



OFFICE OF THE
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSIONER

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B.C. HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONER'S STATEMENT ON NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

30 YEARS AFTER THE ÉCOLE POLYTECHNIQUE MASSACRE, THE HATEFUL IDEAS THAT LED TO THE MURDER OF 14 WOMEN ARE STILL WITH US.

In 1989, a gunman walked into an engineering classroom, ejected the men from the room, and told the women present he was 'fighting feminism'. Then he opened fire. The violent misogyny that underpinned this attack remains all too recognizable in our communities today.

"Violence against women takes many forms in B.C., from the tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women to persistently high rates of rape and domestic violence in our province. These acts of violence are not separate from the École Polytechnique massacre; they are part of a culture that threatens the safety of women and girls." said B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner Kasari Govender.

"For example," she continued, "twice in the last two weeks a Canadian appeal court has had to throw out acquittals in cases that perpetuated long debunked myths about sexual assault complainants.ⁱ Violence committed against these women by the men in their lives was excused or diminished because of what they were wearing or, in the case of a child raped by her stepfather, because a judge decided that she had demonstrated an interest in sex. This way of thinking is abhorrent and discriminatory, and it must end."

30 years on from this tragedy, we have an obligation to name misogyny as the force driving gender-based violence and to act in concrete ways to end violence against women and girls.

"The Calls to Justice of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry recommend education of the judiciary and the reform of laws related to sexualized and intimate partner violence.ⁱⁱ As these cases illustrate, these reforms are necessary not only for Indigenous women and girls but for the safety of all women. On this solemn day, I raise again the urgent need for improved training of judges in sexual assault law and in the dynamics of gender-based violence." concluded the Commissioner.

-30-

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ⁱ Sean Fine, "Interest in sex does not affect a complainant's credibility in a sexual assault trial, Ontario Appeals Court rules," *The Globe and Mail*, December 2, 2019. <https://tgam.ca/2RnEY0B>

ⁱⁱ Call to Justice 5.3 and 10.1 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/indigenous-mmiwg-reaction-britishcolumbia-1.5160105>