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August 12, 2014

Open letter to Prime Minister Harper

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

The first national Unifor women's conference is calling for a federal action plan on the issue of violence against women, including an inquiry into the murdered and missing Aboriginal women.

Our repeated call for action comes on the heels of a brutal attack suffered by a woman in Thunder Bay and her daughter, in Thunder Bay, at the hands of a former intimate partner. The woman survived the attack, but her daughter, 8 years old, was killed yesterday morning.

As a union we cannot negotiate away the horrors of domestic violence or even obtain the full range of necessary structural supports required to allow a woman and her children to leave an abusive partner. Government must step up to ensure women's personal safety and security. An action plan must involve all levels of government, and include a range of supports such as quality, affordable child care, full-funding for emergency shelters and transition services, affordable housing, a higher minimum wage, pay equity and an end the gendered pay gap. Without these crucial supports, women often find themselves in a desperate situation, unable to leave. Targeted programs for male abusers, potential abusers or children who have experienced or been exposed to violence are crucial to ending the cycle of abuse.

Currently, women and their families are continually failed by governments at all levels who do not prioritize these policies and programs. Women's human rights are repeatedly deeply compromised, and lives are lost. Every time there is another murder, we ask ourselves: will this finally be what sparks the action women have been demanding for years?

We are more than 300 women here at the first women's conference of Unifor, representing more than 305,000 members of Unifor right across the country. We are calling for a national action plan to end gendered violence, including an inquiry into murdered and missing Aboriginal women.

As a nation, we can afford to prioritize women's lives and remove all barriers to living free of violence.

Sincerely,

Delegates of the first national Unifor Women's Conference