

Dear Members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF),

We understand that within the last month, you've been facing a lot of criticism about a sexual violence in the military. We also understand that your initial reaction to this criticism might be to say, "#NotAllSoldiers."

Let us be clear: The criticism you are facing is not directed at any one member of the Forces, but rather a culture that permits, excuses, and minimizes the experience of sexual assault and harassment in the military.

You've been given an opportunity by Madame Deschamps's report to challenge and change this culture. Indeed, it is the CAF's opportunity to go above and beyond the 'call of duty' that she laid out in her report.

The proven benefits of prevention are founded in its ability to address the normalization and minimization of sexual violence. Through the consistent challenging of sexist attitudes and violent behaviour, a culture which permits sexual violence will be eliminated. Without direct, decisive, and consistent action a culture of violence will continue to thrive. The CAF also needs to take steps to truly believe survivors and provide adequate support when violence does occur. Transformation can only occur by:

“...a culture that permits, excuses, and minimizes the experience of sexual assault and harassment in the military.”

1. Calling sexual violence what it is. This is a not "pressing desires," it is not "biological wiring." Even the language of "sexual misconduct" minimizes the severity of what we are talking about. Sexual violence is an inexcusable exercise of power which is meant to dehumanize and violate another person's human rights.

2. Stating, without exception, that any form of sexual violence will not be permitted in the Canadian Armed Forces. This includes language, actions, and behaviours, which contribute to a culture that condones sexual assault or harassment. This statement in policy is a first step, but must also be embedded in personal and professional values of every single person serving in the Armed Forces.

3. Recognizing that this problem cannot be solved internally. Community workers who are committed to ending gender-based violence are experts, and are a resource that has not yet been engaged. We are available to you to help you define the issues, determine strategic directions, and review policies which can concretely shift the current

destructive culture. Survivors of sexual violence must also be valued and engaged to transform this broken system.

4. Community-based organizations supporting survivors of sexual violence must also be engaged for military survivors. Mme Deschamps' report noted gaps in the current support service framework. Survivors need confidential and external services for their recovery process. They should not have to rely on inadequate systems that may not be able to guarantee confidentiality or be sought anonymously.

Your mandate is to protect Canada and defend our sovereignty. You proudly support freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Yet, any organization which permits sexual violence in any capacity does a disservice to its members' human rights, autonomy, and freedom.

The time for change is here. Take the opportunity to lead your service towards becoming a model for armed forces around the world. Apply your mission and values to each service member. Guarantee the safety, dignity, and worth of every Canadian Armed Forces personnel.

The experts in your community are here to help you. All you have to do is ask.

Regards,

The Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women
Sexual Assault Network of Ottawa
Draw the Line Campaign