

May 19, 2022

Honourable Melanie Joly
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Government of Canada

Dear Minister Joly

Re: Women's Empowerment and Equality related to Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War

Members of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) are very concerned that the empowerment and equality of women is once again being undermined as sexual violence against women has become an unmistakable aspect of the war in Ukraine. While rape as a weapon of war is as old as there have been wars on earth, this does not present an excuse to tolerate it. Ukraine is only one example of this widespread consequence of conflict on women around the world.

Our members urge you to make Canadian policy/action on this issue a priority during your tenure.

Ideological warfare against women's values such as equality make women more vulnerable. The empowerment of women is essential and only made more difficult when brutal crimes against them are encouraged and/or ignored. Impunity cannot be tolerated.

Canada cannot take this for granted as an outcome of war and the International Community must be moved to react. The 2008 United Nations (U.N.) Resolution 1820 requires the Special Representative of the Secretary General to produce an annual report on this issue. These Reports have noted an increase in the incidence of these acts. Unfortunately, in spite of the historic ruling in 1996 by the U.N. Court defining Rape as a Weapon of War, prosecutions have been minimal.

The Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 emphasizes that each woman and girl can exercise her freedoms and choices and realize all her rights - including to live free from violence. This cannot be taken lightly.

No doubt this is a complex problem, but this should not prevent Canada from taking action. Accountability must extend beyond those who commit these crimes and extend to leaders who encourage, condone, and sanction it. It cannot be treated with impunity if we are to face the serious harm this imposes on women's health and subject them to power dynamics within their political culture that impact equality and empowerment.

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 Indigenous 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.

Note: The original draft of this letter was prepared by Monica Cullum, NCWC Justice Convenor

C:

Honourable Bob Rae, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN
Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister Government of Canada
Honourable Marci Ien, Minister WAGE and Youth
Heather McPherson, NDP Critic Foreign Affairs
Michael Chong , CPC,Critic Foreign Affairs
Jacqueline Neapole , CRIAW-ICEF jackie@criaw-icef.ca