

NOTES FOR REMARKS BY

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*From Words to Action:
Building Safer Communities*

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Thank you. Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, friends. It's a pleasure to be here today and to see so many familiar faces. I'd like to thank the Canadian Club for giving me the opportunity to tell you what I've been up to. But first, let me tell you what I'm not doing.

One myth making the rounds is that I've moved to Ottawa. A second myth, which is even further from the truth, is that I've moved to Ottawa to 'write a report.' The answer to both is No. I'm not living in Ottawa, and I'm not writing a report.

What have I been doing, then? In a sense, the same thing I've been doing most of my adult life — working with others to build safe, healthy communities. As a community worker, probation officer, lawyer and municipal politician, I've worked with many of you in this room to make our community safer. A better place to live.

Since last June, when the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General appointed me to chair the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention, I've had the opportunity to take "our" Toronto experience to the national level, working with people in every corner of Canada. It's been exciting working with people all across this country. Living in Toronto for so many years, I sometimes thought "coast to coast" meant from the Humber to the Don. It doesn't.

The name "The National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention" is quite a mouthful. Maybe appropriately so, for it describes a proactive approach to a big issue. It's our national government saying that we cannot continue to deal with crime primarily through reactive measures — the apprehension, sentencing, incarceration and rehabilitation (sometimes) of offenders. We can't continue with these reactive measures because we can't afford it!

We can't afford it in human terms. Every crime has a victim. And as someone who has been the victim of a violent crime, I know the pain, the disruption and the fear which crime leaves in its wake.

We can't afford it in community terms. The fear of crime - even among those who have not been victims themselves - also remains high. And this fear can, in many ways, be as harmful as crime itself. It can disrupt lives, prevent people from enjoying their community and cause decay and abandoned neighbourhoods.

And if that's not enough reason, we can't afford it in economic terms. Reactive measures — police, courts and corrections — plus the personal and physical costs and the losses of earnings due to crime cost Canadians approximately 45 billion dollars a year. That's more than the combined spending on education by every government in Canada.

I mentioned the fear of crime. Here there is a startling gap between perception and reality.

A recent report released by a City of Toronto task force indicates that 43% of Toronto residents believe that crime is increasing. An almost equal number feel unsafe walking at night. But as fear increases the reality is that crime isn't getting worse. It's getting better.

Here in Toronto, recent police statistics show that the crime rate has been dropping steadily, even violent crime. Nationally, the figures are equally encouraging. The most current statistics indicate that police-reported crimes fell by 5% in 1997 — the lowest rate since 1990 and the sixth decrease in a row. Violent crime declined for the fifth consecutive year. Perhaps even more encouraging is that these recent decreases follow 15 years of increases.

The credit for these developments rests on many shoulders. But particular credit is due to police forces across Canada, including the Toronto Police and Chief Boothby. The partnership between the police and communities is showing impressive results, results we can all be proud of, and for which dedicated officers like Chief Boothby can be especially proud.

Another contradiction exists with respect to violence against women. Many women are afraid to walk alone or even with other women on the streets at night, yet women are much more likely to be assaulted by someone they know at home than by strangers in public places.

Misconceptions such as these are often as harmful as crime itself. They can lead to bad public policy decisions and bad spending decisions. They can divert scarce resources from real problems.

To address these issues, Phase I of the National Strategy was launched by the Government of Canada in 1994 to develop a policy framework for crime prevention through social development. Phase II, launched last June, represents the next step, the 'action' step. The Phase I report, developed by a panel of diverse Canadians, offered three conclusions that have helped guide the action Phase of the work:

First, the time was ripe to develop a strategic plan for crime prevention in Canada which would build on key partnerships with provinces and territories to develop and provide crime prevention knowledge, skills and resources to communities across the country;

Second, the voluntary sector and the private sector had to be more involved.

And third, crime prevention through social development will not work in a silo. It must be integrally linked to a wide range of government initiatives in areas such as early childhood development, support to Aboriginal communities, and school-to-work transition programs for young people.

Based on these conclusions, the Federal Cabinet approved a five-year action strategy with a \$32 million annual budget. The strategy has four key components:

1. The Safer Communities Initiative,
2. A promotion and public education program,
3. Support for a Private Sector Initiative, and
4. A National Crime Prevention Centre.

Most of the funding — \$26.8 million a year — is dedicated to the Safe Communities Initiative which will assist communities to mobilize, will invest in and vigorously evaluate innovative programs, and will share information on best practices.

Specific priorities are also targeted:

- investing in children and youth by providing them and their families with supports and resources to address risk factors;
- investing in Aboriginal people and communities by complementing Gathering Strength and contributing to improvements in health and safety;
- investing in Women's Personal Security to help prevent violence against women, victimization, and fear of crime.

The Promotion and Public Education Program will work to dispel myths and misconceptions such as those I mentioned earlier, and will reinforce the message that crime prevention is everyone's business. A partnership between the private and public sectors will bring new expertise, talent and networks to workplace and community safety issues. The National Crime Prevention Centre is responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of the strategy. I'm pleased that Monique Collette, the Executive Director, is here today.

I've told you about our goals and about the approach we're taking. But, moving from words to action, let me give you some examples of some of the things we're actually doing.

In our first nine months, we have received over 2000 applications, and we've funded projects in every part of the country, ranging from small grants for drop-in centres in remote communities to funding for major initiatives in Canada's largest urban centres. These examples illustrate the extraordinary range and breadth of the initiatives which the National Strategy supports.

