

Speaking Notes

for

The Honourable Alice Wong,
Minister of State (Seniors)

to the

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day
Governmental and UN Perspectives

June 14, 2013

New York, NY

Dear friends,

I am very pleased to be representing Canada at this **World Elder Abuse Awareness Day** event and to be among such distinguished colleagues.

Knowledge, experience and wisdom:

These three words express the contributions many of our elders make to our communities, our workplaces and our families.

But behind these admirable qualities, there can be a harsh reality: Some seniors are victims of abuse and neglect, often suffering in silence.

Elder abuse is a serious problem. It comes in many forms and affects seniors from all walks of life and in communities around the globe.

In Canada, studies suggest that between 4 and 10 percent of seniors experience some form of abuse. But only one in five cases of abuse is reported.

Why is that?

Victims are often reluctant to report that they have been abused by a family member, a caregiver or a friend, and sadly, these are the most common abusers.

The abusers betray their trust. They take advantage of their vulnerability and take away their dignity at a time of life when they ought to feel secure.

It comes as no surprise to any of us in this room that elder abuse is difficult to talk about. It's an emotional issue.

But talking about it, breaking the silence and helping people understand the magnitude of this problem is essential to ending this crime.

Awareness is key, and events such as this one today do just that.

The Government of Canada has recognized and fully supported World Elder Abuse Awareness Day since its launch in 2006.

That is why we are very pleased that World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is now officially recognized by the United Nations. It's good to know that in the fight against elder abuse we have so many allies in the international community.

In Canada, we are tackling this problem in many ways.

Through past programs like the Federal Elder Abuse Initiative, we put a spotlight on elder abuse to educate seniors, families, communities and key support organizations, recognizing that when you shed a light on a problem, it can no longer be ignored.

To reach as many people as possible, we ran a national elder abuse awareness advertising campaign called "It's Time to Face the Reality."

These television ads helped Canadians recognize the various signs of elder abuse and encouraged them to take action.

For many Canadians, this campaign was a real eye-opener.

The impact was phenomenal: A public opinion survey undertaken in 2011 indicated that 91 percent of Canadians were aware of elder abuse.¹

Those in Canada who counted on ignorance to abuse seniors have to face the fact that the overwhelming majority of Canadians are now aware of the problem.

And when people are well-informed, they have the ability to intervene.

I am very proud of the leadership role that our government continues to take in addressing elder abuse.

But we cannot do this work alone. Everyone has a role to play in this fight.

This is why, in Canada, we work in close collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, as well as non-governmental organizations.

We also recognize that local organizations and citizens are often in the best position to change things for the better.

Therefore, one of the largest sources of funding we have for raising elder abuse awareness is the New Horizons for Seniors Program.

The New Horizons for Seniors Program, or NHSP, provides funding for projects that help build awareness of elder abuse, help seniors participate in their communities and engage them in mentoring or volunteering.

Let me give you two examples of projects funded through the NHSP.

¹ Post Campaign Evaluation report for the fall 2011 EA campaign which ran from Nov. 21 to Dec. 11, 2011.

The Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia, in Atlantic Canada, is developing educational resources to help health care professionals better understand elder abuse.

With these resources, health care providers can learn how to recognize symptoms of elder abuse and how to help seniors and their families. Once developed, these resources will be shared with other organizations across Canada.

The NHSP is also providing funding for a national survey on the mistreatment of older Canadians, conducted by the National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly. The final results of this survey will be available in 2015 and will give us reliable data on the prevalence of elder abuse in Canada.

Because we recognize the importance of offering as much information as possible, our website, seniors.gc.ca, also provides a variety of essential government and non-government tools and resources to help people detect and prevent elder abuse.

Our website brings together a variety of federal, provincial/territorial and municipal resources for seniors in a user-friendly way.

On the legislative side, our government has moved to defend older Canadians who suffer from this terrible crime.

We are committed to standing up for victims of elder abuse.

Recently, we adopted legislation to amend Canada's *Criminal Code*.

We passed the *Protecting Canada's Seniors Act* to ensure tougher sentences for those who take advantage of the elderly.

This ground-breaking legislation came into force in January 2013.

In the work against elder abuse, we have come a long way.

But there is still room for improvement, and the Government of Canada will continue to raise awareness and put forward solutions to protect seniors from abuse.

Seniors have played a major role in building our country, and they continue to do so.

We have an obligation to them.

We have to ensure that they are able to enjoy what they have built.

It's about respect.

It's about dignity.

And it's about justice.

In support of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, Canada is pleased to recognize all the work being done to raise awareness of elder abuse and help enable seniors to protect themselves from its many forms.

Thank you for your participation in this event.

I am glad I could be a part of this day. And I hope we will all be able to go back to our home countries and make life better for our seniors. Older people simply deserve it. Period.