

# Truro women disappointed non-state torture not included in Mass Casualty Commission final report

By Raissa Tetanish

raissatetanish@advocatemediac.com

Two Nova Scotia women say the Mass Casualty Commission's final report into the April 2020 mass shooting that left 22 people dead didn't go far enough to address all forms of violence against women.

Linda MacDonald and Jeanne Sarson are founders of Persons Against Non-State Torture and are members of Feminists Fighting Femicide. The Truro women were part of a group calling for a feminist analysis be included in the public inquiry, which concluded on March 30 with the commissioners releasing a final report with 150 recommendations.

Sarson says she and MacDonald made four oral statements at the inquiry, participated in a roundtable and submitted a final report. She admits she's "very upset" about the process and the resulting final report, which doesn't address non-state torture.

"Not only was femicide an issue for us, but the whole reality that women and children suffer forms of violence that amount to torture," said Sarson, adding the House of Commons Standing Committee members on justice and human rights said on Nov. 26, 2016, in Bill C-242, an act around the infliction of torture, that even though non-state torture occurred, they'd still call it assault.

"But there is a difference between torture and assault," she said.

For close to 30 years, Sarson and MacDonald, both of whom are public health nurses, have been working together, focusing on human trafficking and non-state torture. They've spoken to survivors, and it was one survivor whom they call Sarah that got them started. They've travelled the world speaking on the subject, including at the UN, trying to bring national attention to non-state torture and femicide with the hopes of having them included in the Criminal Code of Canada.

A feminist analysis, said Sarson, needed to have all forms of violence considered.

She equates the final report to having four people standing in front of you and each represents a different form of violence: gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, family violence and non-state torture. Sarah represents non-state torture.

The commissioners, who were in a position of power and privilege, talked to three forms of violence, however left Sarah out of the discussion.

On the Persons for Non-State Torture website, non-state torture is defined as torture committed



Jeanne Sarson

in the private or domestic sphere. A number of people can commit non-state torture, such as parents, spouses, neighbours, strangers, human traffickers and more.

"Even though they say to do no harm ... I'm really upset that they would leave a person standing there, not seeing, unsilenced, discriminated against, discredited, just totally ignored and invisibilized," said Sarson. "How does that make a person feel? How does that make a woman in Nova Scotia feel?"

MacDonald says they would never put a name to the type of violence a woman endured, but acknowledged Lisa Banfield, the perpetrator's first victim, suffered types of torture including strangulation.

"It's not just Sarah that's excluded, it's all the other women that have endured non-state torture and the children that are still in families that are being tortured," said MacDonald, adding it wouldn't have taken much for non-state torture to have a sentence or two in the final report.

"It was not like we were asking for, you know, a huge exposé, but even to name it somewhere in the document would have been a pivotal change in our country. But Canada just keeps insisting on silencing non-state torture."

Calling for a feminist analysis opened a different conversation, says MacDonald, in the inquiry. She says even though the feminist analysis worked for all other women, it didn't work for tortured women.

"It's like the main group that Jeanne and I stand for, they're still left outside," she said.

MacDonald is, however, pleased a mass casualty inquiry

included the "reality of patriarchy and misogyny" for the first time, and the recognition that shooters are often violent men.

She's disappointed, however, there's no recommendation to include femicide in the Criminal Code.

"There's no extensive conversation about strangulation, which is one of the key forms of violence against women in torture, and Lisa was strangled," said MacDonald, adding, in her opinion, there was a history of torture in the perpetrator's family.

"I do think it was important when they said that the most pivotal thing they learned is they must not look away, even though they looked away from non-state torture. It puts violence against women on an even standing with the police and it names it as a pandemic or an epidemic in Canada, which it is," said MacDonald.

"I think that (Prime Minister Justin) Trudeau should make a statement about that, a declaration about that. And I think that the ripple down effect from that would be huge."

Sarson says she addressed the issue of human evil during the inquiry because one of the RCMP officers said the only words he could use to describe how he was feeling was that he was witnessing actions of human evil.

As part of their participation in the inquiry, the women also submitted three articles, one of which was a chapter from their Canadian best-selling book, *Women Unsilenced*, about confronting actions of human evil.

Sarson said the final report addresses comments using evil as "simpler explanations about the dangerousness of specific individuals."



Linda MacDonald

"A statement that just says that it's a simpler explanation ... to me, it feels like a judgement not based in research or science," she said, adding one responder also spoke about evildoers living among them, and a doctor also spoke about every day banal evil, all of which Sarson says were dismissed.

