



Andrea Horwath
Leader, Official Opposition, New Democratic Party of Ontario
Room 381, Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A8

March 22, 2019

Ms. Howarth,

I'm disappointed to be writing to you again regarding recent disrespectful comments about Ontario's police made by a member of your party – this time, MPP Joel Harden, Ottawa Centre.

During MPP Harden's member statement yesterday (Thursday, March 21, 2019) that was intended to bring awareness to the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, he outwardly accused the province's police of being inherently discriminatory in their dealings with the public. Statements such as this only serve to divide the public's support for police when government officials should be focused on building relations between police and their communities in the name of public safety.

Ontario's front-line police personnel are, and will always be, committed to protecting the safety of all members of their communities.

Further, and potentially more concerning, were MPP Harden's remarks regarding the unfortunate incident that occurred between the Ottawa Police Service and Mr. Abdirahman Abdi. It was completely inappropriate for him to comment on criminal proceedings, demonstrating a contempt of this country's judicial process as the case progresses through the criminal courts.

When MPP Harden stated in the House that "...[Mr. Abdi] was violently killed by a police officer while trying to go home...", he did not provide any context about the reasons why police were investigating Mr. Abdi in the first place – that he had allegedly sexually assaulted multiple members of the public.

Additionally, MPP Harden's comments suggesting that Mr. Abdi's police interaction and ultimate passing were due – in any part – to his race are purely speculative, therefore only serving to further ignite an already sensitive subject. In fact, the lawyer for Mr. Abdi's family is quoted in a July 24, 2018 CBC interview¹ as saying that racism is not among the "systemic problems" that are identified in a lawsuit his family has consequentially launched against the Ottawa Police.

MPP Harden's choice of words and decision to mention a matter that is currently before the courts as part of his attempt to increase awareness of an important international day of recognition is both irresponsible and harmful to the integrity of the case, the police officer(s) involved, the victim's family and the public's trust in the system and in police.

¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/abdirahman-abdi-family-suing-ottawa-police-1.4757884>



Unfortunately, this is now the fifth instance within the past year that clearly shows your Members and, seemingly, the entire Official Opposition party have a lack of respect for the women and men who keep this province safe. I see no evidence that you, as their leader, have made efforts to address this serious issue. As I have mentioned in my previous letters to you regarding the disrespectful comments and actions of MPPs Laura Kaminker, Gurratan Singh, Jill Andrew, and yourself, the NDP party appears to be greatly disconnected from the value of professional policing and dedication of Ontario's police personnel.

Given that, I will be recommending to my Board of Directors that the PAO contemplate rescinding the NDP's invitation to speak at our Annual Lobby Day Conference this fall that brings together government officials from across all provincial parties to discuss Ontario's policing landscape. We truly hope your party can show meaningful progress towards understanding the issues our members face on the job everyday, and, should that occur, we would be happy to discuss your possible attendance at that time.

As leaders, we should be working to unite our communities, not creating divisions within them.

Sincerely,

Bruce Chapman, President
Police Association of Ontario

CC: MPP Joel Harden, Ottawa Centre

¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/abdirahman-abdi-family-suing-ottawa-police-1.4757884>