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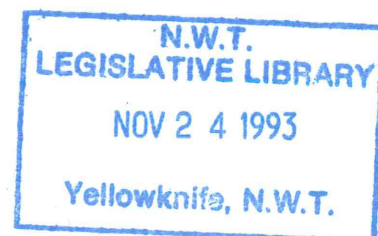


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**BUILDING A STRATEGY  
FOR DEALING WITH VIOLENCE  
IN THE N.W.T.**

**The Honourable Stephen Kakfwi  
Minister of Justice**

**November 1993**





**BUILDING A STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH VIOLENCE IN THE N.W.T.**

**Table of Contents**

Introduction . . . . . 1

I. **BACKGROUND** . . . . . 1

    Dimensions of the Problem . . . . . 2

II. **THE NATURE OF VIOLENCE** . . . . . 4

    Alcohol and Drug Abuse . . . . . 6

    Family Violence . . . . . 7

    Breaking the Silence . . . . . 8

III. **TOWARDS THE ELIMINATION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE - ELEMENTS OF  
A STRATEGY** . . . . . 9

    The Justice System and Violence . . . . . 11

    Breaking the Cycle: Youth and Violence . . . . . 13

    Healing . . . . . 15

    Treatment for offenders . . . . . 16

    Services to victims . . . . . 18

    Community-based Justice . . . . . 19

    Facilitating Interagency Cooperation . . . . . 22

IV. **ZERO TOLERANCE** . . . . . 23

V. **CONCLUSION** . . . . . 26

**APPENDIX:**

**Lake Louise Declaration**

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

### **Introduction**

The basic objective of this document is to generate discussion and to further a process that will lead to a reduction in the level of violence in the N.W.T.

This document begins with an examination of the significance of violence as a problem in our society and some of the underlying causes of violent behaviour, before addressing elements that must be brought to bear in an effort to reduce violence and its devastating effects.

While violence is certainly not limited to violence against women and children, it is violence within the family that is particularly socially destructive and that demands society's attention. This document focuses on violence within the family context.

This document does not purport to contain the solution to family violence in the N.W.T. It does however, contain the elements that are believed are essential for movement in that direction. That is, it contains a description of the problem and an identification of the constituent elements of a broad approach to deal with violence. Certain areas will require further discussion and elaboration before a specific course of action is determined. This document is part of a larger, ongoing process, one that is carried on with the holding of public forums and workshops, the publication of studies, the implementation of legislative changes and government and police policies and practices and the evolution of social attitudes and so on, and one that will continue after this document is forgotten. This document situates itself in the midst of this ongoing process of addressing a major social problem.

Violence is not a new phenomenon, nor is it a social problem that is limited to the North. With the best effort possible, the problem is not going to go away tomorrow. However, significant steps can and must be taken to reduce the extent of family violence in our communities.

### **I. BACKGROUND**

It has long been recognized that violence in the NWT is a serious problem, demanding action by both the people and the Government of the NWT. In 1984, for example, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women established the Task Force on Spousal Assault. The *Report of the Task Force* prompted the Government to prepare "Choices...", a three-year action plan to address spousal assault.

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

The Family Violence Conference held in Yellowknife in March, 1988, brought together government, non-governmental organizations and community representatives from across the Territories. Many regional and local conferences and workshops have been held since that time.

The Native Women's Association of the NWT broke the silence on child sexual abuse in 1989 in their publication *Communities Voice on Child Sexual Abuse*.

Pauktuutit's published *No More Secrets: Acknowledging the Problem of Child Sexual Abuse in Inuit Communities* in 1991.

The *Gender Equality Review Report*, submitted to the Minister of Justice in May, 1992, addresses at length the question of women as victims of violence and the inadequacies of the justice system in dealing with these situations.

In May 1993, the Native Women's Association of the NWT released a document entitled *Community Self-Evaluation for Family Violence Initiatives* that identifies the shortcomings of measures taken to address extensive family violence problems in northern communities.

Nationally, there have been a number of studies, reports and conferences on violence against women. Most recently, the Canadian Panel on Violence against Women submitted their Final Report *Changing the Landscape* in July, 1993, with almost 500 recommendations. A significant portion of the Report is devoted to the circumstances of violence against Inuit women.

The Dene Cultural Institute (DCI) study of customary law in Lac La Martre, funded by the Federal and Territorial governments and released in September, 1993, raises issues of wife assault in a Dene community.

All of these confirm that violence, and violence against women and children in particular, is a serious social problem in Canada and the Northwest Territories.

### Dimensions of the Problem

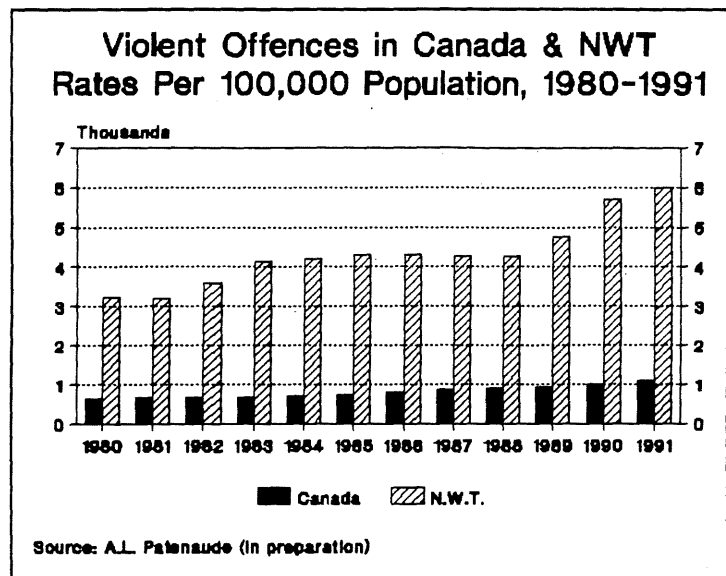
The NWT is a violent society. We have the highest crime rate, and a rate of violent crime that, at six times the national average, is the highest in the country. The homicide rate averaged over the last ten years is 5.6 times the national average. In 1990, there were 3,323 violent offences recorded by the RCMP for a population of 55,000. Many more violent incidents are not reported.

