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NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**OPENING REMARKS AT A MEMORIAL CEREMONY AT THE LASSONDE SCHOOL OF
ENGINEERING**

December 1, 2017

TORONTO, ONTARIO

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

This year marks the 26th anniversary of the Montreal Massacre, and every year at this time I am reminded of how personal an issue this is for me—not only as a woman and as a mother, but also as a sociologist whose research has largely centered on the reduction of violence against women.

Today is also deeply personal for all of us who study, teach and work at universities.

Places of learning must be places where all feel welcome and included and safe, so that all community members are able to fulfill their fullest potential.

We are here together today to remember and to honour the 14 young women whose lives were taken during one of the greatest tragedies ever to take place at a Canadian educational institution.

We also join the wider Toronto community and the national community in remembering all individuals who have been physically or psychologically impacted or who have lost their lives to gender-based violence, transphobia and homophobia; individuals of Indigenous heritage and Indigenous communities who have been impacted by gender- and race-based violence, including missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; and all families and communities impacted by gender-based violence.

At York, we recognize that gender-based violence takes many forms and can happen through a variety of actions and behaviors, both individually and systemically.

We acknowledge that efforts to eliminate gender-based violence require ongoing collaboration with students, faculty and staff to foster and sustain safe and inclusive campuses; and we are deeply committed to working toward this goal through projects and initiatives such as:

- our Sexual Violence Response Office, which provides support, services and accommodations, and is available to all members of the community;
- through the Inclusion Lens, a tool developed by Lassonde and our Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion, which earlier this year ensured that more than 500 Orientation Week events were welcoming and inclusive to all incoming members of the York community;
- our mental health strategy, which supports the mental health and wellness of all members of the community;
- and our Bystander Intervention Training program and other similar educational initiatives.

Of course, initiatives and events like this one today are instrumental to achieving our goal. They are important reminders of the work that we have yet to do in building communities that are inclusive, diverse, equitable and safe for everyone.

So, I would like to thank Marisa and Lassonde for today's event, as well as each student, staff, and faculty member for their support and involvement in these and other initiatives, and for their efforts to establish and promote them for the benefit of our community.

We must continue this important work, as we remember the 14 young women who tragically lost their lives twenty-six years ago in Montreal, and all individuals who have been affected and continue to be affected by gender-based violence.

It is essential that we make our stance on issues of gender-based violence clear, so that survivors know they will be affirmed and empowered to ask for the support and resources they require.

So, I ask today that together we renew our shared commitment to a safer, more tolerant society, by inciting compassion, care, civility and inclusion, not hatred, discrimination or intolerance.

And I ask that this begin right here, in our classrooms, labs, hallways, libraries and campuses.

Let me close with one final thought.

As a sociologist, one of the scholars who played an important role in shaping my own thinking is feminist author, activist and artist bell hooks, who has written and spoken about the concept of a 'beloved community'—a concept that I think is relevant to our community here at York, as well as to the spirit of what we are here to acknowledge and honour today, namely that our actions matter.

The concept of a beloved community assumes a group effort to effect change in social institutions and an effort to make the means of that struggle consistent with the ends. In other words, those working for institutional change endeavor to become a beloved community as they strive for all of society to exemplify such a community.

bell hooks has said:

“Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.”

“If we want a beloved community, we must stand for justice, have recognition for difference without attaching difference to privilege.”

As an institution of higher learning with values of social justice and inclusion that are so fundamental to our identity, York is committed to being a leader in education and research about gender-based violence, and in championing social justice, equity and inclusion in our own practices.

Our actions do matter, so thank you for being here today and for being part of this important conversation.

Your efforts are helping to make the difference.