

STATEMENT

The Ministry of the Attorney General's decision not to appeal the verdict in the Hockey Canada case is another painful reminder of how deeply the legal system fails survivors of sexual assault over and over again. Everyday victims and survivors are told the system will deliver justice, yet what they often find is a system that centres perpetrators rather than the lived realities of those who come forward.

The reality is, we expected the not guilty verdict to come from this deeply flawed legal system. What we did not expect was to see rape myths, victim blaming and shaming repeated in a Canadian courtroom, or to hear a judge say that "believing women" had no place in the legal system. That message was and continues to be harmful, not only to the survivor in this case but to every other victim of sexual assault who is watching and weighing whether to ever come forward.

For once, it would have been powerful to see a part of the legal system stand up for women and all victims of sexual assault, that's what an appeal could have represented. It could have been an opportunity to speak to the damaging 90-page judgement that will certainly be used to discredit victims of violence in the future. Instead, the decision not to appeal reinforces the same silence and dismissal survivors have faced for generations.

Let's remember, an acquittal does not mean nothing happened. It means the bar set by our current legal system is impossibly high for sexual assault survivors to meet. The message this sends is that once again the system is not built for justice.

When the focus remains on the accused and their reputations instead of on the truth and the courage of survivors, the message to women, girls and all survivors is clear: you are not safe here. This decision reinforces the message that the legal system is not broken, it is working as it was intended; to harm, silence and revictimize.

This decision is not just about one case, it is about whether we, as a society, will continue to allow a legal system that discourages reporting, excuses violence and does not believe victims. Women, girls and all victims of sexual violence deserve better. They deserve a system that listens to them, believes them and centres their safety and dignity above all else. Until that happens, the legal system will continue to be a place where survivors are retraumatized rather than protected.

To those who are listening to this decision today, please know that you have capacity to help and support survivors in your life. Listen to them, connect them to resources and believe them when they tell you they have been harmed.

And to the courageous survivors, whether you have shared your experience or have kept it to yourself, please know that this decision is not a reflection on your believability. There are sexual assault centres, Violence Against Women organizations and supports all across the country who are ready to support your healing and who will never require you to prove your worthiness of support. We believe you.