

Seminar Opening

“Making the Links”

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Summary

Since September 2001, the word "security" has justly become the object of exceptional attention, however not without also highlighting the necessity of balance between security and freedom. *Making the Links* is a part of research and action related to this balance as it affects women so that women can accomplish their full potentials as a result of their own life choices, protected from danger and free of insecurity, violence, and inequalities. Since the 1970's, there has been strong mobilization to denounce domestic violence, assault, exploitation, and sexual harassment yet the social recognition of the effects of violence on women's lives and their feeling of safety still remains a key challenge today. In order for women to be able to make this passage from dependence to autonomy, understanding must begin by *making the links*: between women; between men and women; between community organizations and government authorities; between citizens, cities, and police services; between cities and rural communities; between the North and the South...

This Seminar will examine the state of international research and practices related to women's safety, define the key issues and challenges, and develop relevant recommendations for action. The Seminar has four sessions and round table discussions dedicated to each of the main themes: a gendered approach to crime prevention; strategies for women's empowerment; partnerships and the role of municipalities; and safety planning and the role of research.

The dictionary defines "Security " as follows:

Security - *a confident and calm state of a person who believes themselves to be sheltered from danger*

Since September 11, 2001, this word has suddenly found itself at the centre of an unprecedented level of media attention, particularly in North America. Governments have suddenly found millions of dollars to devote to military and police institutions and the strengthening of control and surveillance systems with the very legitimate goal of protecting populations from danger. However the use of such high technology surveillance instruments raises

fundamental questions concerning the upholding of individual and collective freedom. Just last week, a representative of the Department of the Solicitor General of Canada asserted, and I quote, "democratic countries must take up a considerable challenge: that of finding a certain balance between civil liberties and increasing security measures" (Excerpt of a speech given by Mr. Paul Kennedy, Senior Assistant Deputy for the Department of the Solicitor General of Canada during a conference on terrorism and technology in Whistler, British Columbia, Canada in April 2002).

It is precisely this balance between security and freedom that is at the very heart of what brings us together today in Montréal. We will be working to *Make the Links* so that women and girls in all of their diversity will be able to act and accomplish to the best of their abilities and as a result of their own life choices. Our efforts will hinge on women's rights to live protected from danger and to be relieved of the weight of insecurity, the effects of violence, and the inequalities that persist between sexes despite many various advances on the five continents.

During the 1970s, the feminist movement sparked an unprecedented mobilization to denounce the diverse forms of violence directed toward women: domestic violence, assault, exploitation, and sexual harassment. Numerous demands and claims brought United Nations member countries to become involved within a framework of international conferences, in particular the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women held in Beijing. In the year 2000, the World March of Women made the elimination of violence one of its two main demands. In the best of instances, commitments have translated into the implementation of governmental policies and programs that aim to help women "victims" of violence and to make public opinion more sensitive to the serious implications and consequences of such violence.

However improving society's recognition of the effects of violence on women's lives and their feeling of safety remains one of the most demanding endeavors. As early as September 1981, thousands of women took to the streets of at least thirty cities and municipalities across North America chanting "the street, the night, women without fear", during *Take Back The Night*. "The street belongs to us" is what we said, affirming our essential right to move about "sheltered from fear".

"The street belongs to us" later translated into activities aiming to mobilize women to improve their urban environment and which took into account their perceptions and visions of security. Groups of women, researchers, and professionals acting at the city-level began to establish the links existing between insecurity and the planning of public spaces, organization of public transportation, and access to local services. By the end of the 1980s, Women's safety had become closely tied to women exercising their citizenship at the local city- and community-level, which also directly called on municipal governments and local elected officials to act in this regard.

The concept of "Safety Audits", created by METRAC (Metro Toronto Public Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children), has further demonstrated the need to put women "at the centre of the action." Following demands from women's groups to the City of Montréal, Safety Audits were re-adapted and implemented in Montréal in the early 1990s. Safety Audits were later exported and adapted to many European and African cities through a variety of international cooperation initiatives; they have also been conducted in numerous Canadian cities and rural and isolated regions. Many of you have come from afar to observe such interventions. This type of initiative was clearly conceived with the goal of empowering women so that entire populations will benefit from improvements proposed by women based on their perceptions and experiences of insecurity and fear.

Despite this, we have seen a change in direction in certain cases whereby some Audit initiatives have turned into visits guided by "experts" who point out dangerous places where women should not go. This is but one of the challenges that will be raised during the next three days: How to convince all actors concerned to follow an approach to creating safety that is based on the experiences and visions of women and that will allow them to make the passage, although never linear or direct, "from dependence to autonomy"?

