

**Statement to the Legislature**

**By**

**The Honourable Deb Matthews**

**Minister Responsible for Women's Issues**

**SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH**

**Queen's Park**

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Mr. Speaker,

For over 20 years, the month of May has been officially recognized as Sexual Assault Prevention Month in Ontario.

It's a time to acknowledge the survivors of sexual violence. One survivor tells us: "we can't speak publicly because then we are too visible and fear not being believed or doubted".

The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres tells us that Sexual Assault Prevention Month is a time to publicly remind citizens that sexual assault happens every day in our communities and globally, often in places unseen and unheard.

It's a time to mourn the missing and murdered Aboriginal women and re-commit to taking action to end violence against Aboriginal women.

It's a time to raise awareness that the actual and perceived vulnerability of women with disabilities places them at greater risk for sexual assault.

It's a time to inform ourselves that homeless and transient women are also at greater risk – as well as immigrant women and women from racialized communities.

It's a time for francophone women to come together and be vocal about the challenges they face – in order to make public the misconceptions about their lives.

To Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes, working together reinforces the idea of **solidarity**.

During this month, there are a variety of activities and events taking place by communities across the province.

Whether it's community breakfasts, open houses, workshops or touring schools to discuss healthy relationships - the people out in our communities are doing the hard work to find innovative community solutions to ending the complex issue of sexual violence.

I invite you to visit the Ontario Women's Directorate web site at [www.ontario.ca/women](http://www.ontario.ca/women) for a list of events taking place in your communities.

I'd like to acknowledge these incredible people in our communities who have been working hard day in and day out for the past 30 years.

Mr. Speaker, less than 10 per cent of sexual assaults are reported to police. Myths around sexual assault can make women and girls feel they will be victims over and over again if they speak out.

For example, it's simply wrong to suggest that a woman is responsible for violence against herself because of the clothes she was wearing.

Mr. Speaker,

Sexual Assault Prevention Month is an important opportunity to dispel this and other myths.

It's also an opportunity to redouble our efforts to raise awareness and encourage dialogue on this complex issue.

Our government is committed to developing a Sexual Violence Action Plan and I'd like to thank our partners and the survivors of sexual violence whose voices are reflected in what I've had to say today.

In particular, the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, Action Ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes and the Disabled Women's Network Ontario (DAWN).

Thanks to the Sexual Assault Centres and the Sexual Assault / Domestic Violence Treatment Centres.

I'd also like to thank the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres and the Ontario Native Women's Association for their ongoing dedication to ending violence against Aboriginal women.

Finally Mr. Speaker, I would urge all Members of this House to get involved in this work and to support your community organizations however way you can.

I'm convinced that if we work together, we can end sexual violence in Ontario.

Thank you.