to be done.

I remember when I was a little girl; I never used to know what was right and what was wrong. When I tried to ask for help, it was never about me. It was always about somebody else. I literally backed away from my community, too, because all they did was betray me, big time. They seriously betrayed me.

When I'm going through this challenge to overcome the issues I have gone through, that I have lived through for so many years, my community should be here. They should be supporting me. They should be caring about the people. It's their people, too, who are getting killed. But the only ones that they protect are their people.

• (1330)

I had a friend who went missing in Calgary. I've forgotten what year. I asked this person, but he didn't give me any answers. They paid so many thousands of dollars to go to look for that person. This was stolen money that the band members, that they had to.... I know for a fact that my money gets abused by the chief and councils. They may intimidate other people in the community, but I don't live like that anymore. I don't stand there and let people talk to me in any way they want. For how many years I used to take that abuse.... I used to let people with their attitudes....

I've never been to Ottawa before, but I thank the Creator for helping me to come here to raise awareness. We have to stop the violence that's continuously going on. A lot of people don't know it, but it can happen to anybody. I thank the Creator for my still being here because I got to see my grand-kids.

But she wasn't so lucky. She didn't ask to be brutally murdered. She had a boyfriend, who used to rely on her for his addiction, for his happiness.

The government tore my family, broke that circle and destroyed it. As the years went by, I always tried to reach out to my sister, to help her better herself. When she was taken from me, it made me

more bitter. I didn't know how to deal with it. I just keep picking my pain again, my trauma, whatever that evil cycle is that's always trying to challenge me.

It took a lot for me to speak to people like this because I never could talk in public. I'm so used to being told to shut up, that I have no right to talk. Even the community talks to me like that when I try to ask for help. They disrespect me, they mock me, they call me names. They should be taking a good look at themselves and what they do behind closed doors, living off my money, and my grand-kids' money, and my kids' money. Yet we're the ones who have to suffer the consequences that we didn't ask for.

Why am I still here? Because the Creator brought me this far. He brought me this far for a reason. You guys have to start realizing that we've been trying to fight for justice for so many years. It goes on and on. When is it going to stop? A lot of people have been destroyed by predators. There are a lot of predators out there. I've lived out there before. In the life I had, I had to fight to survive out there.

• (1335)

It was just unmanageable over the years, what I've seen. The community works against their people. The community doesn't...not every community, but the community that I come from. I gave up on asking them for help. Why? Because they have proven that they're not going to care and they never will. There are elders there. There are supposed to be elders there to guide the youth, show them right and wrong.

There are a lot of suicides in the community. I had a nephew who hung himself because of bitterness. There were elders there. What they're supposed to be doing is helping the future. But when I see a lot of those people and I try to say something, sometimes I back away, because.... There are a lot of bad things that people like to do. In my first nation way, people play around with medicine. They take it for granted, and they use it on other people, and they get mad. Other people have to pay for their evil. Why do I say this? Because I grew up with this thing as a kid. My grandfather was a medicine man.

I had my brother shot right in front of me. I had my little brother brutally murdered, beaten to death on a reserve. That still hasn't been put to justice. Sometimes I feel like there's no hope at all for the future, because of the life that I live here today and what I see. I have to be here. I have to protect my grand-kids. I have to protect my family.

My sister passed away this year in March. She went through so much pain. She withdrew from everybody, shut herself off behind closed doors away from the world, because of how she was murdered. She drank herself to death. Now my two nephews have to try to learn and live with that, and deal with it. It's very painful not having a parent. My mom abandoned me when I was a newborn. I basically brought myself up in a community, starting, I remember, when I was about five years old. There was nothing but predators around me, evil predators.

As long as this goes on, there's going to be no hope for the future. They deserve to live in a better world. They deserve to live a positive life. They deserve to live a peaceful life. Me, I lived in this world, and what I went through.... I went through a very painful life. My sister's death just about destroyed me, just about took me under. I just about withdrew from my family. I pushed them away. I didn't want to talk to anybody. I got sick. I still struggle with that, and I have to start realizing that....

• (1340)

The Creator came into my heart, my sister came into my heart and told me to start fighting back because my family still needs me here. I'm not ready to go. My job here is not done. I'm still waiting for justice to happen. How many years have I been waiting for justice to happen? And it's always failed me.

