

Opening Greetings
UN Women's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Conference
Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson
October 16, 2018



On behalf of my City Council colleagues — many of whom are joining us here today — I'd like to welcome you all to Edmonton. I'd especially like to recognize the work of my colleague, Councillor Bev Esslinger, on this Safe Cities program. She's dedicated countless hours of time to foster and promote access to services, equality, safety and opportunity for women in our city. Thank you, Councillor.

I thought deeply about what to say today. About how to acknowledge my privilege as a leader, a mayor, a man and a person from the dominant white settler culture. After all, we're gathering at a crucial moment, at the apogee of Me Too and Times Up ... and we need to speak frankly about male privilege and render inexcusable any sexual harassment or violence against women and girls. So, while it's tempting to say that I should step aside ... listen, but take no action ... I believe men like me, and leaders in positions of power, have a responsibility to help build cities that are inclusive for all.

It's important to acknowledge that we haven't always built cities with diverse perspectives in mind. In particular, women's voices have been been ignored — all too often, women haven't even been invited to the conversation in the first place. Even at this gathering, we must acknowledge that most of the mayors attending are men. Globally, our parliaments and local governments continue to be dominated by men. Our city engineers and planners have historically been men.

And while those trends are changing, there is evidently work to do. Shifts in these power structures are not going to change fast enough unless those of us in power are not just willing, but pushing, to change them. As men in positions of power, we have a duty to do more than get out of the way, but to actively press upon and rebalance the scales.

I describe Edmonton as an uplifting and enterprising place — enterprising because we tackle audacious challenges, of which these topics are no exception — but also uplifting because we

wish to lift up each and every Edmontonian along to thrive equitably in our city. But implicit in that is the responsibility for those in a position to lift more to be uplifting.

The conversations we will have this week are more important than ever. In a Me Too world, it's time to move beyond a basic right to safety, toward creating cities where gender equality is the norm and all citizens can thrive.

Therefore, as city leaders, one of the key roles we can play in creating safer spaces for women and girls is to convene and coordinate our efforts. I have often said cities are well-positioned to lead in creating on-the-ground change, creating spaces where our daughters and neighbours and friends feel safe, where they don't have to second-guess whether it is safe to take public transit ... where they don't need to walk alone armed with their keys in a tight fist ... where they can go home and be safe ... where they can go to school and to work and tell their stories and be believed.

Here in Edmonton, our Council is unwavering in our commitment to end sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence. But as important as a clear direction and intent is, action is what counts.

Partnerships like this, between UN Women and cities across the world, allow us to take inspiration, to seize more opportunities and to employ practices in immediate ways to directly and positively impact the lives of our citizens. Every decision we make, from shaping policy to planning and building infrastructure affects the people who live and move through our streets. Therefore, it's crucial we incorporate a gendered and intersectional lens in these decisions.

I firmly believe that, when cities are safer for women and girls, they are safer for everyone.

As we convene this week, I'm committed to listening intently, learning collaboratively and taking action on the recommendations that will inevitably arise from our discussions.

I'd like to thank UN Women for their unending dedication to creating change in our world. The work that you do not only improves and saves lives. It provides us a daily reminder of the level of commitment necessary to impact real and lasting change.

To close, I'll share that perhaps the most important key performance indicator of my work as mayor is to build the kind of city that, when the time comes, my kids will never want to leave. For my six-year-old daughter, Alice, and all young girls, I never want them to second-guess their safety or equality here. And for my nine-year-old son Dexter, he needs to be enlisted in the work too.

We are not committed only to making things better for women and girls, but — all of us — to making change for all our children, regardless of their gender expression.

Imagine, a city (and a world) with kindness and without violence ... with respect and without victimization ... with equality and without sexual violence. I want that for both of my children.

Thank you for bringing this work to our city and we wish you a productive and inspiring time here.