The rate of violent crime is also increasing faster than the national rate.

## Building a Violence Strategy

Reported sexual assaults have increased by 28% over the period 1989 to 1992. Sexual assault rates in the N.W.T. are consistently 4 or 5 times the national average. In some court sittings, sexual offenses account for more than half of the charges on the docket.

Sexual assault is considered by many to be the single most important offence to be addressed by the criminal justice system. This is enormously important because of the difficulty and cost of treating sexual offenders and the devastating impact on victims and the community.



Women and children are frequently the victims of violent crime, many of which go unreported. The Dene Cultural Institute study concluded that all of the women in the community interviewed for the project had been directly affected by violence. In a 1989 study by the Ontario Native Women's Association, 80% of native women had been victims of family violence at some point in their lives. The NWT Native Women Association study estimated that in the communities they surveyed, between 75% and 80% of women have been victims of child sexual abuse.

### BURSTING JAILS

We can project fairly accurately that our existing corrections facilities, already aging and strained to meet the current levels of incarceration, will shortly be inadequate because of the increasing crime rate and increasing population.

In a nutshell: we are going to need new jails, even in the most optimistic scenario.

Young males are overwhelmingly the dominant offender in violent incidents. In the case of sexual offenders, 98% are men. Many of these men were themselves victimized as children.

It is also young males who are killing themselves. Forty-two percent of suicides in the N.W.T. in the period 1982-91 were males between 15 and 24 years old. The suicide rate among Inuit between the ages of 16 and 30 is ten times higher than any other group in Canada. Suicide can be seen as inwardly-turned violence.

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

This portrait of violence is situated in a socio-economic context that is very disturbing. The Special Committee on the Northern Economy (SCONE) in its October, 1989 report *The Scone Report: Building Our Economic Future* describes the economic conditions in the outlying communities where over 50% of the population lives. The official unemployment rate was 27% compared to 7% in the larger centres. The participation rate in the labour force ran at 58% compared to 84% in the larger centres. At the same time, the population is increasing so rapidly that just to maintain unemployment rates at 27% in these communities in the year 2001 will require 2,789 additional jobs in these communities.

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The dropout rate at 77%, compared to 33% nationally. The rate for aboriginal youth in the N.W.T. is 88%. The correlation between education and employment and income levels applies as much to the NWT as elsewhere. 90% of the increase in the social assistance caseload between 1984 and 1988 was attributable to people with less than a grade 10 education.

(SP Research Associates, 1991)

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The traditional economy has been devastated by the anti-fur movement. The average income of a trapper is \$2,000.

The dramatic shortage of adequate housing in most communities adds additional pressure to this situation by creating situations of serious overcrowding. It is estimated that over 3,000 new housing units are needed in the N.W.T.

Against this backdrop of economic and social disruption, widespread violence inflicts a huge social cost. The human

costs are tragic to the offender, the victim and the larger community. People whose lives are marked by violence are unable to participate fully in society. Lives are wasted, even lost.

The crisis of violence also has a direct financial impact. The justice system is expensive to maintain. Money which is used to maintain the courts, jails and high levels of policing could be utilized more effectively elsewhere. There are also direct costs to the health and social welfare systems, in responding to a mounting demand.

## **II. THE NATURE OF VIOLENCE**

Violence is a universal phenomenon. High levels of violence are not unique to the North. However, the degree and character of violence varies from one society to another and also varies over time. Violence can in certain cases be justified, such as in self defence against violent aggression.

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

Societies will vary in their tolerance of violence, or certain forms of violence. Violent activity can be learned and encouraged depending on the social values of a given time and place. There is a high tolerance of violence in North American society.

Violent acts are often expressions of power used to reinforce the powerlessness of the victim and affirm the power of the aggressor.

The use of violence can become more frequent in response to crisis. Persons under stress will often resort to violence out of frustration.

Life for some borders on chaos, which leads to a sense of worthlessness and despair that change for the better will never happen. The result may be drug and alcohol abuse and violence, directed inward and outward. Many of our families and communities are breeding grounds for violence.

At the extreme are dysfunctional families barely surviving in chaos. The children experience not only neglect, but overt abuse, especially if alcohol and other drugs are used by the parents.

Some of this chaos can be traced back to the dislocation in the culture of native people that has occurred since the period of contact. Profound changes have been introduced, ancient cultures and traditions have been uprooted, and these have not been effectively replaced. As a consequence, native people are estranged from their traditional ways of doing things, and - in great numbers - their participation in contemporary society is at the margins, especially in the economy.

Residential schools have played a devastating role in the disruption of native culture and in the breakdown of parenting skills for whole generations of northern parents. In some cases, violence and sexual abuse were visited upon the students. Residential schools were institutions in which power and control issues were primary: the children are completely powerless in the institution and parents are completely powerless with respect to their own children.

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### DESENSITIZATION TO VIOLENCE

There is an aspect of North American culture that glorifies violence. North Americans, including northerners, are bombarded on a daily basis via movies and television with the message that violence is an acceptable, normal and, indeed, honourable way to solve problems. North American youth, by the time they graduate, have spent more time in front of the T.V. than at school.

The impact of this indoctrination is difficult to assess, but it is believed to be significant. At the very least, it creates and reinforces a climate of social tolerance for violent behaviour.

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## *Building a Violence Strategy*

Native people suffer all the symptoms of poverty in addition to the problems of cultural dislocation. As the SCONE Report reveals, the traditional economy does not sustain people the way it used to, and participation in the mainstream economy is hindered by low skill levels and limited opportunities within the communities.

The high drop-out rate in the school system perpetuates the marginalization of native people in the economy, thus from contemporary society as a whole. The drop-out rate is also a reflection of the crisis affecting native families and communities.

Violence, cultural dislocation, poverty, powerlessness, frustration, economic disruption, all are related to and aggravated by, substance abuse.

### Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Alcohol, while not a cause of violence, is certainly an aggravating factor. It is difficult to get meaningful statistics on the role alcohol plays in violent crimes, but most people would agree that the majority of crimes of violence are committed while one or more of the parties is under the influence of alcohol.

