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1974-2024



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Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

L'AFAC a été reconnue par le directeur du bureau des femmes, relevant du ministère canadien du Travail, lors de sa conférence annuelle en 1974.

The Calgary Herald
27 août 1974

NWAC is recognized by the director of women's bureau, part of the Canadian department of labor, at their annual conference in 1974.

The Calgary Herald
August 27, 1974

Native women win support 'of all Canadian women'

THUNDER BAY (CP) — Sylvia Gelber, director of the women's bureau of the Canadian department of labor told a conference Friday of the native women's association of Canada that native women have won the moral support of all Canadian women.

She said native women share with other Canadian women the common bond of being deprived of a part in Canada's economic, social and cultural life.

Miss Gelber, of Ottawa, told about 100 people at the annual gathering that the conference theme — "our place in society" — could well be the theme for many women's associations.

"It is good to know that at long last, steps are beginning to be taken due in no small part to the unwillingness of the native peoples themselves any longer to tolerate the status quo."

Native people also were determined to remove the obstacles that have affected their lives adversely.

"The failure of contemporary society to implement the principle of true equality, regardless of sex, would nevertheless have seemed strange to some native people in times not too far distant."

Miss Gelber quoted from the report of an anthropologist who found Indian women were more independent in North America before the coming of the white man.

One piece of evidence cited for this contention was the number of women's signatures affixed to deeds of land transfer between the Iroquois and colonial governments.

NEED LEGAL ADVICE

Ram Sampat-Mehta of Ottawa, a legal adviser to the Federal Department of Justice, outlined to the conference the department's plans for a law information program aimed at native people.

He said the special effort was needed for native people because native people account for a disproportionately high percentage of the prison and jail population.

Mr. Sampat-Mehta said Indian offenders accounted for five to seven per cent of the federal prison population in the Maritime provinces, and between 50 to 89 per cent in some parts of the Prairies.

A pilot program for the information scheme has been launched in New Brunswick. The aim is to reduce the native prison population and create a better understanding of the legal system.

The areas for special attention would include civil rights, aboriginal rights on hunting and fishing, law enforcement agencies, and court procedures.

Mr. Sampat-Mehta stressed the need for bilateral consultation between the justice department and the native people.

CRITICIZE NEWS MEDIA

Several women at the conference criticized newspapers for discriminating against native people in reporting of minor legal offences.

The delegates argued that when Indians were involved they were always identified as such, but other racial groups were not so identified.

Miss Gelber said the native women should use the media as a valuable tool in publicizing incidents of exploitation. Some delegates, however, said they felt the media, particularly the press, were racist.

Agnes Dick of Port Alberni, B.C. a community aid worker and member of the B.C. Homemakers' Association, read a statement on behalf of the Hesquiat Band Council of Port Alberni:

"We cannot understand the purpose behind the news media drawing attention to peoples' ethnic origin when a criminal act is reported.

"If such racism continues in the media, we would insist that all non-Indians be referred to by ethnic origin, i.e. Irish, English, Chinese, German, etc.

"We, like anyone, enjoy publicity for our achievements but feel we, unlike those of other backgrounds, have been more open and honest with our problems."



Portrait militaire de Bertha Clark-Jones, 18 ans,
première président de l'AFAC.

Military portrait of 18-year-old Bertha Clark-
Jones, NWAC's first president.

Native women unaware of their rights

Native women living in isolated communities lack knowledge of their rights, help with child care, and recreation, the president of the Voice of Alberta Native Women society said here Monday.

Many Indian women who take care of grandchildren whose parents have left them aren't aware that they can receive financial help from the government. Bertha Clark told a group attending the department of health and social development

children will be taken away, she said.

In Fort McMurray, where Mrs. Clark lives, the pressure caused by overcrowded housing has resulted in many marriage break-ups among both Indians and whites, she said. Children who are left parentless are taken out of their familiar surroundings and sent to institutions in Calgary, Edmonton or Lac La Biche because there are no facilities for them in Fort

communities, and that native people must organize them themselves.

A native mother in such a community has no help with child care and few opportunities for recreation she said. "There is absolutely no activity of any kind outside the home for the native mother," she said.

The Voice of Alberta Native Women society has set up a program whereby 45 native women will be trained by the department of health and so-

Women in the communities will also be trained so they can take in children for short stays, when a mother must be hospitalized for example.

When the 600-member Voice of Alberta Native Women society was formed in 1968, some native men were afraid the women planned to take over positions as chiefs and band council members, Mrs. Clark said.

However, she said, the society was formed to provide better communication for native status and Metis

way of life" for natives. The members feel they can help native men by working with education, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, and teaching young natives about life off the reserves.

Mrs. Clark, a mother of seven children, has been president of the society for six terms. She is also president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, a member of the Northern Development Council, and of the advisory committee for the commission for north-

En 1975, la première présidente de l'AFAC, Bertha Clark, aborde les défis auxquels sont confrontées les femmes autochtones à travers le Canada.

The Calgary Herald

4 mars 1975

In 1975, NWAC's first president, Bertha Clark, discusses the challenges faced by Indigenous women across Canada.

The Calgary Herald

March 4, 1975



Native women being heard

SASKATOON (CP) — The voice of women is starting to be heard and heeded. Margaret Thompson of Ross River, Y.T., president of the Native Women's Association of Canada said at the association's annual conference here Thursday.

Between 75 and 80 delegates from across the country are taking part in the conference. Discussions have centred on further organization aimed at solving problems among native people in the areas of health, education, employment, justice and social development.

Ms. Thomson, said women still have a long way to go to organize into effective groups.

