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Loretta Saunders slaying should open Canada's eyes: native group

Body of Saint Mary's University student found in New Brunswick on Wednesday

CBC News Posted: Feb 27, 2014 9:10 AMAT | Last Updated: Feb 27, 2014 1:57 PMAT



Loretta Saunders's body found 2:54

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The slaying of Loretta Saunders should shake the misconceptions many Canadians have about missing aboriginal women, says the president of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association.

"I think what society believes is a typical woman at risk is somebody working in the sex-trade industry, on drugs, mental illness, those types of things. But the fact is our women are disappearing and they're not typically in the sex trade," Cheryl Maloney told CBC's *Maritime Noon*.

Police found Saunders's body on the edge of a highway west of Salisbury, N.B., on Wednesday afternoon, almost a week after she disappeared. Police are treating the 26-year-old's death as a homicide.

"She's smart, she's beautiful, she's bright. Her community was the university community. Canadians should be alarmed overall," said Maloney.

"We shouldn't be growing up in a country where we are at risk to be missing and murdered more than anyone else."

Overcoming stigma

Maloney said aboriginal Canadian women are five times more likely to be violently attacked than non-aboriginal women.

The issue was personal for Saunders, her thesis was on the murders of three Nova Scotia aboriginal women.

Maloney said even when she was plastering missing posters around Halifax, she was met by prejudice and

'We shouldn't be growing up in a country where we are at risk to be missing and

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stigma about aboriginal people.

"It felt like society was justifying, or giving exception or blame ... This is what we have to overcome. The average guy walking down the street saying, 'OK, that's fine then because she was studying aboriginal and missing women and there's all kinds of problems with them,'" she said.

"The challenge is society. Society has to say this is not good. You don't pick up anybody and kill them and pour them out on the side of the road."

Maloney is calling for a national inquiry into missing aboriginal people, for both men and women.

"Is Canada ready to look at those numbers?" she asked. "Loretta's case has opened the eyes of Canadians to say this could have been my daughter. And it can very well be your daughter, but the sad fact is it's mostly likely our daughter."

Homicide investigation

Saunders was last seen in the Cowie Hill Road area of Halifax on the morning of Feb. 13. Five days later, her car was located in Harrow, Ont.

The two people accused of first-degree murder in her death are due back in Nova Scotia provincial court on Friday.

Yalcin Surkultay, who dated Saunders for 2½ years, told CBC News that Victoria Henneberry, 28, and co-accused Blake Leggette, 25, were the Saint Mary's University student's roommates.

Henneberry, who appears on the court docket under the name Victoria Galbraith, was brought from the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility to the courthouse flanked by sheriffs on Thursday morning.

Friends and family of Saunders packed the courtroom, but the case was put over.

Both Henneberry and Leggette are scheduled to appear in court Friday.



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murdered more than anyone else.'

- Cheryl Maloney, Nova Scotia Native Women's Association



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1:55

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