



Toews Clarifies Comments on Ashley Smith Case

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OTTAWA - Public Safety Minister Vic Toews back-pedalled in the Commons on Wednesday after being accused of launching partisan attacks to repel probes on the prison death of teen Ashley Smith.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper referred to the Smith case - now subject of an Ontario coroner's inquest - as a "terrible tragedy" in the House last week, but Toews suggested the NDP consistently speaks "on behalf of prisoners" and "never speaks on behalf of the victims of these prisoners" when opposition MPs asked him about her death on Tuesday.

Toews, who was subsequently asked to apologize Wednesday in the House by the NDP, read from a carefully prepared statement.

"Let me be clear on what I said," Toews read. "This is a very sad case and our thoughts go out to Ms. Smith's family. Some of the behaviour seen in these videos is absolutely unacceptable. Our government has directed Correctional Service Canada to fully co-operate with the coroner's inquest."

Graphic prison video, showing footage of prison guards duct-taping Smith to a chair and strapping her down for hours in wet clothes, were made public during the inquest for the first time last week. The video was shown after the court rejected the objections of the Correctional Service of Canada.

Smith, 19, strangled herself with a cloth on Oct. 19, 2007, at the Grand Valley Institution in Kitchener, Ont., as guards watched. The guards were allegedly told not to intervene.

Smith had been in and out of jail numerous times since she was 13 years old. During the last year of her life, Smith was moved to 17 different locations across several provinces and remained mostly in solitary confinement.

Smith's family has argued correctional staff continuously moved her to skirt regulations to limit confinement to 60 days without a psychiatric assessment.