



November 19, 2020

## Society Can Only Flourish when Women have a Seat at the Table



December 6 marks the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women to commemorate the anniversary of the 14 women who were killed at Montreal's École Polytechnique on this day in 1989.

It's been 31 years since Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte, and Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz were murdered because they were women who dared to study engineering.

The Montreal massacre wasn't just an attack on these women, it was an attack on feminism, on women taking up space in the workplace and on school campuses

where men traditionally ruled. This put an uncomfortable yet necessary lens on violence against women in our country.

It also forced us to look at the sexism and misogyny that is ingrained in all aspects of our society – and asked us to do better, to be better.

At the time of the massacre, only 16 percent of undergraduate engineering students in Canada were women. Three decades later, we've made some progress, but it has been slow. Today, women make up just 22 percent of engineering students at the undergraduate level – a long way from gender parity.

Growth has been slow in other professions as well. Today, women make up more than half of the Canadian population, and almost half of the workforce, but they continue to be underrepresented in political and professional leadership positions.

Even when women reach positions of leadership and power, they are often undermined, under-utilized, or made to feel like they are a token – and it's even worse for racialized and Indigenous women.

But we fight. And we continue to fight because we belong in the workforce. We belong on college campuses. We belong in the boardroom. We belong in Union leadership. We belong at 24 Sussex.

That's why we need more women in positions of leadership across all disciplines, whether it be government, sciences, labour. It needs to become the norm, not the exception. We need women at the table to influence decision-making and pave the way for gender equality across our society.

The 14 women who died at École Polytechnique had every right to study their chosen field. They didn't think of themselves as trailblazers, but their legacy is so much bigger than the way they died. They were the catalyst for our country and our society to decide who we want to be.

We are a richer and stronger society when women have a seat at the table. We aren't waiting for an invitation anymore.

In solidarity,



Jan Simpson, National President



Julee Sanderson, 1<sup>st</sup> National Vice-President



Bev Collins, National Secretary-Treasurer

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