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MAJOR NANCY PERRON

My name is Nancy Perron. I am a Major in the Royal Canadian Air Force, however, I am currently posted at the National Defence Headquarters in the Director of Human Rights and Diversity office (DHRD). My job involves looking across the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in all aspects of our forces across the Canadian Army, Royal Canadian Navy, and Royal Canadian Air Force.

The DHRD consists of a team of approximately 30 military and civilian members who work in a broad number of areas in human rights, diversity, and employment equity. Gender equity in the Canadian Armed Forces is based in the law, namely, the Canadian Employment Equity Act. Diversity; the broader concept, is becoming increasingly important, not only in the armed forces but in all Canadian civilian organizations as well. Our goal for women in the CAF is to eliminate any discriminatory practices, which means much more than granting privileges. The military must be representative of the same diversity as our nation.

We have several goals including, specifically, the current target of achieving 25 percent women in the CAF. It is important to understand that this goal is considered

a target to strive towards, not a quota. Many people understand quotas to be attained at all costs and, in some cases, may lead to reducing standards. We are not selecting and enrolling people in the military who do not have the required qualifications or who are unable to meet the military standards. We are an all-volunteer force, so we do not force people to join the military. We have to develop ways to attract them to serve in the forces. Therefore, there is an emphasis on our attraction and recruiting strategies.

At this time, our overall representation is 15 percent. Our permanent force right now is 14.1 percent, and our primary reserve is 16.5 percent. Our Army is at 12 percent women; our Navy is at 14.5 percent; and, lastly, the Air Force is at 18 percent. On international deployments, both domestic and international, women represent 8-10 percent of our force.

Like many nations, our constitution puts the Charter of Human Rights above all, which provides a mechanism for people to challenge laws/policies that are believed to be discriminatory. After that higher-level charter, we have our Human Rights Act, which states that all federal government employers will comply with the Employment Equity Act. This Act covers four areas, women, aboriginals, minorities, as well as persons with disabilities. These are groups of people that have been historically disadvantaged in our society, and the Employment Equity Act will assist to overcome these disadvantages.

Canadian Armed Forces Policies

The following is a brief overview of types of policies and areas we have been working in in order to improve gender equity. Most of our policies are generally gender neutral in approach (i.e. maternity and parental leave which is available to both men and women when they have children). However, we do have some policies that are not gender neutral and others that have created some degree of controversy. In her testimony, Canadian, Major Dunlop discusses in more detail the “pink list”¹ which was a practice that was not a favorite of many CAF women. This pink list is no longer in practice as it was not believed to be having the impact of actually increasing the numbers of women in higher ranks. Our deployment and our leave without pay policies are also gender neutral and equally fair to both genders. We believe we are beginning to achieve workplace balance in our policies and practices and continue to improve military service for women.

A lot of the work in these areas has been, and is, focused in the recruiting and attraction area, primar-

¹ Major Nancy Perron explains what is the pink list. “The pink list was a practice whereby a certain number of available ‘seats’ for a critical career course were put aside for female members. This was often viewed as women having special treatment whereas men were selected based on merit. The majority of women were not supportive of this measure as it was viewed as more an affirmative action practice where they were not required to be selected based on their merit.”

ily due to the military being an all-volunteer force. The recruiting and attraction focus is to demonstrate to the women of Canada that the military is a viable option for them to be employed; therefore, we do a lot of targeted advertising directed at this aspect of the civilian population. We conduct focus groups with young civilian women to better understand their knowledge about women in the military; what would they like to know; and what would interest them as women to join the Canadian Armed Forces?

We work hard to maintain engagement from our external stakeholders by conducting influence events and participating in women's forums. This outreach work will take place in locations where women attend sporting events, at various universities across Canada, and events where we know we will be able to attract women to the important jobs they will work in the military.