For these people who have shared their painful life stories, I have a lot of comments on the things they have gone through. It's a very evil cycle to get out of. The only way for me to get rid of that was to start believing in me, start focusing on what I was going to do in the future. Now I'm in this future with *kokum*, with my grandkids. Grandchildren are very special. They're a very big part of my healing. A lot of people, the communities, the system, they don't think about grand-kids and what they have to live through. What kind of life will it be for them in the future?

At 15 years of age I left the community. I had no hope to know where to go. My grandparents left me. They passed away when I was very young. I didn't know what to do there, so I left. I wasn't going to stay in the community that hurt me a lot. Still today I have no respect for that community because they did a lot of damage to me, not just a little, but they did a lot of damage. I try to speak out to them and they get defensive. When I try to talk to them, they get defensive, they give me attitude. I try to tell them about the right things they need to start doing. When I go to that community, that's when I feel that evilness, that medicine, that just surrounds that band office. I hardly go there. It's not my life, it's not my culture.

I try to have my voice heard out there as much as I can to the nation. Being in gatherings like this, I really thank NWAC for having this organization for families. It helps a lot to meet other new people and share what they have gone through, because only they know, only they understand.

But people are always trying to speak for us. I had to live with that, too. The law was always trying to speak for me, always trying to speak for my sister, saying, "Maybe she took off for the city. She's probably tired of living here." I was standing there thinking to myself, "How would you know that? You don't think like her. You can't talk for her."

I remember being thrown in jail a couple of times because I had an attitude, I was sticking up for her. I remember them telling me, "Who cares?"

• (1345)

What kind of law would tell a person that they don't care?

You know, we have tribal cops over there, a few of them who.... It's just unbelievable how they work with the white system. They're there to protect those families in the communities and that. It's just unimaginable; cops, they go in there and they shoot anybody they want. That just really gets to me, thinking that, again, another native...natives are destroyed in terms of what they have to see and what they have to learn.

People have to start realizing the reality. We're not living in a dream. This is real, what we have gone through, what I have gone through—a cycle of abuse, a cycle of domestic violence. My girls were sexually abused back in my drinking days, and now, because of that, they're angry. They're bitter. Who has to work with them? I do. The communities' native organizations are paid to do that, to help out the first nations youth, to guide them to a positive life, to a positive road.

I see a lot of stuff in Edmonton that's not right with the system. First nations people are getting thrown in jail, in remand centres. They don't have a voice. They're invisible. The law speaks for them in that courtroom.

I'm sitting there looking at this, thinking, you know, I don't even know why in the hell we have native rights anyway. That's my opinion. I was given rights to have a life. My rights are disrespected. People laugh at me when I try to tell them the reality that we're trying to do something to get justice.

I've heard a few in the law mock these girls on the Vancouver Eastside. Little do they realize that native culture is very powerful. I should know. The gift of the medicine that was given to an elder—that was my [*Witness speaks in Cree*].

On the other hand, the system's literally trying to destroy it so that in the future, they can never get anywhere in their lives to live a positive way. I seriously think sometimes, when I'm sitting there in my room thinking—because my [*Witness speaks in Cree*] used to tell me this too—that people are going to destroy us as much as they want, as much as they can. They're going to literally destroy us.

I never used to believe it when he used to say that to me. But I see how they were abused by the system and what they did to them. They got away with that. I can sit here and talk all day—my face could turn blue, whatever—but what is it going to take to get that message across your guys' eyes?

• (1350)

I'm talking about people who are suicidal, because losing their parents, their sisters, whatever...why? I felt like that so many times. A lot of times I feel hopeless. I try to ask for help, but some of those people are phony. I block myself away from people.

There's too much evil in this nation. This is what's destroying the first nations and making them feel hopeless. I'm fully aware of the stuff that I have seen, but what is it going to take for the system to realize that you guys need to start doing something about the system? You need to start telling them that if they can't do the job they are supposed to be doing, then they shouldn't be working there. That's what they're there for.

The Chair: Lisa, I'm just going to ask you to allow Connie to have a few minutes, because we have a hard end time of two o'clock, when question period begins. There will be time to speak a little bit, even more informally, during lunch, but members of Parliament can't stay any longer. I apologize for that.

I want to let Connie have a few moments, and then—

Amy, do you have a question?

Ms. Amy Miller: Yes, I do.

