

**REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR SUSAN B. CARBON, DIRECTOR OF THE
OFFICE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, AT SEXUAL ASSAULT
AWARENESS MONTH EVENT**

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Thank you, Tom, for your very kind introduction.

I am excited and honored to be with you here today for the very first Sexual Assault Awareness Month event at the Great Hall of the Department of Justice—and for my own first public event as Director of the Office on Violence Against Women.

This is an important occasion, with a most serious purpose. We are here today for three reasons: (1) to shed light on the scope and nature of the effects of sexual violence; (2) to celebrate and honor survivors and those working to end sexual violence; and finally, to issue a call to action for individuals and communities to learn more about sexual violence, to understand its impact on society, and to take a stand against it.

I want everyone to own this problem – and do something to resolve it. Until we understand and accept that this is happening all around us, we will not be able to effect change. Indeed, learning is the first step – but it's not enough. We need to do something, and the Department and this Office are committed participants in this quest for change. This is our call to action.

It is time to abolish forever the myths widely prevalent before the passage of the Violence Against Women Act over fifteen years ago. Whether you work in this field or not, you have only to read a newspaper or turn on the television to see that sexual violence pervades every part of society. It touches people of every age, race, class, gender and sexual orientation. Whether it is used as a weapon of war against an entire people, or cynically employed to break one individual's spirit, its impact is profound. It reaches entire communities-- from the workplace to high school and college campuses, rural and urban America, in our homes and on our streets, here and abroad.

Sexual assault can be defined as any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. Falling under this definition are forced sexual intercourse, sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape.

This is not a crime among strangers. Sadly most victims know their perpetrators, and they are targeted either because they are vulnerable (as with young children or the elderly, immigrants, persons with disabilities, prisoners, or members of tribal communities) or they are rendered vulnerable (such as through date-drugs used to assault college women).

Because it so profoundly usurps its victims' rights to sovereignty over their own persons, sexual assault is a violation of human rights. In its most basic form, sexual violence is a human rights issue. And it is arguably the least reported crime of all.

As a judge I have seen the cycle of violence played out in families through generations. Children who are sexually abused or who witness brutal sexual attacks upon their mothers suffer in ways unimaginable. Their own development is tragically arrested and they may find themselves later involved with the court system as delinquents, runaways, or even perpetrators of violence against others, including members of their own families.

Ending sexual violence is and will remain a priority for OVW and the Department of Justice. We must create a culture where victims are safe to report the crime, where they will be treated with respect by all those with whom they must come into contact (including the medical profession, law enforcement, the courts), and where judges and juries will understand the breadth and scope of sexual assault crimes in their communities.

It is my sincere hope that we will use the platform of Sexual Assault Awareness Month to challenge our own thinking about sexual assault, and to learn more about the complexity of the crime and its far reaching effects. We can work together to bring further innovation to prevention, intervention and treatment, to honor the work of advocates, and to support survivors through their paths of recovery. While the road ahead of us may seem daunting, I am enthusiastic about the journey. We have an historic opportunity to bring to fruition the dream that inspired the Violence Against Women Act.

Thank you for being here today to lend your support to this critical mission.

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