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One Billion Rising YYC Speech

Thank you so much, I can't tell you how much it excites me to be here today.

I work for Calgary Communities Against Sexual Abuse. We are an organization that recognizes that sexual violence affects our entire community. In our society Men, Women and Children can all be victims of Sexual Abuse. At CCASA we provide support for all those people, regardless of race, Socio-economic status, or sexual orientation. Because no man, women, or child, deserves to be a victim of this crime and everyone deserves the opportunity to heal.

We are here today in support of 1 Billion Rising YYC; to be part of a revolution, to raise awareness around the issues that surround violence against women; the sexual and domestic violence against women. The issue of all violence against women has been in the shadows for too long but people have been working for so long to bring this issue to the forefront where it belongs.

Historically women have been the primary driving force when working to bring awareness to these issues. But here I am today, as a man, speaking out against violence against women. I think people sometimes find it odd that I'm a man involved with this work. But you know, to me ending violence against women isn't a question of "is this a women's issue or men's issue" because creating a world free of sexual and domestic violence is about human rights. Ending violence against women is a human rights issue, about creating a world where we are all safe from violence, where we are all equal and accepting of one another.

As a man I feel so privileged to have the opportunity to work alongside these women. To be able to follow the dedicated and even fearless leadership of women who have made it possible for more people than ever to be speaking out on this issue today. That's the

kind of leadership that inspires the type of change our world is currently in so desperate need of.

1 in 3 women experience sexual or physical violence in their lifetime. That's worldwide. That's overseas, on every continent, in every country; and that's the case right here in our own back yards.

1 in 3 women- Think of our mothers, our grandmothers, daughters, our friends. How many women are in your family or how many women are you friends with on FB? 1 in 3!

1 in 3 is the reason for this event and the reason we are pushing so hard for change to happen. Because too often gone unsaid about that stat is the mother or daughter, the soul of the women, her story.

We do hear these women's stories sometimes. On the news, internet blogs, or through friends and family, we hear of women who have been sexually assaulted or who experience domestic violence.

However, too often the language used in these stories paints a very blaming and shaming picture for women. That really skews the reality of the situation. So often the language used when talking about sexual and domestic offer excuses for men who choose to commit these crimes. We hear all time how women should somehow be responsible for preventing their own victimization.

Those conversations have to change. We have to start looking at the messages at we are sending to the women who experience violence and start focusing on the men that are committing the majority these crimes. I believe that we must start more conversations specifically around MEN'S violence against women.

Make no mistake this is a men's issue to. I recognize that the majority of men choose not to commit violence against women but, according to Stats Canada, in 2004 97% of all sexual assault offences are committed by men. How can you hear that and not recognize that there is a problem with what we are teaching young boys and young men about consent, healthy relationships, how to be men.

97%! Men need to do more to change those numbers. And yes we need to hold the offending men accountable for their actions and we need to tell them to stop their abusive behavior. But I think men, good men, men who don't offend; the large majority of men have to start playing their part.

As men we have to recognize and understand that simply not sexually assaulting or not physically harming women is no longer enough. The amount of violence, men's violence against women, is too huge for us to ignore anymore. Within male culture we have to stop addressing issues of domestic and sexual violence as women's issues. We as men have to start talking, as men we need to start taking action and as men we need to join women and form a united front. Because I know that if we can work together we can end this violence.

When it comes down to it, we all have to be doing our part. We have to challenge the hateful attitudes and beliefs within our society that are allowing these crimes to continue to happen. It might not happen overnight but with the people in this city who are working to bring awareness to this cause and the people who are providing support for survivors of these crimes. They give me so much hope.

All of you being here today gives me hope that conversations can start happening and we can begin to see our world change to a culture of offender accountability and a culture where everyone can feel supported; a culture where one day we can all live outside the threat of violence.

I'll leave you with a quote from one very smart man- Albert Einstein.

"The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking."

Let's Join the one billion rising and look at ourselves and see what we can do to become more involved in the issue of violence and sexual violence against women. Let us start by breaking the silence, having the conversations, and changing our thinking.

Thank you.