She said the commissioners left Sarah standing alone while making statements about "we have to know red flags, we have to stand and protect each other, we have to take responsibility to listen to each other."

"If we put violence, gender-based violence in the pie and take three-quarters of it and then dismiss the other, how do you justify that? How does that not become an abuse of power, an abuse of privilege?" she asked.

"Linda and I have been doing this for 30 years and I don't take it lightly. We were in there to create a safe space for Sarah."

Following the report's release, Sarson heard from Sarah, who told Sarson she's there again, invisible, like she doesn't exist. Sarah, says Sarson, can't get a restraining order for non-state torture victimization protection because no one acknowledges that's what she endured.

While non-state torture wasn't in the final report MacDonald feels some things she and Sarson spoke about during the inquiry, such as including engaging men in education and bystanders, were.

"I do feel that we set the tone," she said.

She hopes the recommendation for a gender-based violence commissioner is followed through on.

"I do think that if they have independence outside of any

government body, they only answer to Parliament, that that position could make a big difference in trying to push things forward," said MacDonald.

She added education and holding police accountable to changing their culture around misogyny is a huge piece as to why women don't come forward and are still unsafe.

"It's not just the men that beat them and torture them, it's the the legal structure and the front-line of the police that don't believe them and dismiss their reality," she said.

MacDonald was happy to see Susie Butlin included in the report, a woman from the Tatamagouche area whom police didn't take seriously when she said a neighbour sexually

assaulted her. That neighbour harassed and threatened Butlin for weeks before he shot her in her home in September 2017. MacDonald said they supported a woman who came to them to have Butlin's story included in the inquiry.

Sarson says another gap missed is the fact that women who suffer serious violence are at a higher risk for suicidality.

"I know that they say we have to open the door, but we have to open the door to talk truthfully," said Sarson. "We have to start speaking the truth, because red flags will only work if we know what we're looking for. If we don't know what we're looking for, it doesn't help."

As public health nurses, MacDonald says it was important to them both the commissioners included public health and community safety perspectives, as it's everyone's responsibility.

"That's the only way we're ever going to solve this pandemic, epidemic or horror ... is if we all dig in and take it seriously because we're being all affected, whether we want to admit it or not."

She says funding needs to be available for education and prevention, especially education for young children.

As a feminist, MacDonald doesn't want younger feminists in society to get discouraged by not winning all the battles.

"I have lots of hope," she said. "I'm not giving up on Canada or on the human rights that women and girls who endured torture can have their crime named in our country. I believe it will happen, and that feminism is the key to really moving us forward to more equality."



## THE REAL ESTATE MARKET



### What does it mean to have good credit for buying a house?

If you're planning on buying a home, you'll likely need to obtain a mortgage. Do you think having a good credit score is all you need? Think again!

**THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD CREDIT SCORE** Your credit score serves as a risk indicator for lenders. If your score is below 650, this could limit your pool of potential lenders. Conversely, if your score exceeds 720, financial institutions will be more likely to trust you and give you a better rate.

**CREDIT REPORT** In addition to your credit score, your credit report includes essential information about your credit history, including data about various types of credit, such as lines of credit and revolving credit.

**GETTING A LOAN** Every financial institution has a process for assessing your creditworthiness. They usually check your credit rating, income, down payment, mortgage stress-test score and other elements.

Contact a financial advisor or mortgage broker to find out about your financial and credit situation.

## Sherry Blinkhorn

Wonder what your home is worth?

For a CMA call:

902.759.2557

Call me to discuss your Real Estate Needs!

**Blinkhorn**  
REAL ESTATE LTD.

"Blink" and it could be sold!

2023 Featured Top Agent  
TOP AGENT  
MAGAZINE



2023/04

## Looking for an opportunity to serve your community and build your professional network?

People from diverse backgrounds and communities are needed to serve on Nova Scotia's agencies, boards, and commissions (ABCs). Participating on an ABC is an opportunity to have input on issues that matter to you and to help unite communities through public service.

Applications for the adjudicative boards are due by Wednesday, May 24, 2023. Non-adjudicative board positions are open for applications year-round.

To learn more and to apply, visit [NovaScotia.ca/abc](http://NovaScotia.ca/abc) or call 1-866-206-6844 (toll free).

The Government of Nova Scotia has an Employment Equity Policy. We welcome applications from Aboriginal people, African Nova Scotians, other racially visible people, persons with disabilities, women, and other employment equity groups. Applicants are encouraged to self-identify.



2023/04