I would like to ask that young gentleman back there why he is smiling and texting on his telephone when this is a very important meeting.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Let's just continue with the meeting and then we can have a conversation afterwards.

Lisa, I hope you don't mind. If there's time afterwards, we'll continue.

Thank you.

Ms. Lisa Big John: I'm easy to get along with.

The Chair: I can see that. Thanks.

Ms. Connie Greyyes (As an Individual): My name is Connie

Greyyes and I hail from Fort St. John, British Columbia. My first nations community is in Wabasca, Alberta. I'm a member of the Bigstone Cree Nation. I'm the mother of two sons. I have 12 siblings and about 33 nieces and nephews.

I think what you're seeing here in listening to all these stories is the direct result of how this country has treated aboriginal people from the get-go. The rippling effects of residential school, the breakdown of our families, have had a tremendous impact on all of us. I know that my own experiences, with my mother having gone, and my father, and my aunts, who were sterilized in residential school, have created the person that I am today. I am much different now, 10 years later, than I was prior. I quit drinking and doing drugs 11 years ago.

I've lived quite a painful life. I have been gang-raped, and raped. I have been beaten up. I did go to the police, and was dismissed. I'm standing there at the hospital with my lips cut open, black eye, knowing and telling them who did it, but they're telling me that alcohol was a factor, that we were probably drunk. I can't tell you what that does to a person after hearing it so many times. As I sat here today looking across—because I'm looking at everything—at these things on display in these boxes, it's such a slap in the face that you would show so much respect to those possessions and you can't do that to your aboriginal people in this country. You know, you have to stop thinking with this, and start feeling here.

I'm going to tell you the story of my beautiful cousin Joyce who lived in Edmonton, Alberta. In November of 1993 she was walking through this little condominium apartment and was lost. She knocked on a door and asked for directions. The young man obliged and told her “this is the direction”, and off she went. He decided to follow her and rob her, so he beat her up, rifled through her pockets—I'm assuming—and left her there beaten. He went to the apartment that he happened to be staying in that night. He sat there and decided that she might be able to identify him. He grabbed a can of gasoline and went to where she lay beaten. Then he poured gasoline on her, and lit her on fire. It was such a cold night that when the firemen showed up, they couldn't put her out with water—they would have surely killed her—so they packed her with snow, not realizing that it was a person. When they realized the horrendous scene that they were about to uncover, they couldn't believe it. They said the flames were six feet high off of her. My beautiful cousin didn't die that night. My ancestors covered her and they took care of her. She died 22 days later in the hospital. Thank goodness, you know, my family members were able to go and see her before she passed on, to comfort her and let her know that she was not alone. I often think of my cousin that night, and I made a set of vamps for the Walking with our Sisters exhibit that's going around. It's her keeping me going in this fight.

My Auntie Nora was run down by an MTC. If you don't know what that is, it's called a mobile treatment centre. Three people were in the unit. They backed into her, crushed her between my uncle's vehicle and the MTC. They were 82. Then the medic and the gentleman who was driving and their passenger jumped out, and seeing her laying there, chose not to open up the back of the MTC and transport her to the hospital, they chose to jump into the vehicle and drive away.

• (1355)

What makes it worse was that it was a family friend who had run my auntie down and killed her. He admitted it in court. I did a video plea to him saying that a year ago we were walking up Main Street drumming to end violence to our women and to start respecting our women, and you let my auntie lay there and die. He admitted it. He got two years. He's out, and my family has asked him to live his life in an honourable way, and the forgiveness is there for him.

I don't know the answers, as I know you don't. I know there are suggestions that we can make. I remember giving birth to my sons and thinking, “Please let them be boys.” The second thing I prayed for was that their skin would be light because then they'd be given some privilege. They wouldn't be dismissed. I do have two sons. One is light and one is brown. The light-skinned one grows his hair long so that he can braid it. I'm very proud of him.

If we can all start opening our hearts and living by some honourable teachings, it is not hopeless. Nothing can be hopeless.

In closing, I shared this poem on the Hill last year. I shared it yesterday, and I'd like to share it all with you today so that you can maybe close your eyes and really feel what it is like to be an aboriginal woman in this country. My niece, Helen Knott, wrote this. She said, “Auntie, I wrote this poem. It reminded me of all the women who are missing and I want you to read it and let me know what you think.” I've read it to many people. She is an amazing young survivor of abuse herself. She is just finishing her bachelor's degree in social work.

The poem is called *Invisible*.

Your eyes, they curve around me.
I watch you try so hard to find your way past me.
Your sight is like rushing waters,
Moving beside me, behind me, pushing over me, Indirectly consuming me.

They say the path of least resistance makes rivers and men crooked.
I am here. I have resisted. I am resisting.
I did not make you crooked.

What is it about you structural giants?
What is it about your pockmarked protection?
What is it about your false perceptions?
What beliefs have you bound to my body?
What pathologies have you painted the pigment of my skin?
What bad medicine did your forefathers use to make me invisible?

You don't want to see me.
What's worse is that you have the choice whether or not you see me.
I become a casualty of your blindness,
Subjected to your one-sided absent-mindedness because you've been given a privilege called selective vision.
You weed out the colours that don't match your peripheral preference, and,
I am not part of your rainbow, your twisted-light promises for better tomorrows.

My face can be plastered on posters telling you what I was last seen wearing,
With fitted descriptions, a location to give you bearings, and,
You can choose to look past me, and go on, uncaring.

My raven's hair and heritage does not sound alarm bells.
It does not stir you to look for me.
Because you have never really seen me.
You've seen me all right. You've seen me on street corners,
Lips red like sirens, dreams broken like sidewalk syringes,
Neurotic like Catholic church windows,
Submissive and silent.

You see me in welfare lines, hands open wide, waiting for what's coming to me,
Drinking death-causing concoctions behind dumpsters.
You see me as a standing statistic, a living, breathing, heaving stereotype.
You see me in the bar, another joke for you and your friends.
Just another squaw, but if you want to get laid, I'm your Pocahontas.
You see me as dispensable.
This is how you see me.

Undeserving of stars,
Deserving of starlight rides and pleasurable times.
Funny how you fail to see me when I'm face up,
Lips puffed, body bloated and battered, bruised beyond recognition.
Still not gaining your attention.

Come on, baby, and dance me outside.
I think she was just looking for a good time.
I heard she lived a risky lifestyle.
It was inevitable, some say.
This is how you see me.

• (1400)

Never somebody's daughter, never somebody's mother, never an aunt, a sister, a friend.
Never am I seen as strong, as proud, as resilient.
Never as I am.
Finally, given the stars,
Laid to gaze at them on back roads and in ditches,
On ghostly stretches of forgotten pebbled pathways.
Your vastness swallows me.
Do I fall in your line of sight? Do you see me now?
Because I get this feeling that your eyes, they curve around me.

In my community a dozen women are missing or have been murdered. I come from a community of 18,000 people. I don't think it's a coincidence that it is the oil and gas industry and the insurgence of oil field workers that come in the winter. Unfortunately, they're trying to build a huge dam there, and we're worried for our women. We're really worried. We're surrounded by four reserves, and I just hope that one day this country will start to respect our women and our people as much as you respect the possessions that hang on these walls.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I really appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you to everyone. Just before we wrap up, I want to say a couple of things.

First of all, a special thanks to NWAC, the Native Women's Association of Canada—without them and their help, we would not have been able to have this meeting, so I appreciate that very much.

Also, thank you to our elder, Robert. I just wanted to give you this token of appreciation on behalf of our committee. Thank you very much for leading our meeting in prayer. I think that was a fitting way to do that and I want to thank you very much on behalf of the committee.

• (1405)

Mr. Robert Pictou: It's just the way it is...you have the prayer, too.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

If I might also, of course, thank most importantly all of you who came here to talk to us today, the families, for your strength, for your courage, and for sharing your stories with us.

Please do stay for lunch.

Robert, if you could close our meeting, we'd appreciate it.

Mr. Robert Pictou: [*Witness speaks in Mi'kmaq*]

We asked the Creator...thank us for everything that happened today, thank us for the ladies here who spoke, and the men, too, who are missing their loved ones.

Also, I wished and asked Him to watch each and every one of us. Thank you. as we're going home tonight. Some of us are going by car, some are going by bus, and a few of us are going by plane. I just asked the Creator to watch over each and every one of us.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8](#) from the 41st Parliament, Second Session and [Meetings Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8](#) from the 41st Parliament, First Session) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Stella Ambler

Chair

DISSENTING OPINION OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

“Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions...”

“...States shall take measures, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, to ensure that Indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.”

– United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Articles 18 and 22(2)

Urgent and immediate action is needed to address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and violence faced by too many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women and girls. At the beginning of the special committee’s hearings, New Democrats were mindful that families and communities of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls were expecting to hear concrete recommendations that the federal government could move forward with immediately. New Democrats were hopeful at the onset of the committee of the potential to make clear and strong recommendations for federal action but were left disappointed by the outcome.

A call to action should imply some urgency; instead this report’s recommendations suggest that the status quo remain and no extraordinary measures are necessary to deal with the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. The report does not convey that there is a public safety emergency unfolding in every corner of the country and that a co-ordinated response is needed to address the high rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls.

This approach disappoints NDP members of the committee. As Parliamentarians, part of our work is to decide how to allocate resources to achieve the social and economic goals we determine are of the highest priority. Reducing violence and preventing the disappearance or murder of more women and girls should have been the goal of this committee. Instead, we are left with another report that ignores testimony pointing out that inadequate federal funding has weakened the ability of Indigenous organizations and communities to respond to the on-going tragedy.

This approach disappoints NDP members of the committee. As Parliamentarians, part of our work is to decide how to allocate resources to achieve the social and economic goals we determine are of the highest priority. Reducing violence and preventing the disappearance or murder of more women and girls should have been the goal of this committee. Instead, we are left with another report that ignores testimony pointing out that inadequate federal funding has weakened the ability of Indigenous organizations and communities to respond to the on-going tragedy.

New Democrats had hoped that in line with Canada's obligations to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that First Nations, Inuit and Métis organizations and families would help lead, direct and inform the work of the committee; but this was not the case. Our initial concerns regarding the lack of inclusiveness and clear vision of the committee, raised in a letter to the Chair of the Committee on June 19, 2013, were unfortunately never answered. Instead, the final report criticizes the very people the Committee had asked to join the committee to provide MPs with expertise and lived experience.

We would like to thank the many witnesses who appeared before the committee and shared their stories and work. New Democrats found many inconsistencies in witness testimony. Nearly every witness agreed that a national public inquiry into the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls should be a priority of the Canadian government. Such an inquiry need not be limited simply to the circumstances of each disappearance or murder; it should also look into systemic problems with Canada's justice system and provincial child welfare systems as well as the effects of the *Indian Act* in perpetuating and institutionalizing racism and sexism against Indigenous women and girls.

We also heard many witnesses say that any solutions to end violence against Indigenous women must be led and sustained by Indigenous women. For centuries our legal system has denied Indigenous women their rights and legal standing. That has contributed to the violence against them. Recognizing that and working to combat the attitudes that lead to increased violence against Indigenous women means enabling those same women to take steps to end the violence. This also supports community-driven solutions.

Finally, New Democrats would like to acknowledge the work of the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations for their draft *Action Plan to End Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls*. We also would like to thank the Native Women's Association of Canada and all families for the expertise they tried to provide to the committee. We are dismayed that the committee did not use its powers to recognize that expertise and find a way to better integrate it into the work of the committee.

The lack of recognition of these organizations and individuals highlights an issue that must be addressed by Canada's legal and political community before a national inquiry can begin. As we saw during the work of this committee and also during the Oppal Inquiry in British Columbia, the special circumstances of Indigenous women and their representatives is often sidelined during legal procedures. The reconciliation of the existing Indigenous system of laws and justice and the Canadian legal system is an on-going process. Finding a way to integrate the lived experience of women without re-victimizing them through a system of adversarial questioning and insistence on strict adherence to previous practice would go far in helping determine a way forward for us all.

As Mary Teegee from Carrier Sekani Family Services said during her witness testimony:

"It's not an Aboriginal issue; it's a Canadian society issue. That is the only way we are going to deal with it, by coming together and collaborating in every aspect of our society."

New Democrats propose the following recommendations.

Recommendation One:

That the federal government establish a National Commission of Public Inquiry to analyse violence against Indigenous women and girls, in particular those who are missing or have been murdered and that where possible, Indigenous women are involved in the design, decision-making, process and implementation of this inquiry.

Recommendation Two:

That the federal government, based on the motion presented to the House by Niki Ashton (M-444), and with leadership from Indigenous communities, specifically Indigenous women and their representatives, develop and implement a national action plan to address violence against Indigenous women and girls that addresses the structural root of the violence as well as the accountability and coordination of government bodies charged with preventing and responding to violence.