Drug and alcohol abuse, on the one hand, is merely a symptom of the larger crisis affecting life in our communities. People sometimes turn to alcohol and drugs as a way of covering up the sense of powerlessness they feel with respect to their own lives.

On the other hand, alcoholism is virtually a crisis unto its own, because the impact of alcohol abuse is so vast, that it is pointless, indeed impossible, to address the ultimate causes until an alcoholic or an addicted family or community deals with the alcoholism. Any recovery for the individual requires that one must first "sober up". For a community, it requires a beginning with a few people, whose numbers over time grow to a critical mass sufficient to transform the culture of the community.

The parallel and linkage between alcoholism and violence is striking. For the children of alcoholics, the chaos in the family takes on the air of the familiar, the "normal". If a community is addicted so much more so will children become prisoners of an alcohol culture, and will the chaos of alcoholism become normal.

As violence is invariably a feature of this chaos, so too will violence become "normal", and with it the fear and the despair that children feel when the most important people in their lives are incapable of giving them the familial and

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

communal security that is so vital to human development.

### Family Violence

Violence is socially structured. It is frequently directed toward family members, and in particular toward the less powerful and hence more vulnerable members of the family: women, children and the elderly.

Family violence is a broad concept that includes spousal abuse and abuse of children, youth and the elderly, particularly when the victim is in a state of dependency or the abuser in a position of trust or authority. Family violence can take a number of forms in addition to physical assault, such as intimidation, mental or emotional abuse, neglect, deprivation and financial exploitation. Sexual abuse is a form of physical violence.

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Violence is not a "family" issue, it is not a "domestic" issue, it is not a "women's" issue. It is an issue for all society to address.

Gender Equality Review

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Violence in the family context is based on power and control. The reality of family violence is that the overwhelming proportion is perpetrated by men and the vast majority of victims are women and children. While outside the home, men may be victims of violence, violence directed towards women and children is most often

delivered by loved ones in the privacy of their home. These facts give a different dimension to family violence than to other forms of violence, such as violence between two men involved in fistfights outside a bar. The expression "family violence" must not be used to disguise the fact that almost all the violence is directed at the less powerful members of the family.

Violence is learned behaviour. An individual who grows up in a context where violence is present, where people resolve issues and disputes violently, is more likely to grow up to use violence or accept it as normal than someone who grows up in a context where there is no violence. Typically, the abuser will often himself have been abused or a witness to abuse, as a child. A girl growing up where her mother is regularly beaten will often come to almost expect abuse from her husband or boyfriend, as something which is normal, as a fact of life or, at the very least, something she can do nothing to stop.

Although spousal and sexual assaults occupy a significant portion of court dockets in many communities, the problem is even more wide-spread than this suggests, as sexual and spousal assault are probably the most under-reported offenses. The

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

sexual and other abuse of children, whether in the family, community or institutional setting, has long been a "hidden shame", seldom reported or even acknowledged, as the victim and their families and communities found themselves helpless to bring the crime to light.

There are, however, positive signs in this portrait of violence and social disintegration. For example, the growing crime rates for offenses such as sexual assaults and wife assaults do not necessarily mean that these crimes are becoming more and more prevalent. There is reason to believe that a significant part of the increase is a result of a greater number of disclosures and an increased willingness of victims to report these crimes to the police. In some cases the violence and abuse being reported happened years ago and had never been revealed. It often went on for an extended period of time. This increased willingness is related to a gradual evolution of social attitudes towards violence. Slowly, there is less tendency to blame the victim, and gradually there are more resources and support available to victims.

Around the world, the traditional toleration of violence against women and children is being questioned. Social attitudes are being challenged and are starting to change. Male leaders are beginning to identify the linkage between family violence and other social ailments such as alcoholism and suicide. That these are being addressed is a very positive sign.

As Pauktuutit noted in their report on child sexual abuse, breaking the silence and acknowledging the problem is the first step toward healing. The same applies to all violence, especially family violence.

### Breaking the Silence

Indeed, one of the biggest barriers to the elimination of family violence is denial. The existence of the problem is denied by society at large, and the occurrence of individual incidents and the harm that it causes is denied by those who know, or should know, otherwise. A code of silence is maintained to prevent the violence from coming to light. This has been referred to as a "conspiracy of silence".

Family violence, and especially the sexual assault of children, has been routinely

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Inuit are increasingly conscious of how these acts [of violence] form a cycle of violence which is passed on from one generation to the next, and are the root cause of much of the alcohol abuse, substance abuse and suicide in our communities.

1992 Resolution of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada

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## *Building a Violence Strategy*

denied, because of the guilt and shame - and sometimes fear - born by the victim and the reluctance of the community to deal with the crime. The tendency is to "blame the victim" rather than address the criminality of the abuser, largely because of their relative social positions. It is easier to allow the violation of the rights of a victim to go unheeded than to confront

the guilt of an abuser. The injury to the community is wrongly perceived to be less. A victim, who does not deny the crime, can risk social ostracism, if he or she reports a crime and pursues it with a community that does not want to hear about it or believes that it is the victim's responsibility to put up with abuse.

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Denial in the context of violence is similar to the denial that accompanies alcoholism: it is hard to face up to the truth. But the denial merely allows the alcoholism, or the abuse, to continue.

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There is evidence that northern society is less ready to maintain the code of silence that allows family abuse to continue and grow. As reported earlier in this paper, there is reason to believe that the increased number of charges for family-related violence may be due in part to growing social intolerance for violence and confidence from victims in the capacity of society to address the "hidden shame".

However, this is not a cause for complacency. Violent crime is on the increase, and the attitudes and behaviours that have sustained the tolerance of family violence have deep roots.

### **III. TOWARDS THE ELIMINATION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE - ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGY**

The elimination of all violence must be the objective of any society, but as the above quoted resolution of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada suggests, by focusing on family violence and achieving results, society will realize a far reaching impact on the reduction of all forms of violence. The reduction and elimination of family violence must be a priority, because of the scale and tragedy of the problem and its ultimate impact on building and maintaining a healthy society.

