



HEU remembers the Montreal Massacre victims on the 25th anniversary

Tragedy sparks debate on national gun control laws, and calls for action to end violence against women and young girls

Twenty-five years ago today, Canadians from coast to coast were deeply shocked and saddened by the biggest mass killing in our nation's history.

It was December 6, a brisk winter day in Québec, when a lone gunman entered École Polytechnique de Montréal, separated the female and male engineering students, and opened fire on the young women, murdering 14 of them and injuring several more.

Why? Because of their gender.

Known as the Montréal Massacre, the date is commemorated every year in Canada as the National Day of Remembrance and Action to End Violence against Women.

Since that tragic day in 1989, women's groups, human rights activists, Canada's gun control coalition, and community supporters have lobbied governments to address the issue of violence against women and girls.

Yet every year, the problem and its contributing factors – economic inequality, societal attitudes, inadequate preventative, response and remedial resources – remain.

Government cuts to women's services

Since coming to power in 2006, the Stephen Harper Conservatives have severely cut funding to women's programs, including Status of Women centres, sexual assault support services, and women's shelters – violating women's social and human rights. His government also ditched plans for a national child care program that the Liberals had been negotiating.

And shockingly, Canada's current gun laws – under Harper's regime – are less restrictive than they were three decades ago. His government dismantled the national long-gun registry, destroyed the database containing millions of gun registrations, and made it easier for Canadians to purchase firearms.

This fall, the Harper Conservatives introduced *Bill C-42*, an amendment to the *Firearms Act*, which further weakens regulations on acquiring handguns and even military weapons, and eases the procedures for obtaining a gun license.

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Statistics speak volumes

The YWCA of Canada and the Coalition for Gun Control both report that, on an annual basis, about 100,000 women and children seek refuge in shelters to escape domestic abuse. Research also indicates that about four billion dollars a year are spent providing medical, legal and social services to treat victims of physical and sexual assaults.

Here in B.C., the heartbreaking case of missing and murdered Aboriginal women has been in the spotlight for years. And HEU is one of many concerned organizations to support an ongoing call for action and to demand a national public inquiry.

In 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada and Sisters In Spirit did extensive federal and provincial research to create a database, and attach names and faces to their statistics. At the time, their national stats revealed 582 documented cases, including 160 in B.C., but those numbers don't reflect all of the missing Aboriginal women and girls who have gone unreported.

According to their study, a staggering 63 per cent of confirmed victims were murdered, while 27 per cent were reported missing. Forty-three per cent were women under the age of 31.

Last year, the RCMP launched a formal investigation. Their stats show 1,017 homicides and 164 missing Aboriginal females, totalling 1,181. From 1980 to 2012, the RCMP reported 120 unsolved murders of Aboriginal women in Canada.

Awareness and action

That's why HEU continues to raise awareness about this critical, and preventable, issue. As we mark the 25th anniversary on December 6, the union encourages members to remember those 14 women gunned down in the prime of their lives, and take action to end the violence.

For more information about national actions to end violence against women, visit the YWCA of Canada (<http://www.rosecampaign.ca/>), the Canadian Labour Congress (<http://www.canadianlabour.ca/action-center/justice-canadas-aboriginal-women-and-girls>) and the Canadian Coalition for Gun Control's "25 Years of Tears" campaign (<http://guncontrol.ca/>). There will also be more information on HEU's website in December.

Remembering: 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

December 6, 2014