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# 'Today, let us commit to speaking out for those whose voices may not be as loud': Samaah Jaffer at Vancouver's Women's March

by Samaah Jaffer January 23, 2017October 5, 2021

rabble's B.C. Editor Samaah Jaffer addressed some 15,000 people who came out to the Women's March in Vancouver to oppose the new misogynist in the White House.

*15,000 people attended the Vancouver Women's March on Washington on Saturday, one massive demonstration among over 600 worldwide in defiance of the election of a misogynist sexual predator to the White House. rabble editor Samaah Jaffer addressed the crowd as a young feminist. The transcript of her speech is below.*

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Samaah Jaffer and it's my honour to be standing here today, in solidarity with the Women's March on Washington.

The determination demonstrated by our sisters south of the border, to defend our dignity, rights, and freedoms as women is tremendously inspiring, especially in this moment where we are witnessing the rise of an extraordinarily dangerous political movement.

I want to begin by acknowledging that we are on the unceded ancestral territories of the Coast Salish peoples, in particular, the Musqueam, the Squamish and the Tsleil-Waututh. I recognize my great privilege as a settler living on this land, and I hope that the movements we support, such as this one, remain in solidarity with the struggles of the Indigenous peoples for their self-determination.

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between patriarchy and other forms of oppression, specifically racism and colonialism.

Over the past few years, we have witnessed a rise in hateful, sexist, racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric that has been legitimized by the recent federal elections in both Canada and the United States. We have been told time and time again that those who don't look a certain way, dress a certain way, speak a certain way, or come from a certain place should be feared — that our differences in race, language, class, and faith are somehow indicative of conflicting worldviews.

However, the reality that we are all standing here today, united in our opinion that women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights, proves that hate and fear will not prevail. It is empowering to stand among so many strong, like-minded individuals, who are dedicated to working towards a society in which women, all women, are treated with dignity and respect. By working together in this fight for our rights, we show that we refuse to be divided.

While we stand united today in the face of ever-growing hatred and fear, it is important to remember that racism and xenophobia are systemic issues that also exist in Canada. These issues don't stop at the border. Since the U.S. Election in November, I've heard people, often white, and sometimes women, say how "we are so lucky to be in Canada."

And I, politely, tried to offer my view, my lived experience as a woman of colour, as well as the experiences of some of my hijab-wearing Muslim sisters who were targeted with hateful comments in the immediate aftermath of the election. A rise in hate crimes against Muslims and those who appear to be Muslim was documented in 2015 — the year the niqab became a top issue in our federal election.

And while the events south of the border have struck a nerve — pushing us to mobilize — we need to remember that oppression and violation of the rights of people who are different, and in particular women and children, by those in power is not a new phenomenon. White supremacist ideologies have been veiled by our myth of Canadian "multiculturalism."

Over the years, Canada has witnessed racism in a number of incarnations: primarily against Indigenous peoples, Black immigrants and former slaves from the United States, Chinese immigrants, Japanese citizens, South Asian immigrants. Today's rampant Islamophobia is just the newest form, and unless we confront the systems which allow for the subjugation of human beings based on the colour of their skin, this list will continue to grow.

As a nation, we have our work cut out for us. Canada's reputation has been stained by our inaction in the face of hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Now is not a time for inaction. Now is an opportunity for us to prove that women in Vancouver are resilient — and they are not and will not be silent in the face of injustice.

Since 1991, women of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside have been coming together on February 14 to remember and honour the women who have disappeared. For 27 years, they have fought

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Last year, we saw the initiation of Black Lives Matter – Vancouver — a group that is dedicated to drawing attention to the ongoing struggles of Black people, as well as all marginalized and invisible communities. Three Black American women started the Black Lives Matter movement, and women and non-binary folks are at the forefront of the local Vancouver chapter.

The movement highlights the reality that Black people have experienced a long and unbroken history of police brutality. They are at the forefront of resisting state violence and calling out systemic racism in the United States and globally — a struggle that will only become more important over the next four years. It is unfortunate and disappointing that Black Lives Matter – Vancouver — a group of dedicated, vocal supporters of intersectional feminism — are not represented here today, as they are leaders in advocating for justice and equality.

Acts of violence and discrimination fuelled by Islamophobia are most often enacted against visible, hijab-wearing Muslim women. While Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab may do so for a number of different reasons — no one wears it to entice assault.

And I can tell you, November 9, 2016 was one very frightening day to be a hijabi, even in Vancouver. No woman should have to fear for their personal safety when making decisions about what to wear. Unfortunately, this fear is very real for many women, including Muslim women.

As we leave this solidarity march today, we need to realize that this is only the beginning. We must continue to call out the systems of oppression that are in place to keep women down. We must continue to voice our dissatisfaction with individuals who are working to make fear and hatred the new norms.

This is a time for us, as women and allies, to be vigilant; to speak out when you hear strangers, friends, colleagues or family members using and repeating divisive rhetoric. This is not a time for excuses and apologetics. This is a time to build connections, to pursue solidarity and to continue to fight for women's rights.

Today, let us commit to speaking out for those whose voices may not be as loud — to intervene any time we witness women of colour being put down, harassed or attacked. Let us build on this movement and make a commitment to continue fighting for the rights of our mothers, sisters and daughters. Let's not let a Twitter-loving ego maniac keep us down. Thank you all for coming out.

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