We begin by *Making the links*. *Making the links* between diverse families, between women and men, between community and governmental organizations, between citizens and their local government and police services, between cities and rural or isolated communities, between research and practice, the North and the South. We begin by *Making the links* and developing real and productive partnerships that allow us to go in the same direction together and to better use the

public resources that have been devoted to this purpose.

After more than ten years of mobilizing local partners within the Women and urban safety action committee (*CAFSU: Comité d'action femmes et sécurité urbaine*) and women's safety committees of three Montréal neighbourhoods, we can confirm the difficulty of reconciling various approaches to intervention. The fact that we do not acknowledge the legitimacy of insecurity felt by women continues to be a main obstacle. The dependence on police statistics alone to document women's experiences is, as you know, completely inadequate given that, for example, surveys conducted in Canada indicate that only 10% of sexual assaults are reported to police. Nevertheless, the media and those in positions of power use this police data to tell women that their fears are unjustified and that they must be reasonable. In the same breath as telling women that they do not have reason to be afraid, they are given lists of instructions to follow to ensure their safety... furthermore, it is often women themselves who demand such "miracle recipes" from service providers.

The difficulty lies in the fact that ready-made recipes do not exist and solutions cannot come from outside but rather must be based on what each woman feels at each moment where she must choose between exercising her freedom and meeting her need to feel safe.

The ideal form of freedom is indeed, still according to the dictionary, "a state which does not submit to constraint or the power to act without constraint (autonomy, independence)". Yet reconciling freedom and security does not necessarily mean living completely without constraint in our societies. It is more an issue of becoming more conscious of the daily constraints that we impose on our own liberty in order to make ourselves feel safe and making our own choices, with full understanding of the reasons behind our choices and actions. Each woman is alone in making choices that are influenced by her personal level of confidence or vulnerability that can vary from one day to another, from one age to another, one place to another. Women's empowerment therefore occurs through the strengthening of this relationship with oneself which allows us to assume responsibility for our own decisions. This presents great challenges for all actors involved.

Among these challenges is getting various levels of government to consider the different

experiences of women and men in terms of safety, violence, and crime prevention. During the Habitat II City Summit held in Istanbul in 1996, United Nations member countries declared their commitment to:

"Enhance women's safety in communities through the promotion of a gender perspective in crime prevention policies and programmes by increasing in those responsible for implementing those policies the knowledge and understanding of the causes, consequences and mechanisms of violence against women."

Paragraph 129, Habitat II Declaration, Istanbul, June 1996

What path have we followed since? What obstacles and issues must we face in order that these commitments will lead to concrete actions by various levels of government and actors concerned? Within the current context where cities, particularly in Europe, have become responsible for local security policies, what links are being established to ensure coherence between national policies and local policies on the ground? We will attempt to respond to such questions in the Seminar's Opening Panel.

Exchange, transfer, and sharing of tools and knowledge have been underway for many years now. Since Istanbul in particular, the focussing of international networks on local development has allowed us to position the issue of women's safety and women's participation as citizens within a framework of "good urban governance".

In this sense, the improvements made to Montréal's métro subway, which you will see during your bus tour tomorrow, are strong examples of proof that solutions suggested by women, who suffer the most from insecurity, can benefit the entire population. The City of Montréal now intends to promote the use of urban safety planning criteria that consider women's points of view and to allow women to participate in the planning of public space through the distribution of the Guide for a safe urban environment (*Guide pour un environnement urbain sécuritaire*). You are invited to attend the launch of this Guide at a reception at City Hall this afternoon.

Activities aiming to empower women are therefore not, as many would believe, isolated or exclusive activities just because they are specifically addressed to women. On the contrary, because women constitute the majority of the population, their full participation will allow those in

power and public services to more adequately respond to the needs of all citizens.

If we are gathered today on the occasion of the First International Seminar on Women's Safety, it is because, beyond sharing our experiences, it is important for us to take time to assess our current situation and how we can coordinate the efforts of the many networks and actors involved internationally. Not only must we evaluate the current state of practices and knowledge, but we must also define the stakes and challenges that we must face and formulate concrete recommendations for the diverse partners who have a role to play. We encourage you to work together to develop a common plan of action for the next five - or why not ten? - years to come.

It is not by chance that we find ourselves on university benches. Beyond illustrating the form that alliances can take between research and practice, it is an indication that we have an important task to accomplish over the next three days. We must work hard so that this Seminar will serve as a springboard for action, give a second wind to our efforts, and contribute to an even greater mobilization at local and international levels in the years to come.

To do this, we have chosen to publish the Seminar's presentations and texts on our web site (www.femmesetvilles.org) which identifies some of the key issues and questions related to different themes. We also request your contributions to further expand our online International Directory of activities and resources on women's safety, which at this time contains descriptions of over one hundred initiatives. We hope that you will continue to enrich this Directory and use its contents in your practice.

