



Media Release

Women call for a budget for all Ontarians Want Liberal action on racism and violence against women

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Racism keeps Ontario women who experience violence from getting the help they need to escape, according to the Step it Up Campaign.

“Today is the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,” said Erin Lee-Todd, speaking for the Campaign. “Will tomorrow’s budget show that Ontario is committed to including women who face both racism and male violence?”

Step It Up! is a coalition of provincial women’s advocacy networks, rape crisis centres, shelters and second stage housing programs, women’s centres, labour and community groups. The Campaign calls on all political Parties in Ontario to adopt ***10 Steps to End Violence Against Women*** in all of their programs and platforms now and for the next provincial election.

The Campaign calls for an end to racism and oppression, and accessibility for all Ontario women as one of the top three steps in the “women’s platform” to end violence against women.

“Women’s advocates know that women of colour, Aboriginal women and immigrant women are more vulnerable to all kinds of male violence against women because racism stands in the way of their escape,” said Lee-Todd. “Systemic racism still keeps women poorer, takes away equal access to services and supports and makes the already unbearable impacts from violence more severe for them and their children.”

On the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Step it Up! is urging the Province to make fighting racism an integrated part of all their work on violence against all women, not just an “add-on” to their overall strategy.

“There is a lot more the current Liberal Government could do in Ontario to provide better access to services to Aboriginal women, women of colour and immigrant women,” said Margaret Alexander, a Toronto Step it Up! organizer. “They can get serious about anti-racism and exclusion in the systems they control and they can provide much better funding to Aboriginal women’s services, neighbourhood immigrant women’s centres and women of colour to organize and support women in their communities who are experiencing both racism and sexist violence.”

Although the provincial government has provided some much-needed funding for interpreter services and smaller amounts of funding for some “designated” marginalized communities in its *Domestic Violence Action Plan*, funding is nowhere near the resources and support is needed.

Women of colour and immigrant women are working two or three jobs in large urban areas to support their children, or in many cases working for low wages in part-time, contract and unstable work where Employment Standards are not applied, even when they are highly educated in professional fields. In the North and South, Aboriginal women are struggling with poverty and violence and severe lack of resources to do their work with women and children.

Aboriginal and immigrant women, forced into sex trades by historic colonialism and high rates of poverty caused by racism, are at high risk of lethal violence. Aboriginal women are the most likely women to die from male violence in Canada. And women still fight against ongoing racist stereotyping that minimizes the violence they experience in their communities.

“The political level in Ontario has to do much more if they’re serious about ending violence against women as they all say they are,” said Lee-Todd. “They have to put words into action. Ontario needs to go beyond the *Domestic Violence Action Plan* and build from a framework that includes anti-racism and anti-oppression. We want equality both for and among women.”

An inclusive, integrated framework to end violence against women doesn’t currently exist and anti-racist training on violence against women for systems and services is spotty and poorly funded when it should be mandatory and ongoing.

When the budget is released tomorrow, the Step it Up! campaign members and supporters will be looking for real commitment to the *10 Steps* and a budget that includes action to end violence against all women.

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