We ensure availability of female recruiters so that they can answer questions about what the reality is about being a woman in the military. Regarding our recruiting efforts, we have actually been able to bring up our numbers in various areas. For the Army the percentage of women is 11.7, so I would say that the efforts we are putting into recruiting in this area have been successful. The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) is at 19 percent and the Navy is 24 percent. Overall, the percentage of women in the Canadian Armed Forces is at 14.4.

Current Initiatives

Some current initiatives look at why women are leaving (that is, attrition rates), but with a focus on why women might be leaving given the lower numbers of women in the organization. In addition, we have health and fitness services; various women's committees; and oversight roles with senior leadership, including "Women's in Defence and Security". The latter is a volunteer organization where women can get together across the defence spectrum, share information, and network. We also have the Defence Women's Advisory Organization, which is linked to our Employment Equity Act. This group allows civilian women in defence and military women to come together in a forum to discuss barriers and to present to senior leadership barriers and recommend potential solutions. Our training and education in employment equity and diversity starts with basic training and occurs throughout a member's career. Canadian Armed Forces women are involved in a number of international forums and events that allow us to share what we have learned and continue learning from other militaries.

Attrition Rates

We study attrition rates, which are different for men and women. Males are at 5 percent and females at 7 percent attrition rates. Interestingly, we found that women leave at different periods of service than men. For example, women tend to leave the military at the

10-19 year point, and again at a 20-year point. So, this tells us that we need more research to better understand why women are leaving at these time periods.

Promotion Rates

The promotion rates we have are similar among men, women, and dual military married couples. 30 percent of the women in the military are married to military members, while only 6 percent of armed men are married to military women. Just a quick overview, we are looking to go beyond, and actually understand how women move up through the ranks. There are two areas where there might be some concern.

Maternity/Parental Leave

Our paid leave for CAF woman having a child is 12 months or one year. Parental Leave is also available for the male members. What we discovered is that we have about 124 service women who are on current on maternity leave and over 950 service members than are on parental paternity leave at a given time. What we have learned is that our male members are taking the advantage offered from this type of policy of participating in the parental role.

Employment in Combat Roles

We have approximately 8-10 percent women deployed in combat roles. Canadian women hold key positions in the Canadian Armed Forces, and our equipment is

suitable for a mixed gender force. And we are very interested in sharing any lesson learned with others, as well as learning from other nations in international forums such as this seminar.

Our challenges early on, when women were first integrated into the CAF, were in the areas of equipment and uniform modifications. It has taken several years, but with the help of the Defence Women's Advisory Organization, these issues have been solved. Likewise, with the integration of women, sexual harassment matters have become an issue, which is serious in a military context due to the impact on cohesion in units. We found it critical to understand such incidents and work toward minimizing them as much as possible.

Over the years, there has been considerable discussion and debate over ensuring that the organization achieved critical mass of women in the military. I will not go into this debate in much detail at this point, as, in her testimony, Rear-admiral Bennett addresses that issue. Nevertheless, suffice it to say that the focus on critical mass issues has a number of advantages and disadvantages. Being aware of those issues is important to understand the impact of solely focusing on critical mass.

We have a number of "firsts" (e.g., first woman pilot, etc.) already. Yet we are still experiencing more "firsts," even though we have been an integrated force for a number of years. At this time, our numbers are still slowly increasing; and we are now finding women

moving up and integrating into the combat arms, which is where our challenges have been.

Our key achievements include gender-neutral standards, equal opportunity for all women, and equal pay and benefits; as well as that all occupations are open to both women and men. Also, women are now employed in operations and combat, in leadership roles, and have representation at the senior ranks.

Future Directions

Our future discussions, or next area of exploration, is towards better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of gender-neutral policies versus gender-inclusive policies. An example of gender-inclusive policies is maternity and parental leave, which is available for men and women. The next phase is about understanding the unique requirements for both genders and recognizing that one size may not always fit all.

Lastly, the list of research projects currently underway is growing, which suggests that even though the military has been integrated for a number of years, there is still substantial work to do. Moreover, we as nations must continue sharing information; working together to learn from each other; and, thus successfully ensuring gender integration in all military organizations.