

Violence against women is clearly a multi-system issue. It is a criminal justice problem, a mental and physical health problem and a social problem involving welfare, short-term emergency and long-term affordable housing, job training, pay and employment equity, education, and day care. Accordingly, responses to violence must come from different sectors of Canadian society, including all levels of government. The provinces are responsible for the administration and delivery of health, education, welfare and justice services in this country; however, the Committee sees a strong, leadership role for the federal government to highlight the national importance of human dignity, rights, and equality and promote the right to personal safety and security for all Canadians.

In May 1990, at the annual federal, provincial, territorial meeting of ministers responsible for the status of women in Victoria, B.C., a declaration on violence against women was issued which recognized a number of important principles.

1. Violence against women is a crime and punishable by law.
2. Women are entitled to live in a safe environment.
3. Offenders must be held accountable for their behaviour.
4. The elimination of violence requires a response, including prevention, public education, services and enforcement of the law.
5. Every individual, community and government in Canada must do everything to help women, children and families affected by violence. We must all work together to achieve a society free from violence. (1:22)

The Committee is encouraged by the Victoria Declaration and the commitment from federal, provincial and territorial governments to work towards a violence-free and safe environment for women, children and families in Canada. The recommendations that follow in this report reflect the seriousness the Committee attaches to effectively dealing with violence against women and to the weight to be accorded to this important declaration.