- An overwhelming number of Canadians see a better start for children as the best way to prevent crime. In Edmonton, Charlottetown and Whitehorse we are supporting projects that target high-risk children aged 0-6. In each community, broadly-based coalitions are developing supports for parents and children who are at risk of child abuse and neglect, poor parenting, domestic violence and parental criminality.
- Closer to home, we've supported the Durham School Board program called Together We Light the Light, a school-based intervention model which builds responsibility and resiliency in young people and reduces anti-social tendencies. It's a program which mobilizes an entire community, and it's a program which will be closely monitored in order to determine its effectiveness for other schools across the country.

- Operation Go Home is a prevention program that will work with schools to deter youth from turning to street life in Winnipeg.
- In Cornwall last weekend, over 200 young people from across Canada attended a training session organized by their peers to learn conflict resolution and peacemaking. Back home, they will train others and provide mediation in their schools and communities.
- In a small New Brunswick community, residents discovered that break-ins were being committed by young people for food — or money for food. A community kitchen program that involves the youth has stopped the break-ins and is creating other positive opportunities as well.
- Just last Friday we announced funding for a number of programs in Prince Edward Island including a grant to the P.E.I. Hockey Association and Canadian Red Cross to develop and pilot a community-based abuse/harassment prevention program for 22 Minor Hockey Associations across the province, involving some 5000 players.
- The Canadian Association of Principals are compiling an inventory of resources, research, best practices and other information deemed to be relevant by school leaders in preventing crime. There's a lot of information out there; this will make it accessible.
- Ten days ago I spent an evening on patrol with Vancouver police officers in the Downtown East Side of their city. I saw first-hand this community in crisis. It was shocking. We are providing almost a million dollars a year for five years to support a project in Vancouver's Downtown East Side developed by the city and a community coalition. It will work on the justice, safety, crime prevention and victimization issues currently overwhelming this community. That evening in Vancouver, several people I met on the street asked me about another project we fund: Toronto's Drug Treatment Court. That underlined for me the importance of a national strategy such as this. In the midst of their own nightmare, they were still anxious to learn from possible helpful resources in other communities.
- The Toronto Drug Treatment Court was driven by a Provincial Court judge disturbed by the large number of crimes committed to support drug dependency. Together with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto Police and many other community partners, this court-supervised program connects addicted offenders with treatment and the range of services necessary to break the cycle of addiction and criminality. It forces them to take responsibility for their crime — and for the addiction behind it.

These various initiatives are remarkably different from one another. Yet each, in its own way, is an important piece of the crime and safety puzzle. Whether it's the Native Friendship Centre in Lloydminster, Saskatchewan, or a conference taking place in Montreal, or a seminar advising senior citizens in Victoria of phone scams, the solutions to crime have as many faces as crime itself.

In addition to providing funding for programs and projects, another part of the National Strategy's work is our efforts at building partnerships. The police and court officials are obvious partners, and they have enthusiastically embraced the approach we're taking. But other partners play a key role as well. Teachers and educators. Parents. Community agencies. Churches. Corporations.

Last week I attended the launch of The Body Shop's 6th Annual STOP Violence Against Women Campaign. Involving employees and customers, it's a program which raises money and awareness — awareness of the signs and types of violence against women and girls, how to recognize it, and what to do about it.

This leadership by The Body Shop underscores the fact that crime affects each and every one of us, wherever we are. That includes banks, insurance companies, theatres and restaurants. Shops and factories. The National Strategy has been working on developing more formal partnerships with the private sector. Within the next few weeks, I hope that we will be able to make a more concrete announcement about the Business Action Alliance.

I've spoken a lot about getting tough on the causes of crime. But this does not mean that we shouldn't also be tough on crime itself. The two, in my view, must go hand in hand.

There will always be instances where criminal acts cannot be prevented. In such cases, offenders must be dealt with quickly and firmly. And serious crimes must be treated seriously. Part of being tough on crime means relying on incarceration. But this must be a remedy of last resort. Here in Canada, it costs almost \$100,000 to keep a young person in closed custody for one year. Few people would argue that that's an ideal use of public funds - especially in a time of education cuts and hospital closures.

Incarceration isn't just expensive, it's often counter-productive. Far too often we put a young offender into jail only to have a hardened criminal come out. So, Yes, let's be tough on crime, but let's apply this 'toughness' judiciously and sensibly, not in a way which is short-sighted.

I'm someone who continues to believe that government has an important role to play in the lives of people; that government can and should be a force for good. And programs like the National Strategy demonstrate, in small way, what an important role government can play.

Ours is not a top-heavy, bureaucratic program imposing one-size-fits-all solutions on different people and different regions. It's a strategy which supports communities, which helps them mobilize and develop solutions to their problems. It's a program which seeks to tackle issues before they become problems, and tackle problems before they become tragedies.

As with many troubling issues, crime is something many of us would rather not spend a lot of time thinking about. A bit like an unpleasant disease. But it's an issue we can't afford to ignore.

We know that strong, healthy communities are one of the most effective means of crime prevention. We know that crime and victimization are not random. We know what puts people at risk, and what works to reduce that risk. We also know how poverty and inequality increase the likelihood of risk and decrease the ability of families to respond effectively. We know the harmful effects of prejudice and discrimination.

This information is out there. And many of the solutions are already out there. Now it's time to apply them, to turn words into action. And, in perhaps a small way, but a real way, we're doing that.

Our ultimate goal is individual and community safety. Our bottom line is fewer victims and suffering. We're heading in the right direction. But actually reaching our destination is up to all of us.

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