Any effective strategy requires that all the root causes be addressed. Many of these can be dealt with only incidentally in this paper. For example, to the extent that economic factors lead to social instability and violence, northern society and the government will continue to emphasize the importance of developing a viable northern economy. A healthy economy will do much to assist in the healing of northern society, but it is not enough on its own, and even with a less than perfect

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

economy, family violence must be arrested and eliminated, because it is too costly and destructive to allow it to continue.

Similarly, the reform and improvement of the educational system continues to be a priority of the government, and the government has taken active measures to address the drop-out rate. New measures will continue to be developed and implemented.

Considerable resources have been brought to bear in dealing with alcohol abuse. The people of the NWT and their governments will continue to make the elimination of alcohol and drug abuse a priority, and progress in this area will have a far reaching impact on the incidence of family violence.

Native people will continue to address the social, cultural and economic dislocation they have suffered. Much progress has been realized over recent decades, and progress will continue to be made to re-establish and maintain healthy families and communities.

The imbalance in power between men and women and the persistence of patriarchal structures and attitudes will continue to be addressed by women's groups and others.

The influence of the mass media, especially television and videos, in shaping public attitudes is pervasive. Groups around the world are increasingly expressing concern about the influence of mass media in promoting values based on the glorification of violence. Northerners, recognizing that virtually everyone in the north is exposed to the television and video media and the messages it carries, are starting to address the problem.

At their February 1993 Annual General Meeting held in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Pauktuutit delegates passed a resolution calling for "governments and politicians at all levels to inform people about the harmful effects of violence on television" and further, that "Pauktuutit support the development of regulations controlling the exposure of violence on television and videos."

Television Northern Canada (TVNC) is participating with educational broadcasters across the country in the production of a five-part television series "Countering violent portrayals of women in the media". TVNC and the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation will produce a northern segment of the series aimed at helping northerners to understand how negative portrayals of women contribute to real violence against women in society and at providing achievable methods for viewers to take action to curb violence against women.

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

Other elements of a strategy are highlighted below. The role of the justice system in addressing violence and the limits to that role are discussed. Targeting the youth as a way of interrupting the transmission of violent behaviour and breaking the cycle is explored. The importance of an approach that favours healing is discussed and in this context, treatment for offenders and services for victims are examined. The paper then discusses the changes that must take place at a community level and the importance of community-based justice in affecting the health of the community. Finally, the paper highlights the importance of an interagency approach in dealing with issues such as family violence.

### The Justice System and Violence

When a society sets the broad social goal of eliminating violence, the criminal justice system is looked to as a primary resource.

The aim of the criminal justice system is to maintain public order that is threatened by, among other things, violent behaviour. This is done by punishing offenders, which serves to denounce the behaviour of the offender as unacceptable, at the same time as discouraging the offender, and others, from engaging in the same or similar behaviour in the future. If the punishment is not sufficient to discourage the offender or others, so the argument goes, then the system is not effective in preventing violence. Indeed, the justice system, reflecting society's toleration of violence against women and children, has been criticized for lenient sentencing, thus causing inequity and injustice even as it is criticized for not being effective in ending violence.

This second criticism is related to another, and some would say, contradictory expectation of the criminal justice system: that is, that the offender will be rehabilitated. The expectation is that, in the course of serving a sentence, an offender will be exposed to alternatives and will come to realize that his or her actions were wrong and should not be repeated in the future.

However, there is a limit to the extent to which the criminal justice system can reasonably be expected to replace the broader process of socialization that takes place in the home, school and community. Incarceration, or any other kind of punishment, can do little, in itself, to address the societal values that lie at the root of the violence. A violent act is a criminal activity that, if brought to the attention of authorities, invokes the criminal justice system. The system addresses the particular incident related to that individual offence, without necessarily addressing the underlying social context in which the violent incident arose.

Thus, while the criminal justice system does have an extremely important role to

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

play, there are limits to the capacity of the criminal justice system to address the broader question of violence. Enforcement of the law, alone, cannot change public attitudes to violence if people actually think that it is alright to beat someone. Unrealistic expectations about what the criminal justice system can reasonably be expected to do, will inevitably result in disappointment and disenchantment, and undermine the credibility and ultimately the effectiveness of the system.

Nevertheless, effort must be made to ensure that the system responds to violence in the most effective and efficient way possible.

The response of the criminal justice system to violence, particularly to family violence, has changed significantly over the last ten years. Historically, the justice system, reflecting societal toleration for violence within the confines of the home, reacted with what was effectively a hands-off policy. In the early 1980's, again reflecting an evolution in social attitudes, police forces across the country adopted policies that required the investigation of incidents of domestic violence and charging wherever there was reason to believe that an assault had taken place. For their part, agencies responsible for the prosecution brought in policies at the same time that required them to prosecute cases of spousal violence whenever there was a reasonable prospect of conviction. These policies represented a significant departure from past practices and were a major step forward in addressing family violence.

Part of the relative ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system in dealing with cases of interpersonal violence, particularly in the family context, is related to the difficulty of successfully prosecuting cases where the victim of a violent offence is reluctant to testify against her assailant. This is frequently the case in spousal and sexual assaults.

The reluctance of the victim is certainly easy to understand as she, for in the vast majority of cases it is a woman victim, frequently feels victimized by the administration of justice. *The Gender Equality Review* addresses this issue in some detail, and argues that well-supported and well-informed victims make for a better (more effective) administration of justice. Victims who are provided with sufficient support and information about the operation of the system, who have an understanding of how the system works and of what the likely outcomes of situations are, are more likely to cooperate, and are

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Lack of cultural understanding, inappropriate attitudes, negative experiences and an intimidating judicial process are common reasons for victims of violence to stay silent and live in fear.

Report of the Canadian Panel on Violence against Women

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## *Building a Violence Strategy*

less likely to feel victimized by the operation of the system.

The Department of Justice, Canada, as a measure to meet the specific needs of victims who are facing the court process, last year introduced two Victim/Witness Assistants, one in the Eastern Arctic, one in the West. There are plans to expand this program. These Assistants fulfil a very important role in the provision of information and support to victims who are often terrified of the entire court process in addition to fearing, in many cases, further aggression from their assailants.

