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December 6, 2021

We Will Not Be Silenced

It's been 32 years since 14 young women were murdered at Montreal's École Polytechnique in an act of violence that shook the country to its core. December 6 now marks the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. On this day, we honour and remember Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte, and Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz.

As we mourn these women, and all the other girls and women who are victims of violence, we cannot forget that the misogyny that lead to this tragedy still exists today.

Gender inequalities and injustices happen everywhere – at home, in the workplace, in the media, in politics and in our education system. Gender-based violence has roots in the sexist cultural and patriarchal structure of our society which makes it seem natural and acceptable that men have more power over other genders. This only reinforces the general belief that men have a right to control women, girls, and gender diverse people.

While abuse can happen to anyone, no matter their background, identity or circumstance, women, girls and gender diverse people face a greater risk of gender-based violence. Some are at an even higher risk due to additional discrimination and barriers including racialized women, trans and non-binary people, women with disabilities, women who are homeless and under housed, and Indigenous women.

Over the last two years, as governments around the world implemented various forms of lockdowns and stay-at-home orders to keep people safe from COVID-19, a different pandemic has taken form. It's been called the "shadow pandemic" by the United Nations – the unprecedented increase of domestic violence since the pandemic began.

This is a Canadian issue just as much as it is an international one. A national report published by Women's Shelters Canada found an increase in the frequency and severity of violence against women since March 2020, when public health lockdown measures were imposed in different provinces. Without the reprieve of leaving the home for work, school, or social activities, abused women were left with their abusers all hours of the day, with little reprieve or opportunity to reach out for help.

Every year, on December 6, we remember the Montreal Massacre and the women who tragically died. But we must do more than remember and commemorate. Gender-based violence is still an issue in our society. It's actually gotten worse during the pandemic. We must break down the societal norms and structures that allow gender-based violence to continue. How many more women have to die for us to take a stand and say enough is enough?

We do not want to live in a society that treats women, girls and gender-diverse people as second-class citizens. Today, and every day, we will take a stand. We will no longer be silenced.

In solidarity,

Julee Sanderson
1st National Vice-President

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