



Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) demands the City's leadership to take concrete action to end violence downtown

January 31, 2022 (Ottawa) — What is occurring in our city is horrifying and traumatizing for Ottawa residents. Make no mistake, the hate mob occupying the downtown core is violent. As a coalition representing community-based organizations dedicated to ending violence against women and gender-based violence, the hateful messaging, intimidation, and racism currently taking place in our streets is what our member agencies address daily. It targets women, Indigenous communities, Black and racialized communities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, among others.

The presence of such a large and threatening mob, including white supremacists and Nazi sympathizers, has nothing to do with freedom and is hate personified. This is not just a symbolic exercise. This hate mob is overtly threatening and intimidating women, others from marginalized communities, and those working in precarious low-paid employment. Evidently, if you are not a member of the white hetero-cis mainstream, then you are viewed as sub-human and are not entitled to respect or civility, let alone safety. To assert that this “protest” is “peaceful” is insulting and shows utter disregard for the lived experiences of residents downtown, especially those most targeted for hate.

We have heard of accounts of young women being followed, almost run over, and threatened with rape. It comes as no surprise that those embracing racist, homophobic, and transphobic values also openly demonstrate their hatred towards women.

As the Everytown for Gun Safety has explained:

Misogynist attitudes and far-right extremism heavily overlap... Having embraced the radicalizing message of misogyny that blames a class of people (women) for their own perceived loss of social status, these aggrieved men are primed to accept the ideology of white supremacy, which, analogously, claims communities of color and Jewish people are conspiring to strip white people of their social status. This hateful continuum makes misogynistic groups attractive prospects for recruitment into the far-right.ⁱ

We stand in solidarity with other organizers in our community in denouncing the hate-fuelled mob, and the City's lack of intervention. We, like all residents of Ottawa, are outraged by the ransacking of Shepherds of Good hope. These actions are in stark contrast to the peaceful protests led by Indigenous, Black and racialized organizers that have occurred in the city in which police have violently intervened, and City leadership have denounced peaceful civil disobedience and demanded that the “rule of law” be upheld.

A double standard seems at work: police are holding back for fear of inciting a violent riot response from the protestors. However, as Jihan Abbas, PhD (@JihanAbbas) noted on Twitter:

“You can’t say what is happening in Ottawa is ‘peaceful’ & the mob is compliant w/ the exception of a few misguided ‘individuals’ & then say rules & laws won’t be enforced at all b/c of the imminent threat of escalation & violence from this same group.”ⁱⁱ

While we know that hate crimes are vastly underreported, the failure to prevent and respond to the on-going threat and violence is a taunting reminder of why individuals feel unsafe to seek police support. This observation exposes a police response that is not only negligent, but complicit. The disproportionate harm and the inaction by the police to protect members of the public from harassment and intimidation is an institutional failure: it is how our mainstream institutions entrench racism and misogyny.

Endnotes

ⁱ January 13, 2022 “Misogyny, Extremism, and Gun Violence,” Everytown Research & Policy available at: <https://everytownresearch.org/report/misogyny-extremism-and-gun-violence/>

ⁱⁱ January 31, 2022. Jihan Abbas, PhD Twitter handle (@JihanAbbas) available at: <https://twitter.com/JihanAbbas/status/1488193816863649798?s=20&t=OzffTYcezFLNz7xI2IAUw>