Recommendation Three:

The federal government should take all efforts to enable Indigenous women as leaders in any strategy to reduce violence or to promote gender equality. This may include consultation in program design and implementation with sustainable and predictable project funding specifically for Indigenous women to combat violence at the national, regional, community and family level.

Recommendation Four:

That the federal government address chronic underfunding of:

- **front-line services;**
- **housing;**
- **child welfare services;**
- **education;**
- **health and mental health treatment;**
- **safe houses, especially in northern and remote communities;**
- **research, advocacy organizations and data collection;**
- **other anti-poverty programming**

for all Indigenous women, their families and communities, in close consultation with Indigenous peoples and while respecting Canada's obligations in section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and under the UNDRIP.

Recommendation Five:

That the federal government invest in a balanced, effective approach based on prevention, policing, and prosecution to address violence against Indigenous women and girls by providing sustainable and ongoing funding for: preventive, anti-violence and community safety initiatives; police services in Inuit, First Nations and Métis communities; and victim and healing programs; and also by developing police officer training to counter racism and sexism in the treatment of Indigenous women and girls - in close consultation with Indigenous peoples and while respecting Canada's obligations in section 35 of the *Constitution Act, (1982)* and under the UNDRIP.

LIBERAL DISSENTING REPORT: SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Indigenous women and girls in Canada are significantly more likely to become victims of violence and homicide, as well as to go missing. Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous women and girls in Canada is an urgent issue, and there is overwhelming consensus in Canada it must be addressed urgently. This is a crisis that should transcend partisan politics.

After countless studies, the families of the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls are frustrated that there has been so little progress. They were calling for real action. This committee was struck to bring justice to the thousands of Aboriginal women who have gone missing or been murdered in recent decades. This justice can only be achieved through decisive actions taken to end the violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

On February 19, 2013, the Liberal Party tabled a motion in the House of Commons which sought to create a forum for all political parties to work together to find solutions to address this ongoing tragedy

It passed unanimously. There was hope that once and for all the families of missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada would have a safe place to share their stories and educate Parliamentarians about an issue that had been ignored for far too long. They asked for justice, support and recommendations for action to end this tragedy so that no other families would have to go through what they had gone through.

Unfortunately from the very first meeting it was clear that the [Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women \(the “Committee”\)](#) **would not be allowed the flexibility necessary in the design of its study, the way it heard from witnesses, to achieve meaningful results. This was totally exacerbated by the ongoing partisanship of government members who have refused to exercise their Parliamentary duty to honour the testimony of the witnesses and as they acquiesced to the disappointing set of government-authored recommendations that refuse to answer the call for real action. The title of the report, Call for Action, is thereby doubly insulting.**

Process

The broad mandate of the Committee provided members with the opportunity to design a study that was flexible and focussed on obtaining evidence in creative and culturally sensitive ways. Unfortunately this did not happen.

The Liberal Party made it clear at the outset of the process that, for the Committee to produce a meaningful report, the members needed to hear from the families and loved ones of the victims at the very beginning of the process. This would have provided members of the Committee with a helpful foundation and context to design the study and an appropriate lens through which to view subsequent evidence. Instead, the Committee

only heard from victims' families toward the end of the study. While their stories were powerful and profoundly impacted the members of the Committee, the fact that we did not have the benefit of the perspective that their stories provided when designing the study, or when hearing most of the other witnesses, severely undermined our work.

In addition, the Committee's insistence on hearing from witnesses in rigid one hour panels of three, often with little coherence in how the panels were structured, further hampered the collection of useful evidence and failed to account for the cultural and emotional sensitivities of this issue.

The Liberal Party of Canada was also disappointed with the Committee's failure to make use of the unique expertise of Indigenous women's organizations. In particular, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has done extensive work on this issue over many years and it was the understanding of the Liberal Party of Canada that they would be engaged by the Committee in the design and implementation of the study as well as the drafting of recommendations. Instead, the Committee did not even hear testimony from NWAC until two months into the hearings. The subsequent lack of proactive communication on the part of the Committee with NWAC led to their decision to withdraw from the process last fall.

Committee Report Recommendations and Budget 2014

The Liberal Party of Canada believes the recommendations in the Committee Report should focus on proposing real action to confront the disproportionate levels of violence, homicide and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls. The Committee heard from countless witnesses and there was consensus in their recommendations on actions that need to be taken. Instead of hearing these recommendations and incorporating them, the government instead spent too much time inserting their own priorities into the report.

