

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Statement by Autism Ontario: Guilty Verdict in Toronto Van Attack Trial has Lasting Implications for Autism Community

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Toronto, Ontario – March 3, 2021 - With today's verdict, there are no winners, but a measure of justice has been served for the families of those murdered: Beutis Renuka Amarasinghe, Andrea Knafelc Bradden, Geraldine Brady, So He Chung, Anne Marie D'Amico, Mary Elizabeth Forsyth, Chul Min Kang, Ji Hun Kim, Munir Najjar, and Dorothy Sewell. We also recognize those whose lives have been forever altered by the injuries inflicted through attempted murder: Xiaolong An, So Ra, Hyeon Jeong Moon, Jun Seok Park, Mavis Justino, Robert Anderson, Amir Kiumarsi, Aleksandra Kozhevnikova, Catherine Riddell, Dina Risin, Yunsheng (Bob) Tian, Morgan Anthony McDougall, Samantha Peart, Sammantha Samson, Beverly Smith, and Amaresh Tesfamariam.

While we are relieved by Justice Anne Molloy's decision that the van attacker is criminally responsible and that his autism was not accepted as a defense, the damage to the autism community has already been done. The autism community in Ontario has found itself pushing back against the stigma we thought we had made progress on removing in the past few decades. We are concerned about the potential ramifications of this defense being used in future cases, and the difficulties this will cause for autistic people and their families.

Many members of our community have reached out to express their thoughts on the case and how it has impacted their lives. "I am concerned for the potential employment opportunities for our adult children on the spectrum," says parent Doris Barkley. "Will employers see our children as risks and prefer not to employ them? My experience with my son of 23 is that he is more compassionate, caring and polite than most his age. He knows what is right and wrong and would never hurt someone willingly."

Autism Ontario is alarmed by the long-term implications of this case. We reaffirm that autism was not the cause behind the tragic events of that day; hatred of women and social environments where misogynistic ideology is allowed to flourish were factors which led to the attacker's socially constructed identity as an incel. His horrific and planned actions on that day reflect this toxic ideology.

The stigmatization of people with disabilities or mental health conditions is not the answer. To prevent tragedies like this one from occurring, proactive anti-misogynistic and anti-ableist work which promotes societal transformation must be woven into our community, education and social programs, as well as mental health supports. Only then can we begin to heal.

For more information, email our media team at media@autismontario.com

About Autism Ontario: Autism Ontario has an over 47-year history of representing thousands of families and people on the autism spectrum across Ontario. We are the only organization in Ontario that has elected volunteer parent representation through our 25 Chapters in key regions across Ontario. We advocate with and on behalf of all people on the autism spectrum and their families – at all ages and stages of life, reflecting a wide range of expression and abilities. To connect with us, visit www.autismontario.com