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Women in workshops across the Territories painted a very consistent picture of their experience [in court]. They felt fear, confusion, intimidation and isolation. They frequently did not understand the process of court and they had no one to turn to to explain it to them. They also felt they had no control, that all decisions were out of their hands.

Gender Equality Review

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Court support is also one of the services provided by community-based victims assistance groups that are starting to develop in communities across the Territories. The Department of Justice currently funds four such volunteer-based programs, in Rankin Inlet, Fort Smith, Iqaluit and Yellowknife.

Other measures given new prominence in the criminal justice system which support the elimination of family violence include, the training of personnel to make them sensitive to issues in family violence, and

amendments to the *Criminal Code* to provide for enhanced protection for women and children as the victims of family violence. Recent amendments provide for the offence of Criminal Harassment (so-called "stalking"), to prevent abusive ex-spouses from harassing their partners, thus reducing the potential for renewed violence. Other amendments allow for stricter conditions on release pending trial to protect the victim, and support for child witnesses. The Federal Government is also exploring ways to reduce delays in the processing of violent offenses so that the resolution of conflict can proceed in a timely fashion.

### Breaking the Cycle: Youth and Violence

If family and other forms of violence are to be arrested it means that the chain of transmission of violent behaviour from generation to generation must be broken. A societal intervention is required so that the abused do not themselves become abusers and perpetuate the culture of violence and so that the negative conditioning which teaches that violence is normal and acceptable can be



## *Building a Violence Strategy*

overcome.

Society and government must make an investment in youth in the form of encouragement and trust, so that they can overcome the harmful influences of social conditioning in the culture of violence and negative role modelling. Youth must be encouraged to organize themselves to assert themselves as the generation which will refuse to carry to the upcoming generations those destructive influences which shape the patterns of crime and violence.

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The prevention of abuse before it happens, and arresting abusive patterns before they are established is at least as important as the rehabilitation of abusers. For this to happen, youth must learn to rely on their own leadership and inspiration rather than wait for adults to change.

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Youth must be provided with the tools with which to break the cycle of violence. These tools include appropriate life skills education in the educational system, leadership conferences and seminars, and facilitating the organization of youth groups at the community, regional and territorial level. These will be aimed at facilitating the recognition of the cause and impact of violence in their lives, and the generation of the will to transform society's values with respect to violence.

Realistically, this transformation will take several generations. There will be no one generation which exclusively takes up the social burden to change values and practices. Each succeeding generation will do its share to build up the momentum for change. The confidence of each succeeding generation will grow as positive role modelling and cultural practices become more prominent. At some point a watershed will be identified when it is clear that attitudes and practices are changing, but it will not happen without one generation taking up the challenge to begin the process of change which will take generations to achieve.

This has happened before and can be witnessed in the present. Communities and families which have successfully challenged patterns of alcohol abuse in the past have made life for their children better than it was previously and might have been without that initiative within the family or community. The period of transformation was often long and painful, with numerous setbacks, but it happened.

"Breaking the Cycle" as an element of a strategy to eliminate family violence is a challenge to society and government and requires ongoing work. There are programs in place offered by government and within the schools, which promote the development of life skills and conflict resolution. Government must continue to address its attention to programs and measures which will focus particularly on

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

this element of a strategy.

A breaking of the cycle which transmits violence from generation to generation cannot be addressed out of context from "healing" at an individual level and the restoration of harmony at the family and community level.

### Healing

Healing is the restoration of harmony within the individual, the family and the community. As a process it involves both the victims and perpetrators of violence, but ultimately, the true focus is the community, because everyone is affected by violence. To achieve change, families and communities, youth and adults, must all acknowledge the negativeness and destructiveness which surrounds them and commit themselves to the healing process.

An important example of the healing process can be found in a growing number of communities, where leaders have dedicated themselves to the challenge of alcoholism and asserted the importance of a sober leadership, recognizing the importance of example and role modelling. Healing cannot happen without the commitment to sobriety.

Part of the healing process involves addressing the "generation gap" that exists in most communities. The youth of today no longer speak the same language as their grandparents, both figuratively and literally. The Dene Cultural Institute's Traditional Justice study in Lac La Martre speaks of the vital need to address the gap between the generations if the community is to be able to move forward toward well-being. It is important to stimulate a dialogue between the estranged groups.

Recently, communities in the Deh Cho collaborated in a promising initiative to set up a youth centre in Fort Simpson. The main reason for the centre is to address the needs of youth and to help them to acquire the tools and skills they will need for the future. One of the particularly interesting aspects of this community-based undertaking is the emphasis placed on involving elders and promoting a dialogue between elders and youth.

Other aspects of the healing process have been initiated in some communities. Women in many communities have organized themselves into support networks for victims of violence and several projects to provide training to those providing support for victims have been funded by the Department of Justice.

Male abusers have begun to organize themselves into groups so that they can

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

understand why and how they came to be what they are, and to have the support of peers in their struggles to overcome violent behaviour. These groups must be encouraged and supported.

There are other examples showing how community-based initiatives contribute to the healing process. The Igloolik Video Workshop will film community women discussing concerns including family violence and sexual abuse. Participation in the making of the video will be in itself part of the healing process. The distribution of the video to others in the community and in other communities will raise public awareness and promote healing.

Volunteer-run crisis lines have been established in Iqaluit and more recently in Yellowknife. The crisis lines came about, not because of any initiative of the government, but as a result of the commitment of community members who felt that there was a need for a crisis help-line in their community and who took the steps to make it happen.

The Gwichin have expressed an interest in building a permanent facility called a Healing Camp where members of the community could address issues of family violence and sexual abuse.

If the various initiatives towards healing are to work, they must be accompanied or preceded by a commitment to stop the violence. Again, the parallel is alcoholism. The alcoholic must sober up as the first stage in healing, and only after that can constructive healing begin. Healing cannot happen if the violence is allowed to continue.

### Treatment for offenders

Little is accomplished through incarceration if the offender is returned to the community only to repeat his offense. Demands for the availability of treatment for offenders have come from all sectors. The healing process for offenders must start while the offender is incarcerated.

Issues surrounding treatment for violent offenders are extremely complicated. There is little consensus about what kind of treatment should be available, for what kind of offenses, for how long, where or when. Many treatment programs are very expensive and only available in the south. Some are of doubtful value.

Identifying the resources for the treatment of offenders in custodial institutions is also an issue, when the resources are scarce and institutions are so overcrowded that physical space to conduct programs is at a premium.

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

Other issues include whether treatment addressing issues of power and control can effectively be delivered in a custodial institution where inmates are relieved of control over their own lives, and whether treatment can or should be imposed on inmates or must it be voluntary. The self-help groups described in the previous section may be more effective in the longer term, but these are not totally an alternative to offender treatment within the institution.

Also at issue is whether treatment for abusers can afford to focus on issues of physical abuse to the exclusion of emotional and psychological abuse. Women whose spouses have attended treatment or counselling for physical abuse have reported that emotional and psychological abuse worsened when the physical abuse ended. The emotional abuse can be so painful, that women have said that it is worse than the physical abuse.

Standards for treatment and counselling programs is an issue which will have to be addressed. The goal of any treatment program for violent offenders must be to end the coercive, dominating and violent behaviour and to ensure the safety of the victim. The principle underlying all treatment for offenders is that offenders must be encouraged to accept responsibility for their actions. It is essential, if behaviour is to change, that offenders are made to realize that there are choices to be made about how they behave, and specifically, that they are making a choice to be violent whenever they engage in violent behaviour. They are also making choices, whether conscious or not, about who their victim will be, where and when they will be violent and the degree of force used.

Many abusers may have witnessed abuse and may have been abused themselves as children and youth. However, although this may help us to understand why an offender is abusive, it does not in any way excuse abusive behaviour, or make it less necessary to strive for changes in behaviour.

The process of abusers acknowledging their behaviour and learning to stop physical, emotional and psychological abuse is a long and challenging one. Men who have dealt with violence themselves and have initiated a healing process, have an important role to play with respect to helping other abusive men recognize and deal with the problem of violence, similar to the role of sober alcoholics in helping others recover from alcoholism.

Dealing effectively with this problem requires a continuum of services including educational session, group therapy session, follow up therapy and an ongoing support group process. At the same time, treatment services have to be made available to their partners, victims and family members.

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

Correctional institutions have introduced programs focused on offender counselling and treatment. Related programs include individual counselling, marriage/relationship counselling and "Emotions at Home", both of which are offered to groups. As well, there is a men's support group, Alcoholics Anonymous and life skills training. A family violence program is being delivered at the Yellowknife Correctional Centre by a local counselling service on contract.

The Department of Justice has recently hired an additional corrections psychologist to assist the one psychologist who until then, was responsible for services in all the adult institutions in the Territories. It is expected that a third psychologist will be hired by the Department in the coming months.

It is clear that any treatment delivered in an institutional setting requires some sort of follow-up after an inmate has left the jail. The Government, together with Community Justice Committees will be exploring ways for treatment to continue in the communities with the objective of promoting the healing of all concerned and restoring harmony within the community.

### Services to victims

Society and the justice system are in the course of making some long overdue adjustments to give proper recognition of the interests of the victim of violent crime. These adjustments are necessary to protect the victim from further harm from an abuser, to ensure that justice is done and to facilitate the healing process. The victim will bear emotional and psychological scars which will last a lifetime unless healing takes place. Harmony within the community cannot be restored without the inclusion of the victim in the healing process.

Victims are often in need of a number of different services. After an assault they may need emergency and crisis services and access to a safe place to stay. In the medium and long term, they may need counselling and support, information and support for the court process and possibly housing.

The Family Violence Prevention Program was established in the Department of Social Services following recommendations of the Task Force on Spousal Assault. The program funds shelters, safe homes and transition homes across the Territories, mainly in the larger communities. Shelters operate above capacity on a regular basis.

Shelters provide a temporary but necessary refuge for women and children fleeing violence in their own home. However shelters on their own do little to end violence against women. In most cases they provide a short-term respite and an

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

element of security. Shelters are not available in all communities which means that victims are often removed from their community rather than the offender being removed.

Over the last few years, the Department of Social Services, with funding from the federal government's Family Violence Initiatives, has offered an extensive training program to shelter and family violence workers to enable them to provide an enhanced level of service to victims of violence.

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The role of shelters in some communities is undermined by a lingering belief that shelters, and not violence, are responsible for family break-up. This attitude persists even though the vast majority of women seeking refuge in shelters eventually return to their abusive spouses.

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There are few community resources throughout the N.W.T. with the necessary skills to provide adequate services for victims. In order to provide appropriate counselling to either victims or offenders, a thorough understanding is required of the dynamics of family dysfunction, victimization, gender socialization, gender and power issues within families as well as individual and group treatment skills.

However, it is clear that even with the highest level of training to Community Social Services Workers, the scale of the demand and the limits on resources are such that more will be required if adequate support and counselling for victims is to be provided. The long term goal must be to provide those services to victims at the community level, through community organized and community run services wherever possible. It is not cost-effective or appropriate to do otherwise, especially in the context that the healing process is a community-wide process.

### Community-based Justice

Prior to contact, justice was administered directly and immediately by members of the hunting group, according to rules and practices established by the larger cultural group, and passed on from one generation to the next. An offender was absolutely accountable to the group for his or her actions and all shared an interest in the resolution of conflict and restoration of harmony. Much of this was lost with the introduction of the formalized Euro-Canadian system.

This loss occurred not only with respect to the resolution of conflicts and the administration of justice but in many other areas as well. Community health and well-being have been severely undermined over the last decades as community members found themselves with progressively less responsibility for and control over services that directly impact the daily lives of community members.

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

In order to move toward the restoration of community well-being, it is essential that communities start taking back responsibility for the services that are most important to them and that the communities themselves be empowered to set the pace and conditions of these important changes.

The Government of the NWT shares with the communities an interest in restoring the concept of community-based justice as a significant part of a larger project in which communities assume a greater role in the development and delivery of services in the community.