We are very concerned about the Committee's decision to insert or otherwise highlight in the report's recommendations partisan government messaging regarding the Conservative policy priorities. Their inclusion in no way reflects the testimony of witnesses, and thus is a flagrant abuse of the parliamentary principle of reporting on the testimony of witnesses factually.

Regardless of the specific measures, the recommendations should be focused on proposing new initiatives, or new ways to implement existing ones, rather than noting what is already being done.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. National Public Inquiry

The Liberal Party of Canada recommends that the Government of Canada call a national public commission of inquiry into the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. That national public commission of inquiry must have the scope and resources necessary to identify the root causes of this ongoing tragedy, provide justice for the victims and true healing for their loved ones. This inquiry is not only about

much needed reconciliation, but a non-partisan mechanism to develop solutions to an ongoing crisis.

It is unfortunate that the recommendations in the Committee's final report ignored the call for a national public commission of inquiry into the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. This issue was repeatedly raised by witness after witness who passionately spoke about the need for such an inquiry.

When speaking to the committee on May 30, 2013, NWAC President Michele Audet told us:

"We are not here today to set aside the national public inquiry to document the situation of missing and murdered women. That remains a priority for us...we are talking about a large number of missing women who have never obtained justice. Perhaps the problem is systematic. A national public inquiry would therefore shed some light on the issue and bring about solutions."

We heard from the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief, Shawn Atleo, on December 3, 2013 that:

"The AFN is not in any way saying that we sit back and not undertake the needed efforts now to stop violence against Indigenous women and girls. Instead, I want you to know that a national public commission of inquiry is critical for accountability and to create change. What has prevented us from moving forward in the past? Has it been cost, negligence, or has it been oversight?"

Ms. Susan O'Sullivan, the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, told the committee on January 30, 2014 that:

"A national commission of inquiry would allow for the voices of Canada's aboriginal women and communities to be heard, respected, and considered, in processes and structures designed to address their needs. In this way, strategies for preventing and responding to this crisis could be specifically tailored to the needs of aboriginal women and rooted in understandings of the social and economic conditions that have contributed to their vulnerability. The Government of Canada has an important leadership role to play in preventing and responding to the crisis of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. As such, in my view, the initiation of an inclusive, national commission of inquiry on Canada's missing and murdered aboriginal women, with a corresponding commitment to implementing the commission's recommendations would be an appropriate and necessary next step."

2. National Action Plan to Combat Violence Against Indigenous Women

These are only some of the examples of the passionate pleas witnesses made to the Committee to recommend that a national public commission of inquiry be called. In addition to testimonies heard by the Committee, premiers from every province and territory have unanimously and publically called on the Government of Canada to call a national public commission of inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

The Liberal Party of Canada recommends the immediate development and implementation of a national action plan to address violence against Indigenous women and girls, the structural root causes of that violence, and to address the coordination and accountability of government bodies charged with preventing and responding to the violence.

The Liberal Party of Canada further recommends that a committee of cabinet be established, which will be responsible for the creation of such a national action plan in close consultation with Aboriginal leadership and communities and that a progress report of the work of this cabinet committee be tabled with Parliament no later than June 21, 2015.

These are complex issues and solutions will involve the cooperation between many government departments and all jurisdictions across Canada. While the Committee Report does call for a working group to implement an “action plan”, that plan has been restricted to the implementation of the recommendations in the Committee Report. There is no question that there are positive recommendations contained in the Committee Report; however, restricting a comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional national action plan to the recommendations in the Committee Report fails to recognize the scope of the issues we are dealing with. Further, the lack of a date by which the activities of the working group referenced in the Committee Report recommendations must even commence fails to recognize the urgency of the issue or to introduce the necessary accountability into the recommendation.

3. As we heard from AFN National Chief Atleo when he testified:

“We seek a clear and unmitigated commitment to taking action demonstrated through the creation of a national public action plan. Indigenous communities, organizations, provinces and territories, are advancing strategies to end violence, but without clearly articulated national goals and coordinated efforts led by the federal government these initiatives will not fully address the magnitude of response required to prevent and end violence against Indigenous women and girls and bring accountability to the families of those who are missing and murdered.”