We have organized Seminar presentations and round table discussions around four main themes. Beginning this morning, we will address the integration of a gendered approach to national and local crime prevention policies; this afternoon, strategies for women's empowerment; Friday morning, partnerships and the role of cities and municipalities; and Saturday morning, safety planning and the role of research.

We will strive to make productive links throughout and across all of our work over the next three days. For example, we ask you to consider certain questions that will be posed in each round

table discussion: How do we ensure that strategies focus on women's autonomy and empowerment? How do we ensure that women in all of their diversity are taken into consideration? What are our needs in terms of exchange, networking, and access to financial and other resources?

We have asked that the resource person at each round table respond to these questions based on her or his experience. We chose to work in round tables in order to maximize our opportunity to exchange with each other. It is our view that there are not only a few "experts" here who will speak while all others listen but rather that you all have important contributions to make based on your unique experiences. Throughout the entire Seminar, you will be asked to come up with concrete recommendations intended for the many actors involved.

These recommendations and the *Montréal Declaration on Women's Safety* will then, with your help, be shared with all of our respective organizations, authoritative bodies, and networks at the local, national, and international levels. We hope that the *Montréal Declaration* will serve as a reference point from which to guide our action and allow us to measure our progress and results in the years to come. Furthermore, we hope that this Declaration will be a symbol of the links that we will make over the coming days as part of this demanding sharing exercise.

You will find a first draft of the *Montréal Declaration* in your folder. An editing committee will produce new drafts of this Declaration based on the input and recommendations that you will bring forth in the Seminar panels and round tables. Therefore the round table discussions will be your best opportunity to contribute to the development of the final version of the Declaration that will be adopted in the Seminar's final plenary session.

At the heart of our exchanges, we also find the issue of partnerships. Beyond the issues that partnerships raise, the sharing of resources and respective abilities of the diverse sectors involved is certainly essential to the success of our initiatives.

Thanks to our partnerships in Montréal which have now existed for close to ten years, many members of CAFSU accepted to work on the organizing committee for this seminar. Thanks to the richness of links developed at the national and international levels, many of you also helped to

organize this event. I would like to highlight the participation of the United Nations (UN-Habitat) Safer Cities Programme that made it possible for an important delegation of representatives from southern countries to be with us, as well as the presence of many members of the Huairou Commission. I would like to thank all members of the working committees, particularly Caroline Andrew, my Seminar Co-sponsor, and our local team in Montréal, particularly France Leblanc, Seminar Co-ordinator, and Josée Laplace, Information Officer. I would also like to thank the group facilitators, secretaries, and numerous volunteers who lent a hand to ensure the best conditions for the success of this ambitious undertaking. I would like these people to please stand. I would also certainly like to thank the numerous organizations that have given financial and material assistance to the Seminar's development, as well as to follow-up activities which will continue following the Seminar. (A message from our sponsors: Women's safety, it's our business!)

- The Department of Justice Canada and the Department of the Solicitor General of Canada for their financial support within the framework of Canada's National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention;
- The City of Montréal, within the framework of its Women in Cities (*Femmes et ville*) Programme;
- Status of Women Canada;
- The Safer Cities Programme of UN-Habitat, United Nations;
- The Canadian International Development Agency;
- The Québec Ministry of Public Security (*Ministère de la Sécurité publique du Québec*);
- IREF Women's Studies Research Institute and Relais-Femmes Research Alliance, University of Québec in Montréal (*IREF : Institut de recherches et d'études féministes*);
- The Huairou Commission;
- The Canadian Federation of Municipalities;
- The University of Montréal's Urban planning program (*programme de gestion urbaine*);
- The International Centre for the Prevention of Crime;
- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) within the framework of the Urban

Governance Initiative (TUGI);

- The Island of Montréal's Regional Development Council (*Conseil régional de développement de l'île de Montréal*);
- The Montréal Transport Society (*Société de transport de Montréal*);
- The Québec Ministry of Health and Social Services (*Ministre déléguée à la santé et aux services sociaux du Québec*);
- The Québec Federation of Workers (*Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec*);
- and the University of Ottawa.

The diversity of the organizations involved here is surely an indication of an increasing interest in women's safety. This encourages our conviction that the growing place that women are being called to take in public space will not only improve their own living conditions but indeed those of entire local populations. We are also encouraged to believe that we will have an impact on the very vision of security and peace, social justice, and freedom at the global level.

We wish all of you three rich and stimulating days of exchange, an excellent and enjoyable stay in Montréal, and what it takes to recharge you to pursue our exchanges and strengthen our solidarity far beyond this initial meeting.