The evolution of the Justice of the Peace court as a locally based institution is one important component in the development of community-based justice. Justices of the peace are community members who are interested in playing a role in resolving community problems. Encouraging women and aboriginal people to become justices of the peace is a priority of the Department of Justice.

The matters in which justices of the peace in the N.W.T. can exercise responsibility are quite broad compared to many other jurisdictions. Training for justices of the peace to assume larger responsibilities is another ongoing priority for the Department.

The introduction of Community Justice Committees as the representative of the interests of the community in justice issues is being encouraged by the Department of Justice, by Justice Canada and by the RCMP, as the core element in the development of community-based justice. The role and mandate of these committees is being developed in partnership with the communities and will evolve over time.

Unique in Canada, are the Community Justice Specialists employed by the Department of Justice to work in all the regions of the NWT. They are the front line workers whose specific mandate is to encourage, facilitate and assist communities in the identification and development of ways in which the community would like to participate in the administration of justice. The establishment of Community Justice Committees is seen as a key component in this process.

Other elements of community-based justice have been introduced or are in the process of introduction. Community-based diversion schemes are effective in some communities, especially in relation to juvenile crime. Community participation in sentencing is gradually being introduced. Community supervision of probation and remands is being explored. Communities could be involved in the administration of sentences through local programming like counselling, bush

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

camps, curfew, house arrest and so on. This would provide alternatives for the courts to incarceration and would enable communities to assume a certain ownership of both the problems and the solutions.

Community-based institutions are particularly important in providing for measures addressing both prevention and after care.

It will be up to the communities, in cooperation with other participants in the justice system, to decide, over time, the level of responsibility they want to assume. Experience elsewhere has shown the risks of communities prematurely assuming responsibilities in offenses where there are victims of violence and sexual assault. It is expected that, as the Community Justice Committee members and the community gain experience and confidence from dealing with various offenses, they will gradually assume responsibilities for more serious offences, including offences involving violence.

Experience has also shown that it is important that committee membership is representative of the community and the interests of the victims are well-represented.

The Northwest Territories is also exploring examples from elsewhere. The system of community justice in Greenland has important lessons, as does the system in place in the Navajo communities. Interesting and revealing experimentation in the Yukon with "Circle Sentencing" indicates that an emphasis on community justice has a far reaching impact on crime in a community. There are also examples of projects elsewhere in Canada which have been less successful and from which important lessons can be learned.

However, in the end, it is our own experience and the unique conditions within the NWT which ultimately contain the clues to the solutions for the NWT. There is no perfect model to adopt. Helpful as the examples from other jurisdictions may be, they are no substitute for the difficult task of confronting our own problems and devising our own solutions.

To the extent that violence is in many ways merely a symptom of larger social problems that exist in many communities, violence will not disappear until the broader questions of community health are resolved. A healthy sense of self-respect and a healthy degree of self-esteem, both at an individual level and a community level, depend, to a large extent, on exercising a degree of control over one's life. As communities and individuals within communities begin to reassume responsibilities that have been removed from the community, the community's health and well-being will improve as a growing sense of control over



## *Building a Violence Strategy*

the life of the community takes hold. As the community recovers its health, it will become easier to address issues of control and the structure of power within the family and within the community. It is impossible to undermine the climate of violence in communities unless the general health of the community is addressed.

### Facilitating Interagency Cooperation

An effective strategy against violence must include the optimum institutional response to the problem. Because violent behaviour has such a broad impact on society, a coordinated and cooperative approach to service delivery is essential. Many agencies, from inside the federal, territorial and local governments and outside government, are working to provide services. Too often, the different services are operating in isolation to the result that the cumulative service is inefficient and not as effective as it might be. Inter-agency coordination must be a priority of both governmental and non-governmental agencies.

There are examples where such coordination is working.

In Baker Lake, Mianiqsijit is a community-based response to child sexual abuse, in which the various local agencies have worked together to make a helping project happen. The project, which is locally directed and managed, deals with abuse in a holistic way by providing professional help for victims and helping the offender in a community context. The project is also involved in community education and awareness.

In Iqaluit, an interagency group called the Coordinating Committee for Family Violence and Victim Services has been formed, bringing together agencies from the community including women's groups, the shelter, municipal and Territorial social services, the Crown Prosecutor's office, the RCMP and health and educational bodies. In 1992, the group produced a video called "Victims in Court", in Inuktitut and English. Currently, their aim is to develop a model for a locally-directed, coordinated approach to serving victims of violence including spousal assault, elder abuse and sexual assault.

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A group of eight nationally-based, professional associations have cooperated in the production of an interagency, domestic violence kit that was released in the summer of 1993. Called *The Mountain and Beyond*, the kit includes written and video materials that promote a collaborative approach to dealing with family violence. The kits could be used by groups working at a community level.

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## *Building a Violence Strategy*

In March 1993, an interagency group, including the Departments of Health and Social Services and the RCMP, facilitated an interagency workshop in the Keewatin. The workshop was designed to encourage an interagency cooperative approach among the various helping professionals working in each community. This approach enables community interagency groups to work together as a team to eliminate family violence. Further workshops in other regions are in the planning stages.

### **IV. ZERO TOLERANCE**

When the actual scale and character of family violence in the north and the destruction it wreaks is fully understood, acknowledged and assessed, free from the barriers of ignorance, denial and tolerance, it becomes patently clear that family violence must be eradicated and as soon as possible. If we want a healthy and viable society we need additional, concrete, decisive, strategic, societal initiatives to complement what is already in place.

Until society says emphatically "**No to family violence**" and intercedes to stop the transmission of violence from generation to generation, violence will continue to decimate families and communities, and grow as a destructive influence.

Zero tolerance for family violence must become a goal for all of society.

Family violence cannot be tolerated. There can be no excuses. The damage done by family violence is so lethal to the health of society that any violence whatsoever is intolerable.

At the national level, the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women brought out their report in July, 1993. At the centre of the almost 500 recommendations contained in the report was the adoption of a policy of zero tolerance for violence against women.

In 1990, Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women issued *The Lake Louise Declaration on Violence Against Women* (attached as an Appendix), when they called for a commitment from every individual, community and government to work together to achieve a society free from violence.

