

February 10, 2021

Dear Committee Members

On behalf of the membership of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), I urge you to continue to work diligently to ensure more women and children will not have their lives irreparably and permanently damaged by actions such as those practised by the management and owners of MindGeek and Pornhub.

The NCWC has long held policies condemning the commodification of women without their express consent, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation. Last week's testimony of Serena Gleites has once again brought into clear focus the lasting ramifications of having a video of herself, a mere child, available for viewing by any, and all, who wished to download it. The platform itself should have never allowed the video to be posted, and the young man who decided to share it must also take responsibility for his part in the downward spiral of her life.

There are two main and distinct issues here that must be addressed – consent and age. As an organization dedicated to ensuring women have the right to equal opportunities in all areas, that they have control over their own bodies, and that their rights must be respected, we are not judgemental about what any person, man or woman, chooses to do. However, we do take issues when there is no consent, yet liberties are taken. Young people, those under the age of majority, do not have the right or responsibility to give consent; they must be protected from those who would use them for their own purposes.

With over 35 million internet users in Canada, it is essential the government assures the content of information and access to it is legal and appropriate regarding consent and age. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that many of our young people are even more reliant on the internet for their learning, their recreation, and their social interactions. This increased use has intensified the possibility for them to become targets for use and abuse.

Serena's personal story has placed this issue up front and on centre stage. Thus we, as a caring society, must provide solutions to stop this victimization of young people. We strongly advocate for the government to enact age verification measures to protect children and those under the age of majority. These measures should be part of a robust Canadian digital framework wherein all internet service providers and social media sites must agree to adopt age verification measures prior to being granted or renewing their license. The next step would be to provide sustainable funding for specialized online forensic tools along with national policing, direct resources, and directives to ensure that social media platforms, tech companies, and internet service providers comply with the age verification measures. If they do not comply, there must be sanctions that would include blocking access to their websites here in Canada.

Let us not forget how Serena's story began...a thirteen-year-old girl unsure of her place in the world, learning about love, who ended up being abused by her boyfriend who was aided by the very organizations that could have, and should have, helped her by reporting him for child exploitation.

The National Council of Women of Canada believes that as Canadians, we can, and we must, do better to protect our young people from predators; these stories must come to an end.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely

Patricia Leson, President

National Council of Women of Canada

***The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Canada is the traditional territory of Indigenous and Metis People. We are grateful to join with others in peace and hope, advocating for an improved quality of life for women, children, families, and society.***