



# Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres

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July 18, 2010

Honourable Vic Toews, P.C, M.P.  
Minister of Public Safety  
269 Laurier Avenue West  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0P8

## **RE: Public Safety Minister Announces Federal Support for Emergency Preparedness Projects and Urban Search and Rescue Projects across Canada, Toronto, May 5, 2010**

Dear Honourable Vic Toews,

The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) works toward the prevention and eradication of sexual assault. The Coalition recognizes that violence against women is one of the strongest indicators of prevailing societal attitudes towards women. As you are likely aware, our membership includes sexual assault centres from across Ontario, offering counselling, information and support services to survivors of sexual violence, including childhood sexual abuse and incest.

OCRCC is writing in response to Ministry of Public Safety's announcement of federal support for emergency preparedness projects across Canada in Toronto on May 5, 2010.

"The federal government plays an important role in helping the provinces and territories respond when emergencies strike," said Minister Toews<sup>1</sup>. Funding – for over 400 relevant projects – will allow for the purchase of emergency response equipment such as radios and other telecommunications, emergency generators, computer software, and decontamination showers. OCRCC would like to commend the federal government on this venture, which acknowledges the need for tools, preventative steps and training for emergency professionals (and communities alike) required to help keep Canadians safe.

**As your Ministry undertakes this work, OCRCC reminds you of the important role that gender plays in emergency preparedness, disaster management and relief efforts.**

According to the Pan American Health Organisation, a Regional office of the World Health Organisation, "looking at natural disasters from a gender perspective is an urgent requirement to understand what disaster means to every-day reality"<sup>2</sup>. Unlike men, women are more vulnerable during disasters because

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<sup>1</sup> Public Safety Minister Toews Marks 15<sup>th</sup> Annual National Emergency Preparedness Week: *Announces federal support for Emergency Preparedness Projects and Urban Search and Rescue Projects across Canada*. Online: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/media/nr/2010/nr20100505-eng.aspx> . May 5, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Association for Women's Rights in Development: *Gender and Natural Disasters: Why We Should Be Focusing On A Gender Perspective Of The Tsunami Disaster*. Online at: [www.Awid.org](http://www.Awid.org). December 2, 2008.

they often have less access to resources, and are the primary caregivers to children, the elderly and the disabled.

In addition to these issues, women frequently experience an increase in violence – including sexual violence – following a natural disaster, and are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation during economic hardships that follow disasters<sup>3</sup>. In Haiti, for example, sexual violence continues to affect women and girls in Internally Displaced Person camps many months after the January 12 earthquake; after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, aid workers cited an increase in the number of rapes affecting disaster survivors and residents of relief camps<sup>4</sup>. Reports of human traffickers targeting impoverished women, children and families have also followed natural disasters around the world<sup>5</sup>.

In order to reduce the harm associated with disasters, it is necessary for governments and Ministries such as your own to recognize these vulnerabilities. **Linking emergency preparedness plans with a gender analysis can lend a greater understanding of what is needed to ensure that women's unique circumstances during natural disasters are recognized and acted upon. This in turn can prevent sexual violence in the context of disasters. The OCRCC makes the following recommendations:**

- Include the possibility of sexual violence, and specific safety planning within your emergency preparedness plans for women and children
- Include women's health professionals, women's crisis workers, and anti-violence advocates in your current work in emergency preparedness planning, so to ascertain the inclusion of women's unique circumstances during natural disasters within these plans
- Recognize sexual assault centres in Ontario as a resource and ally to your current work in emergency preparedness

OCRCC believes that the best way to prevent such incidences is to work with others to change a society that presently condones forms of violence against women. Together, we will make a difference.

Sincerely,

Nicole Pietsch,  
OCRCC Coordinator

c.c. Jacqueline Benn-John, OCRCC President  
Honourable Laurel Broten, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues  
Amnesty International, National Office

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> EcoSalon: *Sexual Violence Escalates in Post-Earthquake Haiti*. Online at: <http://www.ecosalon.com/sexual-violence-escalates-in-post-earthquake-haiti/>. May 5, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Association for Women's Rights in Development: *Gender and Natural Disasters: Why We Should Be Focusing On A Gender Perspective Of The Tsunami Disaster*. Online at: [www.Awid.org](http://www.Awid.org). December 2, 2008.