

# **THE TOXIC CULTURE OF THE RCMP: MISOGYNY, RACISM AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN CANADA'S NATIONAL POLICE FORCE**

A Report by The Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (May 2022)

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The evidence of systemic discrimination and violence against women perpetrated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is shocking, and it is growing. This is the conclusion of a new report on Canada's national police force issued May 9, 2022 by the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA).

FAFIA says that it is time to act. The Government of Canada is committed to "address[ing] the profound systemic inequities and disparities that remain present ...in our core institutions" and to "accelerat[ing] action to reform the RCMP." It is time for independent review and transformational change.

The RCMP's culture of misogyny, racism and homophobia was identified by former Supreme Court Justice, the Honourable Michel Bastarache, in his groundbreaking report on sexual harassment in the RCMP, *Broken Dreams, Broken Lives*, issued in December 2020. His report, which resulted from a class action suit that was joined by 3,086 female RCMP Officers, concluded that the problem of sexual harassment in the RCMP cannot be attributed to a few individual "bad apples". Rather, the sexual harassment is fostered and permitted by an institutional culture of misogyny, racism and homophobia that operates at every level of the RCMP, and in every jurisdiction.

Justice Bastarache concluded that the RCMP is not capable of changing itself from within, and that the "time has come for the Government of Canada to ask some hard questions about the structure and governance of federal policing."

It is evident, from many other reports, that the RCMP's culture of misogyny, racism, and homophobia affects not only the treatment of women who are employed by the RCMP, but also the treatment of the women whom the RCMP is intended to serve. The same "hard questions" that are raised by the RCMP's

treatment of the women it employs are also raised by the RCMP's treatment of the women it polices.

A review of the evidence provided in key documents from legal experts and human rights organizations over the last decade reveals a pattern and practice of sexualized violence against women by Officers of the RCMP, including harassment, sexual assault, rape, excessive use of force, unwarranted strip-searching, and sexualized verbal abuse. In addition, reports document RCMP failures to protect women, especially Indigenous women and girls, from violence by men in the community – including from sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, and murder.

Numerous reports, including from Human Rights Watch, the Legal Services Board of Nunavut, Pauktutit Inuit Women of Canada, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Oppal Inquiry, and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls document overt violence against Indigenous women and girls by RCMP Officers, as well as failures to protect them from disappearances and murders. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls expressed serious concerns about RCMP misogyny, racism and sexualized violence against Indigenous women and girls, as well as about RCMP failures to properly investigate exploitation, abuse, disappearances, and killings. Little substantive action has been taken in response.

For women, police response to sexual assaults and domestic violence are key issues affecting their equality and security. But rates of “unfounding” of sexual assault allegations are particularly high in rural and northern Canada where the RCMP is the principal police force, and they reveal entrenched misogyny and stereotyping. Also, women who report domestic violence cannot rely on help; recent reports document RCMP conduct in domestic violence cases that is sometimes dismissive and sometimes abusive. In short, women cannot trust Canada's national police force not to commit violence against them, or to prevent violence and investigate thoroughly when it occurs.

Violence against women is a violation of women's right to equality and non-discrimination. As a signatory to international and regional human rights treaties, the Government of Canada has obligations to respect, protect and fulfill women's right to equality. To meet its human rights commitments, the Government of Canada is required 1) to ensure that officials of the state, such as RCMP Officers, do not perpetrate violence against women; and 2) to prevent, investigate, prosecute and provide redress for violence against women by non-state actors.

Despite the many documented accounts of overt violence and policing failures, there is no effective accountability and oversight mechanism for the RCMP. The Civilian Review and Complaints Commission (CRCC), which accepts and investigates complaints against the RCMP, has been described as a "broken system." It is not truly independent, as complaints against the RCMP are mainly investigated by the RCMP itself, and the RCMP Commissioner is the final decision-maker on the implementation of any recommendations.

FAFIA concludes that Canada cannot have a credible National Action Plan on Violence against Women, or a credible National Action Plan on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, until the deeply entrenched misogyny and racism in the culture of the RCMP is confronted and dismantled.

An independent, external review of the RCMP, its practices, structure and future, is needed now.

The report recommends that the Government of Canada:

1. Initiate the independent, in-depth review of the RCMP called for by the Bastarache Report, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, and Indigenous women advocates, with the goal of determining whether and how radical changes can be made to RCMP oversight, transparency, accountability, structure, culture, and practices. This review needs to consider options for restructuring, or dismantling, the RCMP.

2. Implement the 52 “stop-gap” recommendations of the Bastarache Report and establish an oversight body for reviewing and reporting specifically on the implementation of those recommendations.
3. Take immediate steps to investigate, prosecute and make reparations for RCMP Officer-perpetrated violence against Indigenous women and girls in an open and transparent manner, with independent oversight that includes Indigenous women experts.
4. Replace the CRCC and the ERC with a genuinely independent and adequately resourced oversight body that can investigate and report publicly on all complaints against the RCMP and hold the institution and individual RCMP Officers to account for individual and systemic failures, neglect, harassment, abuse, misconduct, assault, and violence against women.
5. Make effective legislative changes to ensure that a new oversight body has full access to RCMP information, files, statistics, reports and any relevant documentation, and that investigations of complaints regarding Officer misconduct can lead to employment, civil and/or criminal consequences. These legislative changes must include a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination and violence against women as recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women.
6. Ensure that the focus and goal of any reform is to make the RCMP capable of meeting Canada’s, and the RCMP’s, human rights obligations to ensure that public officials do not perpetrate violence against women, and that they prevent, investigate, prosecute, and provide effective remedies for violence against women.
7. Include women, especially Indigenous women, in the design of oversight mechanisms and in their operation, and as key participants in decision-making regarding the future of the RCMP.