Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a great honour to be with you today at the opening of today's Regional Consultation on the Role of Key Stakeholders in Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls in Asia.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, let me first extend my warmest welcome to all the distinguished participants in this event, and my congratulations to UN Women and the Commonwealth for putting on this important regional consultation.

We are here today because we recognize that violence against women is a critical issue in every society in numbers that range from sobering to shocking. I'm sure you are all familiar with the statistics: at least one out of every three women in the world has experienced violence in her lifetime - usually by someone who is known to her.

Violence against women can be can occur in public or at home, by a spouse, father or by a complete stranger. In particular, domestic violence—the most common form of violence against women—persists because of gaps in enforcement and reporting, because those charged with enforcing the law are hesitant to intervene in the family, and because of reluctance of family members to report such violence for fear damaging a family’s reputation, or of imprisonment of family members.

As a result, often perpetrators of violence against women and girls go unpunished. This impunity perpetuates violence and discrimination and reinforces the message to the perpetrator that violence is acceptable. As long as it is accepted and tolerated by society, so too will society continue to accept and tolerate acts of violence against women.
This Regional consultation is very timely as it is bringing together all stakeholders (police, prosecutors, judges, national human rights institutions, Ombudspersons) involved in the justice system and at raising their knowledge and awareness about the state obligations, ways and means of strengthening institutions, responses and partnerships on the issue of violence against women. The role of all various stakeholders in achieving ending impunity for violence is critical to strengthen. It is also of utmost importance that all actors of the justice system who are mandated to provide protection and redress to women victims/survivors of violence provide quality services and in a coordinated manner.

In two days' time I am hosting an event in my home that will honour the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence and remember a tragic event that happened on December 6th twenty-five years ago where a man shot twenty-four women, killing fourteen because he believed they were feminists. December 6th is now the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women otherwise known as “white ribbon day”. This day and the 16 Days of Activism are keen reminders that violence against women is ubiquitous and we must keep up our efforts to decrease gender violence.

Canada is often seen by others as a fair and equal society but we still grapple with violence against women – particularly in our Aboriginal communities where there are over 600 known cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women in Canada. Half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16. On average, every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. On any given day in Canada, more than 3,300 women (along with their 3,000 children) are forced to sleep in an emergency shelter to escape domestic violence. Every night, about 200 women are turned away because the shelters are full.

We are trying to address this serious issue. The Government of Canada has been involved in ongoing legal reform to strengthen the criminal justice response to address violence against women and girls. Over the years we have invested extensively in training of our own police forces in handling of cases of violence against women, and over the past decade Canada has changed its legislation to increase the penalties for violent crimes and improve the availability of testimonial aids for vulnerable victims/witnesses. We have taken significant actions to make our communities safer for women and girls, and have introduced legislation that will give police and prosecutors new tools to address cyberbullying and the non-consensual distribution of intimate images.

Violence prevention is not just about stronger laws and policies but requires changes in attitude and cultural stereotypes. In Southeast Asia there has been some progress in addressing certain forms of violence, but I believe it is fair to say there are still many laws in the region that maintain and even perpetuate some forms of violence against women such as marital rape.
Today’s event promises to be a very useful forum for exchanging views and experiences with practitioners on addressing violence against women and in particular the issue of impunity, and providing the equal access to justice critical to protecting women in any society.

I wish you a successful consultation. I know that you have much to learn from each other and look forward learning of the successful outcomes.

Thank you.

H.E. Mr. Philip Calvert
Ambassador Extraordinary
and Plenipotentiary of Canada to the Kingdom of Thailand
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