"The women have come to the stage of maturity provincially and are looking at the national scene," she said, adding that the conference has produced "good healthy criticism "

En septembre 1976, la présidente Margaret Thompson intervient devant les délégués de tout le pays lors de la conférence annuelle de l'AFAC.

The Leader Post

25 septembre 1976

In September 1976, President Margaret Thompson addressed delegates from across the country at NWAC's annual conference.

The Leader Post

September 25, 1976





Image de la Marche pour les
droits des femmes
indiennes.

Image from the Indian
Women's Rights March.

Library and Archives
Canada/Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

1979

REGAINING INDIAN STATUS: A DECADE OF STRUGGLE

1971 In June, Jeannette Corbière Lavell, an Ojibway woman from Manitoulin Island who had married a white man, loses her court battle to have her status as an Indian reinstated. In October, however, Mrs. Lavell successfully appeals her case in federal court. The court rules that an Indian woman cannot be deprived of her rights as an Indian



Jeannette Lavell, an Ojibway woman, first tests the Indian Act in 1971

simply because she marries a white man.

Jean Chrétien, minister of Indian affairs, announces that his department will help any Indian group wishing to appeal the federal court decision, and the Association of Indians in Ontario calls for an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada: Richard Isaac, the chief of the Six Nations, states that with the Lavell ruling "the reserves will eventually be dissolved."

1973 Groups representing 325,000 treaty Indians plan to join the federal government at the Supreme Court in April to defend the validity of the Indian Act. Harold Cardinal, leader of the Indian Association of Alberta, says that unless the federal court decision of 1971 is overturned, "It could destroy any chance of our survival in this country as a distinct cultural unit."

In February, hundreds of Indians begin pouring into Ottawa for the Supreme Court hearing scheduled for April 12. At the hearing, Mrs. Lavell's lawyer, Clayton Ruby, argues that the

Indian Act is a case of "discrimination by reason of sex," but the court rules that that is not sufficient reason to



Harold Cardinal wants to exclude Indian women who married white men

declare the Act invalid.

There follows a storm of protest: the National Advisory Council on the Status of Women wires Prime Minister Trudeau, "demanding immediate intervention," and John Diefenbaker calls the ruling "unjust" and "retrograde," saying that women in Canada are now second-class citizens. Trudeau defends the Supreme Court ruling, saying that to intervene "would be telling the Indians how to run their affairs."

1975 The National Committee on Indian Rights for Indian Women, established in Ottawa, defines "Indian woman" to mean any woman of North American



Jeany Margetts and Monica Turner form Indian Rights for Indian Women

Indian ancestry, regardless of marriage. In Mexico, at the United Nations World Conference for International Women's Year, Mary Two-Axe Earley—a Canadian Mohawk from the Caughnawaga reserve near Montreal who had lost her status by marrying a white man—publicizes her situation.

1976 In Ottawa there are signs that the federal attitude is swinging against the Indian Act. In May, Margaret Thomson, president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, tells a Commons standing committee on Indian affairs that "federal legislation that prohibits an Indian woman from retaining her



Mary Two-Axe Earley hears Hugh Faulkner promise equality

Indian status upon marriage to a non-Indian should be abolished." And Justice Minister Ron Basford warns Indian leaders that the federal government will not tolerate "for too long" discrimination against Indian women.

1978 A 92-page study delivered in April by the Federal Advisory Council on the Status of Women says that Indian women have become pawns in a political battle between the federal government and the all-male National Indian Brotherhood executive. In June, shortly after Sandra Lovelace's appeal to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights (see story), Indian Affairs Minister Hugh Faulkner says he will ask Parliament to eliminate discrimination against women from the Indian Act.

In November a working paper on reform of the Indian Act urges that women who marry non-Indians should not lose their Indian status.



Sandra Lovelace takes appeal to the UN Human Rights Commission

1979 Joe Clark tells a group of Quebec that "the grace" and will the Conservative throne speech introduced by some / Epp, minister of Indian Affairs, promises to amend the Act.

1980 The federal government continues to tinker with the Indian Act. In July, the Minister of Indian Affairs, Joe Clark, promises to amend the Act to give Indian women the same rights as Indian men. The Indian Affairs Minister, Joe Clark, promises to amend the Act to give Indian women the same rights as Indian men.



Joe Clark, Minister of Indian Affairs, promises to amend the Act

Au milieu des années 1970, l'AFAC s'est imposée comme un acteur de poids dans la lutte contre les discriminations fondées sur le sexe dans la loi sur les Indiens.

The Windsor Star

28 novembre 1980

In the mid 1970's NWAC emerged as a strong voice against the gender discrimination in the *Indian Act*.

The Windsor Star

November 28, 1980



Jeannette Corbiere Lavell (28) avec son fils. Elle a obtenu la décision contre la Loi sur les Indiens, qui stipule qu'une femme qui épouse un non-Indien perd son statut au sein de sa bande.

Jeannette Corbiere Lavell (28) with her son. She won the decision against the Indian Act which says a woman marrying a non-Indian loses her status with her band.

Dick Loek/Toronto Star via Getty Images.

En 1980, la présidente Marlene Pierre-Aggamay a appelé les organisations autochtones à aborder les problèmes rencontrés par les femmes autochtones.

The Leader Post

25 juin 1980

In 1980, President Marlene Pierre-Aggamay called on Indigenous organizations to address the problems faced by Indigenous women.

The Leader Post

June 25, 1980

Official says native women being ignored

WINNIPEG (CP) — Indian organizations across Canada are ignoring the plight of native women, the president of the Native Women's Association of Canada said.

Marlene Pierre-Aggamay told a native economic development conference that the credibility of such organizations was being harmed because of their failure to address native women's problems.

"Don't be surprised," she warned. "If you find yourself in a courtroom in a couple of years being sued by native women for abrogation of their rights."

