

Police Chief calls for legislative change following rash of York Region crimes

The Federal and Provincial governments need to work together to get tough on crime, according to York Regional Police Chief Jim MacSween.

The Police Chief called for action last week at a press conference at the YRP's Aurora headquarters. The conference related to two recent high-profile crimes in Vaughan and Richmond Hill.

The murder of Abdul Aleem Farooqi in Vaughan amid a home invasion Police described as 'targeted' took place in the early hours of Sunday, August 31, while, the following morning, Police responded to an arson in Richmond Hill which left one 11-year-old girl dead and four others hospitalized.

MacSween described these and other incidents as taking place during 'a particularly violent few weeks in York Region, which is both concerning and, of course, disappointing to all of us.'

'We understand the concern and attention these incidents have garnered,' he said. 'The York Regional Police and I personally am committed to keeping our community safe and providing support for these victims and their families. The gravity of these incidents will not be overlooked and each case will be investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, and those responsible will be held accountable.'

'For those of you who are concerned about the spike in violent crime we saw in the last two weeks, we hear you and we are definitely listening. That's why York Regional Police is taking proactive measures to prevent violent crime wherever possible. We are increasing patrols in hotspot areas across our Region. We're working with our team of crime analysts and our partner agencies across the Greater Toronto Area, and our investigators are working diligently to arrest those responsible and ensure they are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.'

But, ensuring public safety is a 'shared responsibility' and he called on members of the public to call police if they see something suspicious, and on upper levels of government to do their part as well.

'It means we need the help of all actors in the criminal justice system to do their part in keeping violent offenders where they belong: off the streets,' he said, calling for reforms to the bail system. 'This is about risk management, hard stop. Each and every day, our officers risk their own personal safety to remove these criminals from the streets and yet I am disappointed to report that many of the violent incidents in our Region, we are arresting repeat offenders over and over again'. This is not about politics. It's about safety. The system's broken and we need to ensure justice is served and violent criminals are not on our streets when they pose a significant risk to all of our communities.'

Another trend, he said, was a 'spike' in violent crime committed by youths.

'As young people continue to be recruited and exploited by criminal networks, York Regional Police is working hard to disrupt and dismantle these criminal organizations, but, as they say, it takes a village, and it's up to the entire community, including institutions and families, to ensure our kids have positive influences and opportunities to keep them away from crime and on a path to success. And, if they do get into trouble, we need to ensure they're being rehabilitated effectively so they don't re-offend.'

These issues, he contended, are 'not going to be solved by further funding' or another task force, but instead by 'the whole system working together and focusing on public safety as a key component and making it victim-centred, so we're focusing on victims and not over-relying on talking about accused people who are actually the ones who are making the choices to victimize our community.'

'I've been down at Queen's Park. I've provided comments on bail reform, so have many of my colleagues across the GTA, and here

we are again talking about it, and it seems like in some cases we have not moved the needle collectively because this is not just a police issue," said MacSween. "Unfortunately, when it becomes our issue, it's too late, so we need to do something about this issue around bail and about keeping those people off the streets that shouldn't be on the streets. If that's done, in its rawest form, if we were to keep those that are committing violent crimes, crimes related to firearms, off the streets when they should be, we would see reductions. We would see less victimization and less opportunity to commit crimes against people who are simply trying to live their lives and raise their families in York Region and beyond."

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter