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Ottawa Journal: strong action to combat the sexual exploitation of children

Canadians want to know that their streets are safe and that their children are protected against sexual predators. The number of reported sexual violations against children in Canada reached over 3,900 in 2012, a number that has increased by 3 per cent from 2011 with the same increase from 2010 to 2011. This steady increase in reported sexual violations against children in Canada signals the need for strong action to protect the most vulnerable in society.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has indicated that Canadians can expect the Government to bring forward targeted measures to combat the sexual exploitation of our children. Our proposed amendments will build on the broad range of action that our Government has taken since 2006 to punish offenders to the full extent of the law, hold violent criminals accountable, enhance the rights of victims, and increase the efficiency of our justice system.

To further the goal of holding convicted criminals accountable for their crimes, Prime Minister Harper has indicated that a comprehensive legislative plan will be introduced this fall. Legislative amendments will include an increase in penalties for offenders who commit sexual offences against children and will require convicted predators to serve their sentences consecutively. The current system, which allows convicted sexual offenders to serve their sentences concurrently, does not adequately reflect the number of victims impacted by these crimes and this amendment will ensure that the sentences received take into account each victim.

Our Government is also pursuing new measures to further protect children in Canada and abroad from known sexual predators. Approximately one million children internationally are exploited by sex tourists and traffickers each year. The Government is combatting the sexual exploitation of children abroad through the creation of a new notification requirement for offenders on the National Sex Offender Registry who travel outside of Canada, as well as through improvements to information-sharing between the police and border security. Measures will also be introduced to establish a publicly accessible national database that contains information on high-risk child sex offenders who have been subject to public notification by local law enforcement.

As our Government works towards keeping our communities safe and holding offenders accountable for their crimes, we are equally pursuing measures that are putting the needs of the victims first. Ongoing consultations are taking place with the public and stakeholders to create a federal Victims Bill of Rights to provide the necessary support for victims of Crime. Since 2006, our Government has invested more than $120 million to the needs of victims of crime through a broad range of programs and initiatives. Over $10 million has been invested for new and enhanced Child Advocacy Centres in locations across Canada that provides important services to help young victims of crime cope with related trauma.

Canadians can be certain that our Government remains committed to combating the sexual exploitation of children, putting victims first, and holding offenders accountable.

David Tilson, M.P.