

Check Against Delivery

SPERO Gala

May 15, 2014, Edmonton

**Honourable Sandra Jansen, Associate Minister of Family and
Community Safety, Human Services**

Amazing ...

What an amazing night this is ...

It is amazing because each and every one of you here tonight knows how important the issue of human trafficking is.

Thank you to my colleague Jonathan Denis, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

I also want to thank former Justice Minister (Jonathan Havelock) for attending tonight.

The Action Coalition on Human Trafficking Alberta (ACT Alberta) does not work in a silo – it works with all of us who care for every person victimized when trafficking is allowed to flourish unchecked.

The Government of Alberta believes this and we are committed to working with ACT Alberta and all of their partners to deal with human trafficking in our communities.

We know that human trafficking takes many forms – whether it's forced labour with low wages and no worker rights or the kind of trafficking where girls and women are sexually exploited for someone's material gain.

Make no mistake Alberta is a province where human trafficking is flourishing and it will take all of us to combat it.

I want to thank ACT Alberta for their incredible dedication to working on this important issue.

I was only just in to my mandate as Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety last fall when I met ACT Director, Andrea Burkheart and she talked about the good work the organization is doing.

I'm so proud to work with ACT and CEASE on research and also on a knowledge exchange forum that is going to be vital to our ability to do our work better.

I have met with many stakeholders now in my ministry work whose stories of struggle and survival through sexual exploitation have inspired me and other members of my government.

I want to thank my colleague – Justice Minister and Solicitor General Jonathan Denis, because he shares this passion and commitment to change our province along with our other colleagues.

We want you to know we are listening and committed to doing our part to end human trafficking.

But I also want to remind you that you don't have to be a government representative to help bring about real change.

Everyone who came tonight is here because they understand the need, and they are ready to be part of the solution.

I was recently at an event hosted by CEASE where I heard a heart-wrenching story from a woman who, at a very young age, was forced into prostitution just so she could eat something that she didn't find in the garbage.

Her story had a profound effect on me.

It helped me understand some of the linkages and root causes that vulnerable people face.

I also had an opportunity to meet with the Canadian Women's Foundation and learned about the extensive cross country consultations completed by the Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada.

I look forward to collaborating with them following the launch of their report later this year.

For many years now, the Alberta government has recognized that far too many children are sexually exploited through prostitution and trafficking and, as such, require specialized protection.

Since the introduction of legislation in 1999 to protect sexually exploited children, nearly 1,300 children and youth have come to the attention of the government – that's about 100 children a year.

The Protection of Sexually Exploited Children program provides a continuum of supports, community services, residential placements, and protective safe houses for the prevention of the sexual exploitation of children and youth.

I am proud of this work and I believe that it's essential that Albertans has resources like this that will keep our children safe.

We also need to raise awareness.

Our government created a public education campaign with the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association to address "underground" child sexual exploitation and trafficking.

The purpose was to educate hospitality industry staff about this issue and to encourage reporting.

Within the coming year, you will see several new initiatives for dealing with issues like violence against women, sexual abuse at any point in life, and poverty reduction.

Together, our new initiatives will make a difference in keeping our communities safe.

And with community partners like ACT, I know we will soon see success.

ACT is working to take power away from those who take advantage of people and give it back to those who are being exploited.

I urge you to find out more about how you can help ACT and how you can spread the word about the problems that are occurring right now in our communities.

I want to thank you all again for being here tonight, I know that many of you have been working alongside ACT to make a difference and I am humbled by your courage.

I am glad that as a community, together we are speaking up.

Please enjoy your evening along with our thanks for your continued support