In the Northwest Territories this same commitment must come from every

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

individual, community and government.

A primary element of a strategy to achieve zero tolerance for family violence and build this commitment is to inform and change public attitudes through public awareness and education. Some of this is already in the works. Women's organizations and governments are developing, producing, translating and distributing informational, educational and public awareness materials, pamphlets, handbooks, poster, television and radio spots promoting Zero Tolerance. For example, the Status of Women Council has prepared a Family Violence Prevention Kit called "Break the Silence ... End the Violence" that has had wide distribution.

A more formalized campaign and cooperation between government, non-governmental organizations, communities and the media would give a sharper focus to the strategy.

There are other information needs as well. Victims, offenders, family members and communities need to know what resources are available and what can be done at a community level. For example, the Status of Women Council is preparing a how-to book on organizing community workshops on family violence and other issues. This will be a valuable tool for communities in addressing these issues.

Issues of public awareness and understanding of violence must also be addressed in the school system. With the arrival of divisional boards, individual school boards determine their own priorities. School councils and parents can choose to identify the issue of violence as something that they want the schools to deal with and can provide innovative approaches that are appropriate for their particular community. The Department of Education plays a support role to the boards and will continue to respond to requests for assistance such as in the area of curriculum materials. Currently, the N.W.T. School Health Program includes abuse prevention lessons to provide youth with information on abuse and violence issues.

The Departments of Social Services, Justice and Education, Culture and Employment will continue to work together to ensure that adequate training and support are provided to teachers and education councils with respect to recognizing the signs of abuse and addressing the needs of the abused child as well as actively promoting alternatives to the use of violence for the resolution of disputes. Handbooks and teachers guides have been prepared or are being prepared as a resource for teachers in dealing with child abuse.

An employee of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment will shortly be receiving training as a certified instructor to deliver non-violent crisis intervention techniques to divisional boards and schools in the regions.

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

Some schools have organized day workshops for children to discuss violence issues.

The Government is exploring the development of additional resources to be used in the schools and at the community level in family violence prevention for issues such as parenting skills, mediation and counselling (to help in the resolution of disputes before they escalate to a point where a violent resolution is sought), date rape and the relationship between alcohol and drug abuse and family violence.

There is an important role for leaders to play with respect to changing public attitudes towards family violence. The political leadership of the N.W.T., such as the members of the Legislative Assembly, political parties, aboriginal organizations, municipal councils, band councils, chambers of commerce, the leadership of unions and self-regulating professionals and so on, should be role models for their constituents. They can send a powerful message by following the lead of women's organizations and committing themselves to the elimination of family violence. They can do this by making this a priority agenda item and by making it clear that violent behaviour will not be tolerated among their own members. For example, Pauktuutit is currently developing a code of conduct for Inuit leaders, both men and women, that would set the minimum standards of behaviour that would be acceptable for members of organizations that adopted the code.

Similarly for agencies involved in the administration of justice. For example, the RCMP has a policy of internal discipline of any member responsible for acts of family violence, regardless of the outcome of any criminal proceeding.

At a local level, individuals in towns across the country, including communities in the N.W.T., are using the anniversary of the massacre of women students at the University of Montreal in 1989, as a symbol of violence against women. On December 6 every year, white ribbons are distributed and worn as a symbolic gesture saying that violence must not and will not be tolerated. This is an excellent example of individuals in society taking a leadership role to denounce violence, without waiting for governments to show the way.

Ultimately, the adoption of Zero Tolerance as a goal means that society will be declaring that whatever the causes of family violence, there are no excuses. Being depressed, frustrated and angry, for whatever reason, is not an excuse for victimizing women and children. Ultimately, Zero Tolerance will be effective only if everyone assumes their part of the responsibility to end violence.

## *Building a Violence Strategy*

### **V. CONCLUSION**

There can be no doubt that a effective strategy to overcome the human tragedy of violence in the NWT, is long term affair. There are no quick fixes or easy answers to this intractable problem which has well established and complex roots.

However, there are numerous examples from our own history when communities in the NWT have acted to correct the dangerous erosion of social stability and harmony that alcohol abuse causes. It has happened before and can happen again.

There is a role for everyone to play. Women have been instrumental in encouraging all of us to confront the violence in our society. Women as victims have minimal investment in the maintenance of the status quo, and will continue to play a vital role in any strategy to arrest family violence. Men must now start to assume their part of the responsibility to bring about a change in attitudes and behaviour. Youth must also play a key role in overcoming destructive social patterns.

The first step is to acknowledge the seriousness of the problem: that is, the widespread extent of violence and the profound harm that it inflicts. Nothing will change as long as denial persists.

The next step is to set goals. In this case, the goal is to eliminate family violence. A commitment is required of everyone. The commitment can come in the form of an explicit endorsement of the goal of eliminating violence.

The third step is to work to change violent behaviour. This involves accepting responsibility and not tolerating violent behaviour in oneself or others.

The pace of social change is so slow that it tends to discourage the kind of commitment that is necessary to make a difference. However, the costs of doing nothing and conversely, the reward in eliminating family violence are so great, that we really have no choice but to begin now to rebuild a society which allows the full participation of all its members, honours the dignity and value of the individual and respects the right to live and grow free from violence.

LAKE LOUISE DECLARATION

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ON VIOLENCE

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AGAINST WOMEN

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BY FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL  
MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR  
THE STATUS OF WOMEN

**W**e, the Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women in Canada, are committed to achieving full equality for women in all aspects of life. As Canadians, we value the inherent worth and dignity of every individual and we expect all persons to treat one another with respect. Since violence and its threat are depriving many women of their ability to achieve equality, we declare that:

1. Violence against women is a crime and punishable under the law.
2. Women are entitled to live in a safe environment.
3. Offenders must be held accountable for their behavior.
4. The elimination of violence against women requires a response including prevention, public education, services and enforcement of the law.
5. Every individual, community and government in Canada must do everything possible to help the women, children and families affected by violence; we must all work together to achieve a society free from violence.

May 31, 1990  
Lake Louise, Alberta



Status of Women  
Canada

Condition féminine  
Canada

Canada