"Walk a few blocks up Main Street here in Winnipeg. You'll see the terrible conditions some Indian women live under. Most of them support the family alone...Who has protected their interests?"

Pierre-Aggamay was speaking to about 250 delegates to the Kanata Institute's conference for Indian, Inuit and Metis people, and members of the business and public economic sectors.

In a paper distributed to conference delegates, the native leader said Indian and non-Indian men are limiting the involvement of Indian women in society.

"All too often the Native Women's Association has to spend its energies justifying the involvement of native women rather than becoming involved in the future directions of our communities and the development of our societies, cultures and political structures," she said.

Pierre-Aggamay criticized Indian leaders for ignoring the potential of native women.

"It's hard to stand by and be left out of a system being proposed by your own people," she said.

Meanwhile, the president of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians said natives are getting fed up with the control politicians, bureaucrats and big business have on their lives.

Sol Sanderson said natives have no choice but to enter the political arena to solve their problems. He said Indian leaders in Saskatchewan adopted that strategy because they were sickened by having no control over everything from spiritual life to their economy.

Sanderson said he didn't blame his people for chronic problems such as poor health, high suicide rates and alcoholism.

"Many of the non-Indians who are here in Canada now arrived here because they lost control in their own communities in the same way."

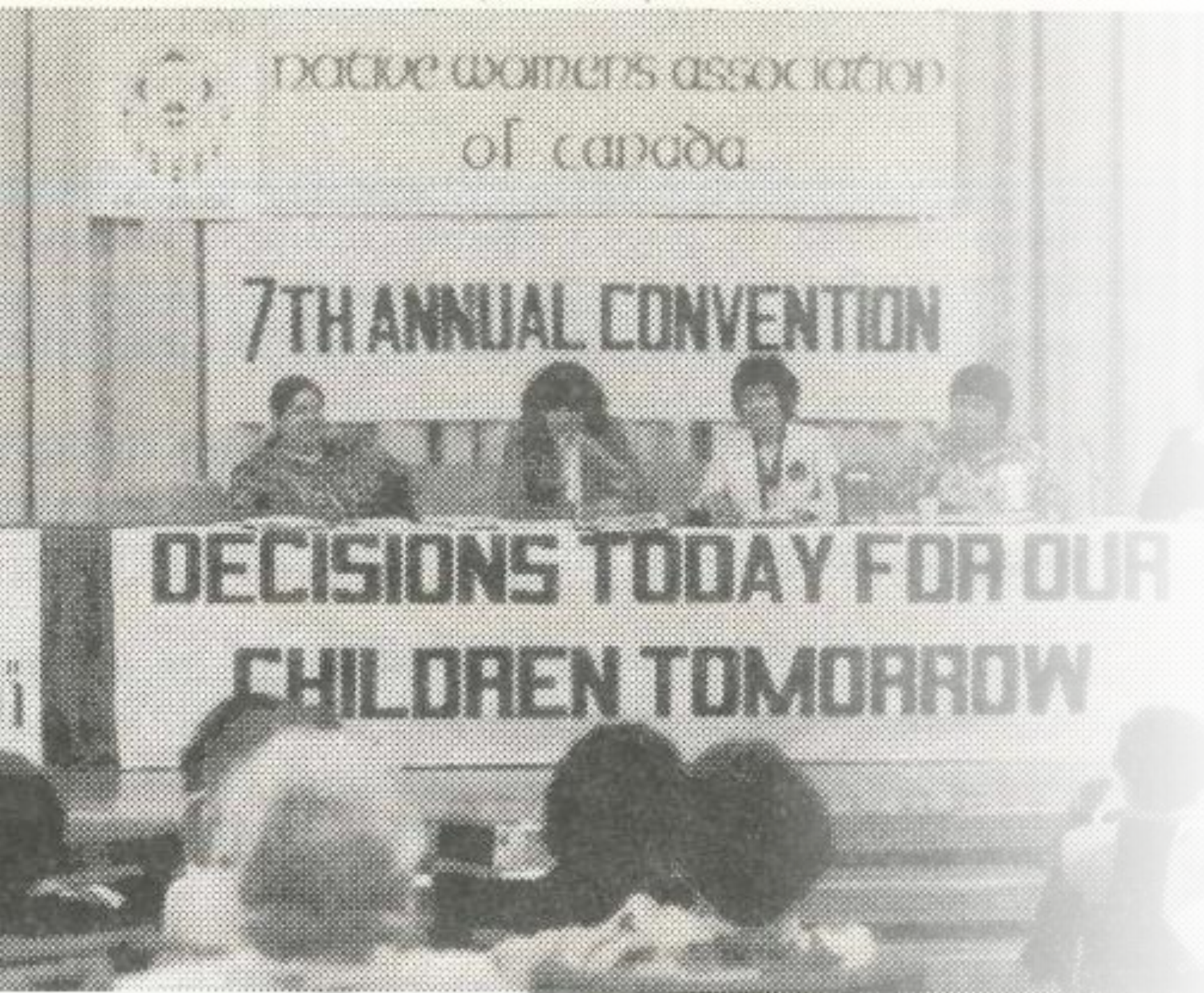
He said he would like to see the Indian community turned around to the way it used to be.

"We used to be the producers," he said. "We intend to get very active in controlling that trade again."

He described several instances in which Saskatchewan natives established their own programs and institutions and won back control of land to which they never surrendered title.

The federation has established three higher learning institutions including the Saskatchewan Federated College on the campus of the University of Regina, which have made for a dramatic increase in the number of native graduates in the province. The federation is about to launch a native child care program.





Cérémonie d'ouverture officielle de
la 7e convention annuelle de
l'Association des femmes
autochtones du Canada.

19-21 juin 1981

Regina, Saskatchewan

The official opening ceremony of the
7th Annual Convention of the Native
Women's Association of Canada.

June 19-21, 1981

Regina, Saskatchewan

Indians advised to do homework on legislation

KINGSTON, Ont. (CP) — Unless Canada's Indian groups begin doing some serious homework they will be confronted with many unpleasant surprises contained in legislation that the federal government plans to introduce this fall, says a former legal adviser to the Union of Ontario Indians.

Speaking to a conference on the rights of native women, Dan Russell said the proposed bill, now being drafted, will fundamentally redefine native property rights and will alter the powers of Indian band councils.

The conference is being held at the Prison for Women where 30 of the 80 women belong to the Native Sisterhood in Prison. The sisterhood, a self-help group, managed to have the meeting held in the prison.

"The native sisterhood was unable to go to the mountain so the mountain has come to them," says prison warden George Caron.

Russell told delegates of the

conference that despite the potential impact, native lobby groups across Canada have failed to do their homework on the legislation.

He said individual band councils lack the resources to investigate the proposed legislation and that he is appalled by the lack of research being done by groups representing Indians both on federal and provincial levels.

One of the delegates' concerns is that the Indian Act discriminates against Indian women. Under the act, a native woman who marries a non-Indian loses her Indian status but an Indian man who marries a white woman retains his Indian status.

Cathy Nicols, from Curve Lake Reserve near Peterborough, said she lost her Indian status when she was 14 years old because she married a white man. She lost the right to vote or to own land on the reserve and forfeited access to benefits that the government extends only to native people.

"If I go home, I can lease land, but I can never buy it," Nicols said. "I think that it should be a right that we keep our status (after marriage to non-Indians) whether we are male or female."

Rita Cadieux, deputy chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, said that once Canada has an entrenched charter of rights in a new constitution "it will be impossible" for the government not to change the discriminatory sections of the Indian Act.

However, Agnes Mills, executive director of the Native Women's Association of Canada, said "if the constitution is brought home the way it is, we still don't have guarantees as native women that our rights will be protected.

"We want to see aboriginal rights entrenched in the constitution for all native people regardless of where they live — on the reserve or off the reserve."

Agnes Mills, directrice générale de l'AFAC, conteste les accusations constitutionnelles pour ne pas avoir protégé les droits des femmes autochtones.

The Leader Post
23 septembre 1981

Agnes Mills, Executive Director of NWAC, challenges constitutional changes for not protecting the rights of Indigenous women.

The Leader Post
September 23, 1981

En 1981, les anciennes présidentes de l'AFAC ont reçu des cadeaux en reconnaissance de leur contribution exceptionnelle au mouvement des femmes autochtones.

In 1981, NWAC's past presidents were awarded gifts in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the Native women's movement.



(l-r) Marlene Pierre-Aggamaway, Bertha Clark Jones, Edith McLeod, Margaret Thomson, Donna Phillips

En 1982, Marlyn Kane a interpellé le gouvernement fédéral sur le manque d'avancées vers le progrès escompté.

The Phoenix

9 septembre 1982

In 1982, Marlyn Kane called out the federal government for the lack of progress towards gaining status.

The Phoenix

September 9, 1982

Indian leader disputes equality proposals

OTTAWA (CP) — While Indian women fight for equality with Indian men, the Canadian government can continue its policy of discrimination against both groups, the head of the Assembly of First Nations told a Commons subcommittee Wednesday.

The government's is using "diversionary" tactics by its sudden rush to cut sections of the Indian Act under which women lose their status as Indians when they marry non-Indians, said David Ahenakew, head of the association representing Canada's 300,000 status Indians.

At best, he said his organization won't oppose native and non-native women's groups that support government plans to cut the offending clauses from the act.

But the fight for equality can't be separated from whole problem of discrimination perpetuated by the "racist" Indian Act, Ahenakew told the opening day of hearings on the discrimination issue.

Several native leaders fear the emotionally-charged and divisive

conference to define aboriginal rights.

Marlyn Kane, representing the Native Women's Association of Canada and a non-voting subcommittee member, was clearly upset at Ahenakew's lukewarm support of their fight to remove the clauses.

While agreeing that Indian self-government would improve the lot of all Indians, she asked how long Indian women must wait.

"Is it fair for me to watch while other non-Indians are gaining status (by marrying Indian men)?" she asked.

The Liberal-dominated subcommittee had a rocky start to its opening deliberations Wednesday, when it received a stern rebuke from Indian Affairs Minister John Munro.

