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May 19, 2015

The Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of National Defence
National Defence Headquarters
Major-General George R. Pearkes Building
101 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K2

Dear Minister:

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) is a federal not-for-profit corporation working to ensure the voice of victims of crime is heard by all levels of government. We have previously written to your predecessor, the Honourable Rob Nicholson, on the issue of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces.

We were very pleased to read that you promised on May 13th, 2015 in the House of Commons to create an independent body to deal with sexual misconduct in the military. We agree with retired Supreme Court judge Marie Deschamps who recently said an independent centre was “essential” for eliminating what she had identified as a “hostile” sexual environment in the Canadian Forces.

We are writing to inquire about further details, including a timeline for when such a body will be established and also when you plan to introduce legislation that will establish a victims’ bill of rights for military personnel. These announcements are encouraging. We are pleased that you recognize the seriousness of sexual harassment and assault in the military and that a new model will be unveiled which is truly independent of undue influence from the chain of command.

It is unacceptable that any workplace in Canada, let alone the Canadian Armed Forces, would suffer from what Deschamps described as a “hostile sexualized environment”, particularly among recruits and the junior ranks, which included everything from swearing and sexual innuendo to “dubious relationships” between low-ranking women and high-ranking men. We are also concerned about rape and a culture wherein officers turn a blind eye to inappropriate conduct and senior non-commissioned officers “imposing a culture where no one speaks up.” It is intolerable that a large percentage of incidents involving sexual harassment and sexual assault in the military are not reported because victims are worried they will hurt their careers, not be believed, or even face retaliation from peers and supervisors.

The CRCVC strongly supports an independent centre responsible for receiving reports of inappropriate sexual misconduct, as well as prevention, coordination and monitoring of training, victim support, monitoring of accountability, and research, and to act as a central authority for the collection of data. We believe this will allow many more victims to come forward and seek supports without the fear of reprisal

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from their superior officers. The military must provide an environment for victims to safely report harassment and violence without the fear of negative repercussions to one's career.

We believe it would be wise for Canada to follow the lead of other countries around the world such as Britain, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, where military justice is handled completely by civilian authorities. France, Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium have erased their military courts so that the military chain of command cannot influence justice. We hope Canada will follow these international examples in responding to the endemic problem of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, to bring independence, impartiality and increased trustworthiness in the eyes of victims.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Heidi Illingworth', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Heidi Illingworth
Executive Director