

September 14, 2020

Honourable David Lemetti  
Minister of Justice and Attorney General  
Government of Canada

Dear Minister Lemetti

**Re: Gender Based Violence**

On behalf of the members of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), I must urge you to take every possible action to end the scourge of gender-based violence (GBV) in Canada.

The NCWC is particularly concerned with the treatment of women through the Courts and Judicial system – systems that continue to fail women, either through neglect or the inequality they support.

Recent statistics indicate the prevalence of GBV has increased during the restrictions imposed to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Both overt and covert instances of social inequality, sexism, and misogyny, including physical, psychological, spiritual, and emotional abuse, have exacerbated over the past months. The pressures and stresses of economic and social issues, physical and social isolation, coupled with the possibility of substance abuse and mental health issues, have been pinpointed as being catalysts for this unfortunate rise in GBV.

Three recent cases highlight our concern but should not be considered as unusual or solitary events.

- In April 2020, the rampage by a lone gunman in Nova Scotia, who killed 22 innocent people, is said to have begun with domestic violence. Even though these instances were reported, they were under investigated.
- In June 2020, a parolee in Montreal, who had served time for the murder of his wife, was granted permission to have encounters with women for sexual purposes. Soon after, he was charged with the murder of a sex worker. Such a parole condition for a man with a history of violence against women must be considered inconceivable, especially considering the potential it created for other vulnerable women to be assaulted and/or killed.
- In July 2020, a former night club promoter in Edmonton was convicted of five counts of sexual assault. There were accusations by several other women whose complaints could not be corroborated sufficiently for the purposes of the trial, leading us to believe there were many more victims than five. His lawyer even had the audacity to suggest that the women “were asking for it” simply by their presence in a bar. Due to a jail incident in which he was assaulted by another inmate, the Judge decided to reduce his sentence. Again, justice for these victims was denied.

Victims, their families, and their friends regularly watch as these perpetrators enjoy the benefits of power and privilege while they, themselves, are left with years of remorse and trauma. Violence has an impact far beyond the event for these women, many of whom continually deal with physical and psychological health issues daily, resulting in their loss of employment and disruption to their lives.

Systems that protect those who would use violence against women must be continually monitored to ensure that women are believed and are encouraged to come forward without fear of reprisal and the trauma of not being believed. Women need, and deserve, the support of the Courts and the Justice System.

November 25<sup>th</sup> will once again mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This will be an ideal time for you and your colleagues to announce concrete measures that will serve to decrease gender-based violence, a fact of life for far too women in Canada.

Gender based violence has no place in our country, or for that matter, in our world.

Sincerely

Patricia Leson, President  
National Council of Women of Canada

***The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Canada is the traditional territory of First Nations and Metis People. We are grateful to join with others in peace and hope, advocating for an improved quality of life for women, children, families, and society.***

C: Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness  
Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister Status of Women and Gender Equity  
Honourable Patty Hadju, Minister of Health  
Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Maya Roy, CEO, YWCA Canada  
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