The federal government has a leadership role to play in bringing together, not only the various departments and agencies under its jurisdiction, but provincial, territorial and Aboriginal partners to end this national disgrace.

The Liberal Party of Canada would also like to make special note of the fact that, as we heard from witnesses, the development of such a national action plan is not an initiative that would replace a national public commission of inquiry, but would be complementary to it.

As AFN National Chief Shawn Atleo told the committee on December 3, 2013, “Just to be clear, I think the action plan is absolutely in parallel with the call for the national public commission of inquiry”.

4. Creation of a working group

That the federal government, with leadership from Aboriginal communities, develop a working group on violence against Aboriginal women and children, comprised of relevant government departments (including Public Safety Canada, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Status of Women Canada and Health Canada) and national Aboriginal organizations, including the Native Women’s Association of Canada;

that this working group be tasked with collectively developing a coordinated strategy to prevent and address violence against Aboriginal women and girls; and;

that the working group report to Parliament on its progress no later than June 30, 2015.

5. Awareness campaign

That the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations, create a national public awareness and prevention campaign focusing on violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

6. Support for the families of victims

That the federal government support a national meeting led by the families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

That the federal government create a fund to help the families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls that have incurred expenses related to the loss of their loved ones.

7. Support for Communities

That the federal government invest more resources in the program administered by Public Safety Canada that allows Aboriginal communities to

develop safety plans and establish emergency management teams to respond to violence.

8. Funding for anti-violence work

That any new funding for anti-violence work with Aboriginal women include a component for training Aboriginal women so that they can be employed in delivering the service.

9. Investment in services for victims

That the federal government provides adequate investment in shelters and front-line services for victims of violence to create new shelters and to ensure that funding of existing shelters is comparable to off-reserve shelters.

10. Funding for First Nations child-care agencies

That the federal government increase funding for First Nations child-care agencies.

11. Elimination of Obstacles to economic development

That the federal government propose the changes necessary to eliminate obstacles to the economic development of Aboriginal people living on reserve, with particular attention to obstacles hampering full participation by Aboriginal women.

12. Measures to curb poverty

That the federal government put in place measures such as microcredit in order to curb poverty.

13. Police Services

That the federal government, in collaboration with the provincial and territorial governments, increase funding for police services in Inuit and First Nations communities.

14. Data Collection

That the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations and the provincial and territorial governments, examine the possibility of collecting police data on violence against Aboriginal women and girls that includes an ethnicity variable.

15. Police procedures for multiple investigations

That the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations and the provincial and territorial governments develop procedures among police services to facilitate multipartite investigations.

16. Police Officer Training

That the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations and human rights advocacy organizations, the Canadian Police College and the provincial and territorial governments, develop police officer training and protocols, along with serious consequences for failing to abide by them, in order to counter racism and sexism in the treatment of Aboriginal women and girls.

CONCLUSION

As we heard from the families who had the courage to share their stories with the Committee, this ongoing tragedy is about missing daughters, mothers, aunties, cousins, nieces and friends. The mandate of the committee was to address the tragedy of those missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls whose families and friends every day have to deal with the aching in their hearts and those who continue to confront violence in their daily lives. They want justice for their loved ones, but most importantly they do not want others to have to experience the pain of losing a loved one or to go through the terrible cycle of violence that so many Indigenous women and girls face. We had hoped that this Special Committee of Parliament would afford the government an opportunity to show the leadership necessary to right this terrible and ongoing attack on social justice. I am saddened that we have let those families down again.

It is deeply disappointing to see the Conservative government use their majority to replace the thoughtful, specific and action-oriented recommendations brought forward by the witnesses with partisan, self-serving, status quo recommendations. The report does not recommend any concrete actions but instead makes a series of stay-the-course, exploratory recommendations. In sixteen recommendations, the word 'continue' is included 4 times and 'explore/examine options' is used 5 times. Other such terms peppering the report include 'implement', 'maintain', 'encourage' and 'support'. None of these are action-driven resolutions and many in fact imply that significant action is already taking place.

That the recommendations include so many specific references to existing government programs makes it clear that this report is not the work of a parliamentary committee and instead is the product of Ministerial offices.

Unfortunately, the families will have to wait until the government changes in order for them to get the National Public Enquiry and National Action Plan that they have sought for so long and so rightly deserve.

