



Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter

March 2, 2011

**Statement by: Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter on the Rapes of Women in the Shelter
of First United Church.**

Our hearts go out to the women who were raped in their attempt to find safe shelter on winter nights in Vancouver. We applaud their courage to come forward and report the violent assaults against them.

We are calling on the Vancouver Police Department to conduct a thorough investigation of these and other sexist attacks, and to ensure that the men who are committing violence against women will be held accountable by the criminal justice system.

We are outraged by Rev. Ric Matthews' comment, which blames the victims for the crimes done to them. Such ignorance about the nature of violence against women is appalling when expressed by anyone, let alone by a religious leader.

We appreciate the long-standing service that the First United Church has been offering the most disadvantaged people in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. Its effort to provide temporary night shelter, though well-intentioned, is clearly lacking. We are calling on the First United Church to create a women-only safe space for the women who are in desperate need of beds for the night.

The temporary shelters in Vancouver are an inadequate response to the total abandonment of women by the federal and provincial governments. The impoverishment of women due to the shameful income assistance rates has had a devastating effect on women, and has dramatically increased their vulnerability to predatory men.

We are calling on the national, provincial and the municipal governments to provide a liveable income and public housing to the women of British Columbia as a first step toward ensuring the safety and autonomy for women.

In solidarity,

Hilla Kerner, for the collective of Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter