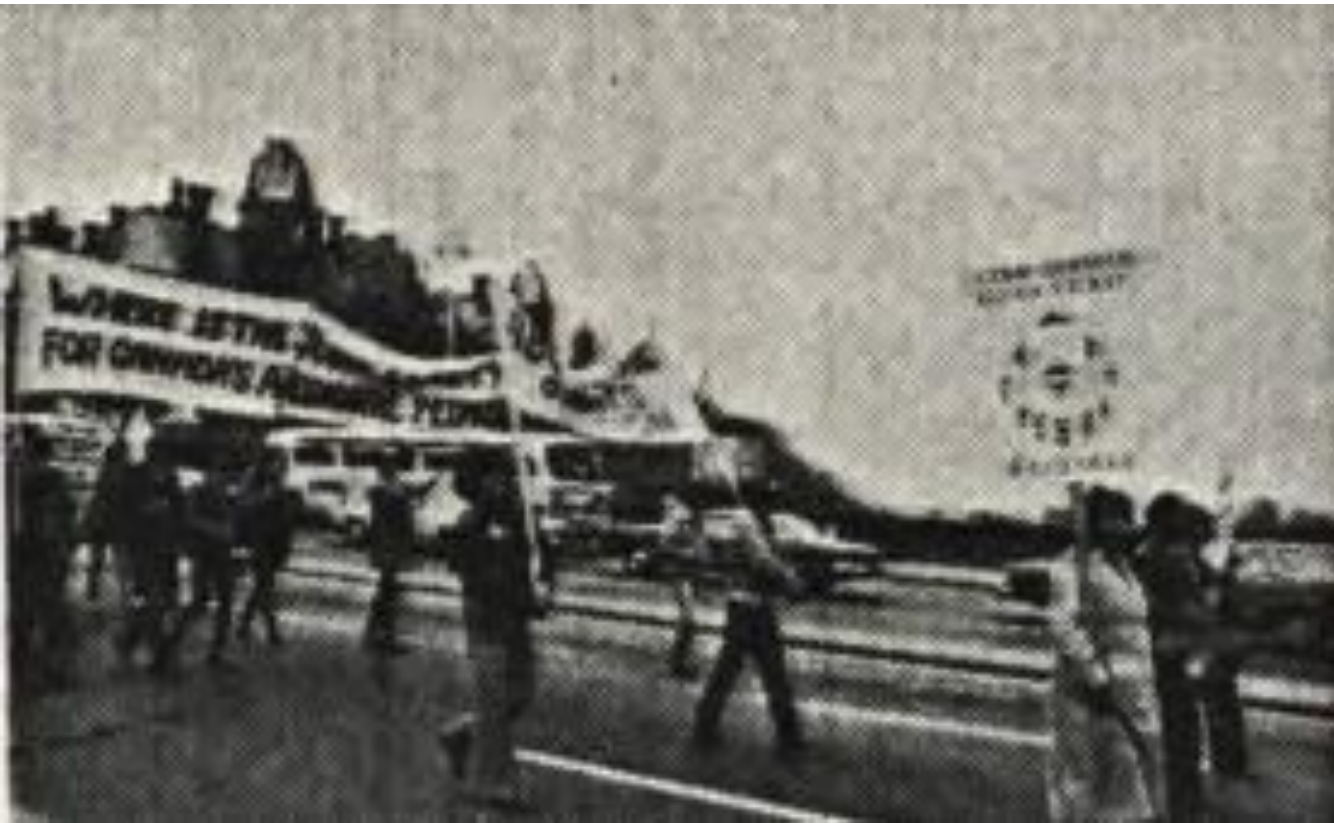
Munro accused the Indian affairs committee of making a "total mockery" of their parliamentary mandate by imposing a Sept. 20th deadline on its subcommittee's study of the issue.

Once it is agreed to remove them, the committee will begin the more complex second part of its mandate

Des membres de l'AFAC
participent à une marche devant
le Parlement contre
l'amendement sur les droits des
Autochtones.

Members of NWAC attend a
march on Parliament against an
Aboriginal Rights Amendment.

1982



Native women take hard line on marriage status question

OTTAWA (CP) — Non-native women married to Indians should be stripped of their Indian status as part of radical changes to the Indian Act proposed Thursday by the Native Women's Association of Canada.

"Why there are people out there who want to become instant Indians is beyond our comprehension," association president Jane Gottfriedson told a Commons subcommittee studying sex discrimination under the federal act.

Non-Indians should never again be allowed to gain Indian status either by marrying an Indian or through adoption, Gottfriedson said on behalf of the association, which represents Indian, Inuit and Metis women.

The association's militant stance goes far beyond the subcommittee's desire to remove a section of the act that now causes women to lose their Indian status when they marry a non-Indian.

and also gain it for their wives and children — long a sore point among native women.

All parties on the subcommittee have indicated a desire to allow Indian women who marry non-Indians to keep their status. But they have not mentioned the possibility of denying status to non-native women who marry Indian men.

The association wants all non-Indians removed from the federal list of persons eligible for benefits under the Indian Act. And non-native women who separate from their Indian husbands should have to leave their reserves.

While the Canadian Human Rights Commission has long supported the Indian women's fight for equality under the act, any attempt to strip non-Indians of their status will likely be opposed by the commission.

Federal human rights commissioner Gordon Fairweather testified Thursday that he was shocked

And Ray Chenier, a member on the subcommittee and parliamentary secretary to Minister John Munro, expressed his disapproval.

"I don't think that's the cause there is an issue now, we should do it or else," said Chenier, a Member of Parliament from the Ontario riding of Timmiskaming.

The act currently provides for women for intermarriage with Indians in a manner not as subtle that South Africa's policy, Gottfriedson said.

A federal commission was formed to study inequalities and possibly expropriation of reserves facing a financial crisis, affecting Indian families, said Chenier.

A cabinet discussion last year estimated the cost of a retroactive reinstatement of status for native women at \$1 billion.

Jane Gottfriedson demande au gouvernement fédéral d'aborder la question de la discrimination sexuelle dans la loi sur les Indiens.

The Phoenix
10 septembre 1982

Jane Gottfriedson calls on the federal government to address sex discrimination in the *Indian Act*.

The Phoenix
September 10, 1982

NATIVE WOMEN

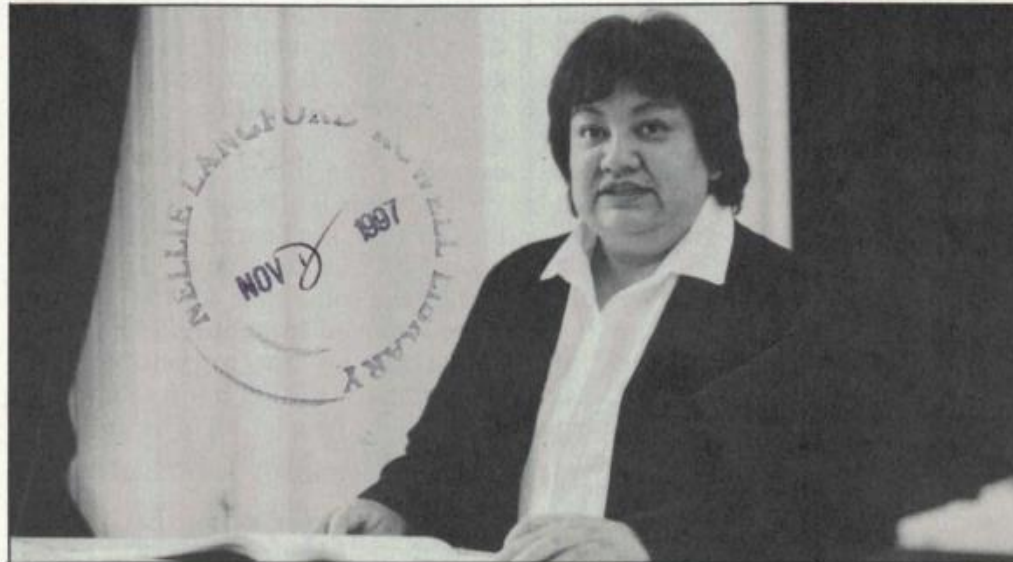
Native Women's Association of Canada, 255 Argyle St., Ottawa Ont. K2P 1B8

236-6057

Message from the President

Although Native women came away from the First Minister's Conference on Aboriginal Rights with a less than explicit statement on equality, the principle has been recognized and affirmed. The hard work and dedication has finally paid off and all of us should take pride in this achievement, no matter how minor it may seem.

But our task is far from complete. During the "on-going" constitutional process many important issues affecting our families and communities will have to be worked out. Family and customary law, mobility rights, language and cultural rights, aboriginal title and land base—these are just some of the issues that are tied up in the constitutional debate and that affect us directly as women, mothers and mem-



Jane Gottfriedson in her address to First Minister's Conference highlights political and social divisions created by the Indian Act.

women take part in these discussions. I urge each and every one of you to lobby your Chief, your Member of Parliament, your Premier for a say in

men and women have a moral duty to generations yet unborn to ensure that life as an aboriginal person is not only possible in the future, but is both satis-

Publication dans le bulletin d'information de l'AFAC d'un mot d'ouverture par la présidente Jane Gottfriedson à propos de la conférence des premiers ministres sur les droits des autochtones.

Vol 1, No. 8

Printemps 1983

Opening message in NWAC's Newsletter from President Jane Gottfriedson on the First Minister's Conference on Aboriginal Rights.

Vol. 1, No. 8

Spring 1983

Wording of accord correct, according to poll of provinces

OTTAWA (CP) - - A federal poll of the provinces shows they all agree the constitutional accord signed last week contains the correct wording of a clause guaranteeing equal rights for native women and men. Justice Minister Mark MacGuigan said in the Commons Monday.

And he added that at least five of the provinces are against changing the wording of the clause to satisfy the concerns of some native groups.

But the storm over the wording, part of a broader constitutional accord signed last Wednesday, continued unabated.

Progressive Conservative MP Frank Oberle said in the Commons Monday that MacGuigan "deliberately deceived" native groups by altering the wording in the final accord after it had been agreed to at a closed meeting of federal, provincial, native and territorial leaders.

And women's groups across the country are being urged to mount a lobby to force the federal and provincial governments back to the table to rewrite the clause.

"There has emerged genuine concern that the wording of last week's accord does not guarantee rights to native women," Ontario Status of Women Council chairman Sally Barnes said in a statement drafted Sunday.

The president of the Native Women's Association of Canada said Monday she believes federal officials substituted their own, more limiting, version of the equality clause after an earlier version was agreed to at a closed meeting.

"I'm really upset," Jane Gottfriedson, president of the association of Indian, Inuit and Metis women, said. "I can't understand how they could do something like that."

The clause was discussed at two closed meetings chaired by MacGuigan, last Tuesday night and Wednesday afternoon. Several sources at the meetings said there was ample room for confusion, the atmosphere was highly charged and, especially Wednesday, time was very limited.

The closed meetings hammered out the details of an overall accord that was then signed Wednesday by Prime Minister Trudeau, all provincial premiers but Quebec and native and territorial leaders.

The accord also requires four more years of talks on aboriginal rights, enshrines land claims and commits governments to consult natives before their rights can be changed in the Constitution.

MacGuigan suggested outside the Commons the confusion of some native groups over the equality wording "may be a way of arguing their case."

The provinces were asked Friday if they agreed the wording was correct and if they would change the accord to meet native concerns.

All provinces said it is correct and only one or two favored making a change now, he said.

MacGuigan said the federal government now is looking to see if "a change of a lesser magnitude" might be acceptable, although that could be discussed at future constitutional negotiations.

The Inuit Committee on National Issues and the Native Council of Canada, both signatories to the accord, have sent messages to Trudeau and provincial premiers expressing concern over the final wording of the equality clause.

Neither group has commented publicly, saying they are afraid the dispute could jeopardize the hard-won accord and its chances of being ratified by Parliament and provincial legislatures.

The clause in the signed accord says: "Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in Subsection (1) are guaranteed equally to male and female persons."

The native council and Gottfriedson say the clause that all parties agreed to at the closed meetings was:

"Notwithstanding anything in this part, the rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are guaranteed equally to male and female persons."

They are concerned because the clause in the accord ties the rights to another subsection of the Constitution that affirms "existing aboriginal and treaty rights."

Metis and non-status Indians fear it may be interpreted that they have few "existing" rights since they have no treaties and aren't eligible to live on reserves or to receive federal benefits.

Existing legislation such as the Indian Act already discriminates against Indian women, rendering the accord "useless," Oberle, MP for the B.C. riding of Prince George-Peace River, said in the Commons.

Federal Secretary of State Serge Joyal said last week the accord offers "more comprehensive protection" since it includes references to treaty rights.

James O'Reilly, a Montreal lawyer at the closed meetings for the Assembly of First Nations, said Monday the wording in the accord is more limiting than that proposed by the native council.

He is unsure himself what version of the equality clause was approved in the Wednesday afternoon meeting, he said in an interview Monday.

No poll was taken among the 17 parties in the room before moving away from the equality issue to other items, nor was the wording available before the formal signing at the conference table about an hour later, he said.

"There was no question there was room for a lot of misinterpretation," he said.

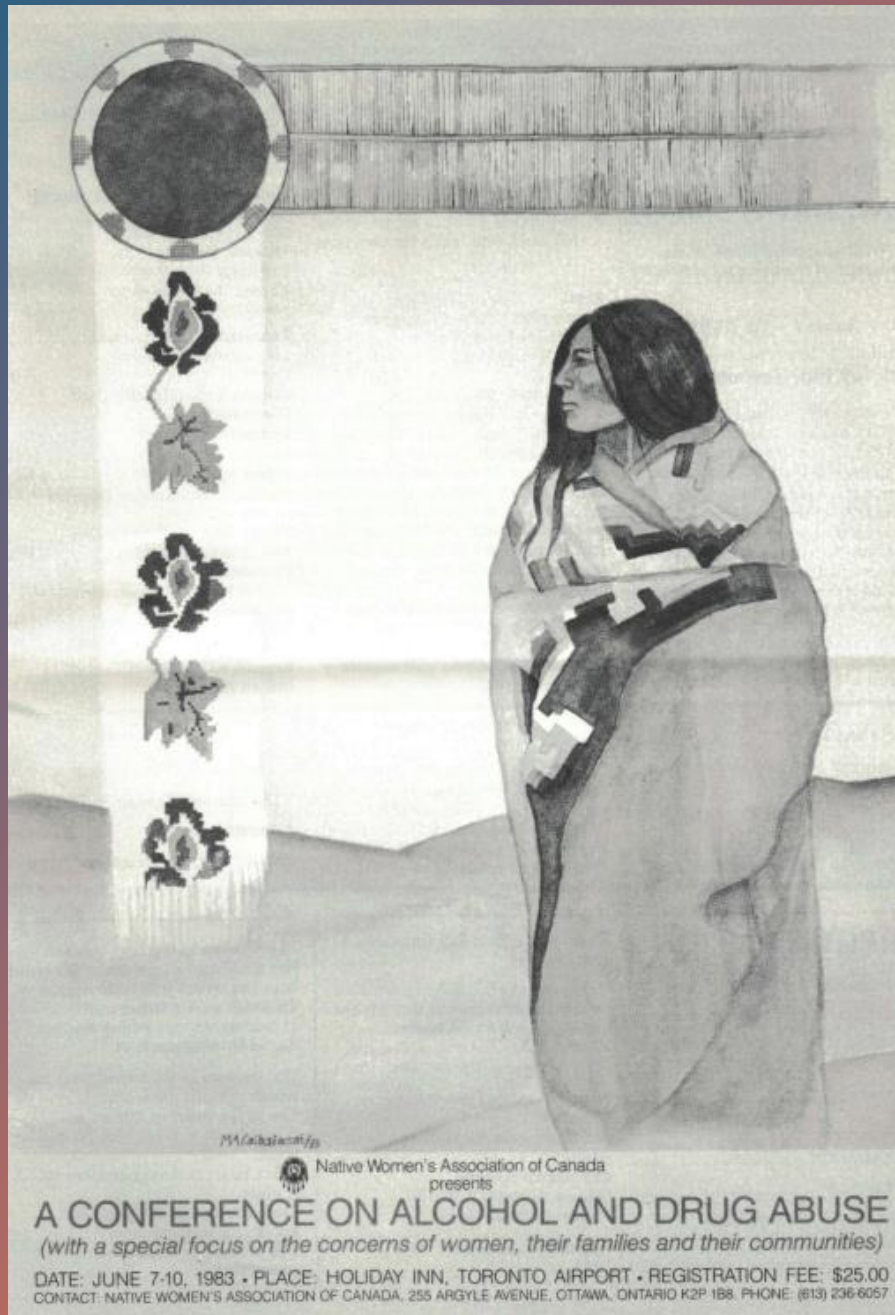
La présidente Jane Gottfriedson évoque les amendements apportés à la version finale de l'Accord constitutionnel, qui ont supprimé les garanties relatives aux droits des femmes autochtones.

The Leader Post
22 mars 1983

President Jane Gottfriedson speaks out about amendments made to the final version of the constitutional accord that removed guarantees for the rights of Indigenous women.

The Leader Post
March 22, 1983





Affiche de l'AFAC pour sa conférence sur la consommation d'alcool et de drogues, axée sur les préoccupations des femmes autochtones, de leurs familles et de leurs communautés.

7-10 juin 1983

NWAC's poster for its conference concerning alcohol and drug consumption with a focus on the concerns of Indigenous women, their families and their communities.

June 7-10, 1983

Indians and native women back reforms

OTTAWA (CP) — The national Indian and native women's associations have patched together an alliance to support proposed legislation to eliminate discriminatory sections of the Indian Act, but only if members of Parliament agree to several major changes.

The news conference by the Assembly of First Nations and the Native Women's Association of Canada is a rare display of unity in an emotionally charged issue that has ripped through the native community since the legislation was tabled

En 1984, l'AFAC a soutenu plusieurs changements majeurs visant à éliminer les articles discriminatoires de la Loi sur les Indiens.

Gazete de Montreal

23 juin 1984

In 1984, NWAC supported several major changes that sought to eliminate discriminatory sections of the Indian Act.

The Montreal Gazette

June 23, 1984

The National Action Committee and The Native Women's Association of Canada

invite you to

The Women's Constitutional Conference

*Protest women's exclusion from the accord!
Women are 52% of the population!
Let's make sure we're part of the solution!*

August 24, 1992 • Noon - 9 p.m.
Reading Room in Center Block
Parliament Hill

For further information please call:

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Donations towards the event are appreciated

Le Comité canadien d'action sur le statut et L'Association des femmes de la femme

vous invitent à

La conférence constitutionnelle des femmes

*Protestons l'exclusion des femmes
Nous sommes 52% de la population
Soyons présentes à part entière*

le 24 août 1992 • 12h00 - 21h00
Salle de lecture • Édifice du
Colline parlementaire

Pour de plus amples renseignements, adressez vous:

CCA Ottawa 613-234-7062 • Toronto 416-759-5252 • AFAC

Les dons envers cet événement sont

Affiche de la Conférence constitutionnelle des femmes organisée par le CCN et l'AFAC pour dénoncer l'exclusion des femmes de l'Accord constitutionnel.

Poster for the Women's Constitutional Conference hosted by NAC and NWAC to protest women's exclusion from the Constitutional Accord.

1992

THE NATIONAL ACTION COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF AND THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF



DEFEND OUR SOCIAL PROGRAMS



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THE WOMEN'S CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE


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Affiche de la Conférence constitutionnelle des femmes organisée par le CCN et l'AFAC pour dénoncer l'exclusion des femmes de l'Accord constitutionnel.

Poster for the Women's Constitutional Conference hosted by NAC and NWAC to protest women's exclusion from the Constitutional Accord.

1992




Mary Two-Axe Early aux
audiences de la Commission
royale sur les peuples
autochtones à Montréal.

Mary Two-Axe Earley at the
hearings of the Royal
Commission on Aboriginal
Peoples in Montréal.

Audrey Mitchell/Library and
Archives Canada/Bibliothèque
et Archives Canada, R2847-
213-2-E, RG33-157

May 1993



NWAC blasts government

By Paul Barnsley
Windspeaker Staff Writer

OTTAWA

When the Indian Affairs department marked the first anniversary of the launch of *Gathering Strength* on Jan. 7, the Liberal government issued a 12-page press release reporting "progress."

"Over the past year, our priority has been to build the foundation for lasting change," Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart said.

Aboriginal leaders, especially national leaders in Ottawa, are worried that some of this "lasting change" won't necessarily be for the better.

Marilyn Buffalo, president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, says a lot of the programs the government points to so proudly are mostly about fulfilling its own agenda.

"There's been an accord with the Métis National Council, with the Congress of Aboriginal People and the Assembly of First Nations," Buffalo said. "We have not received any new money. The Native Women's Association has not been acknowledged, nor are they recognized or given any funding. Is that punishment for refusing to accept the apology? I think so.

I've made every effort over the last year-and-a-half to put proposals to Canada but they haven't been forthcoming."

NWAC refused to accept the government's apology for sexual and physical abuse at residential schools "on behalf of those who could not speak for themselves." Many former students have supported the stand the association took at that time and have been critical of AFN Grand Chief Phil Fontaine for accepting the apology on their behalf.

Not only is the government playing hardball with the national women's organization by not increasing funding or programming, Buffalo said, but Human Resource Development Canada has taken a "very significant" program away from the organization.

An employment and training program exclusively for off-reserve women was administered in all areas of the country and Buffalo says the women will soon have to look elsewhere for that help. Off-reserve groups in various parts of the country are struggling to get their share of employment and training funding. Groups in Manitoba and Ontario have taken the government to court during the last year to force changes in the way the programs are funded.

(see Women page 2.)

La présidente Marilyn Buffalo évoque le manque de financement de l'organisation.

Windspeaker
Février 1999

President Marilyn Buffalo speaks on a lack of funding for the organization.

Windspeaker
February 1999

Women's organization frozen out

(Continued from page 1.)

"They need to increase the funding, not take it away," she said. "It would be nice if our people could have access to resources that have been set aside for First Nations but, unfortunately, we have a population now that's 60 per cent off reserve and the funding doesn't reflect that. It's impossible for a person that's living away from the community to access this money and to top it all off, there's never enough for on-reserve people, anyways."

Observers say the federal government is happy to dodge its fiduciary duty to Aboriginal people by confining its services to reserves where there are no prospects of employment, knowing people will move off the reserve and become the responsibility of the provincial government. The government can claim that it has initiated a number of new programs, Buffalo said, but they haven't changed their attitude towards

Aboriginal people.

"All they're doing is maintaining status quo to appease the minister of finance. There's no real spending increase here," she said. "It's just borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. While Canada is out bragging at the international level, the Aboriginal people who hold title to this territory, particularly Native women and children, are forced to line up at the food banks."

Buffalo slammed Ottawa's self government negotiation process.

"The federal government continues to apply its extinguishment policy and forcing First Nations to borrow money," she said. "They're in hock before they even settle their land claim and part of that is the extinguishment of tax immunity status. That's not acceptable. If you own title to territory why should you have to go in hock to the government before you even start negotiating?"

Women's associations in all

"We have not received any new money. The Native Women's Association has not been acknowledged, nor are they recognized or given any funding. Is that punishment for refusing to accept the apology? I think so."



Marilyn Buffalo.

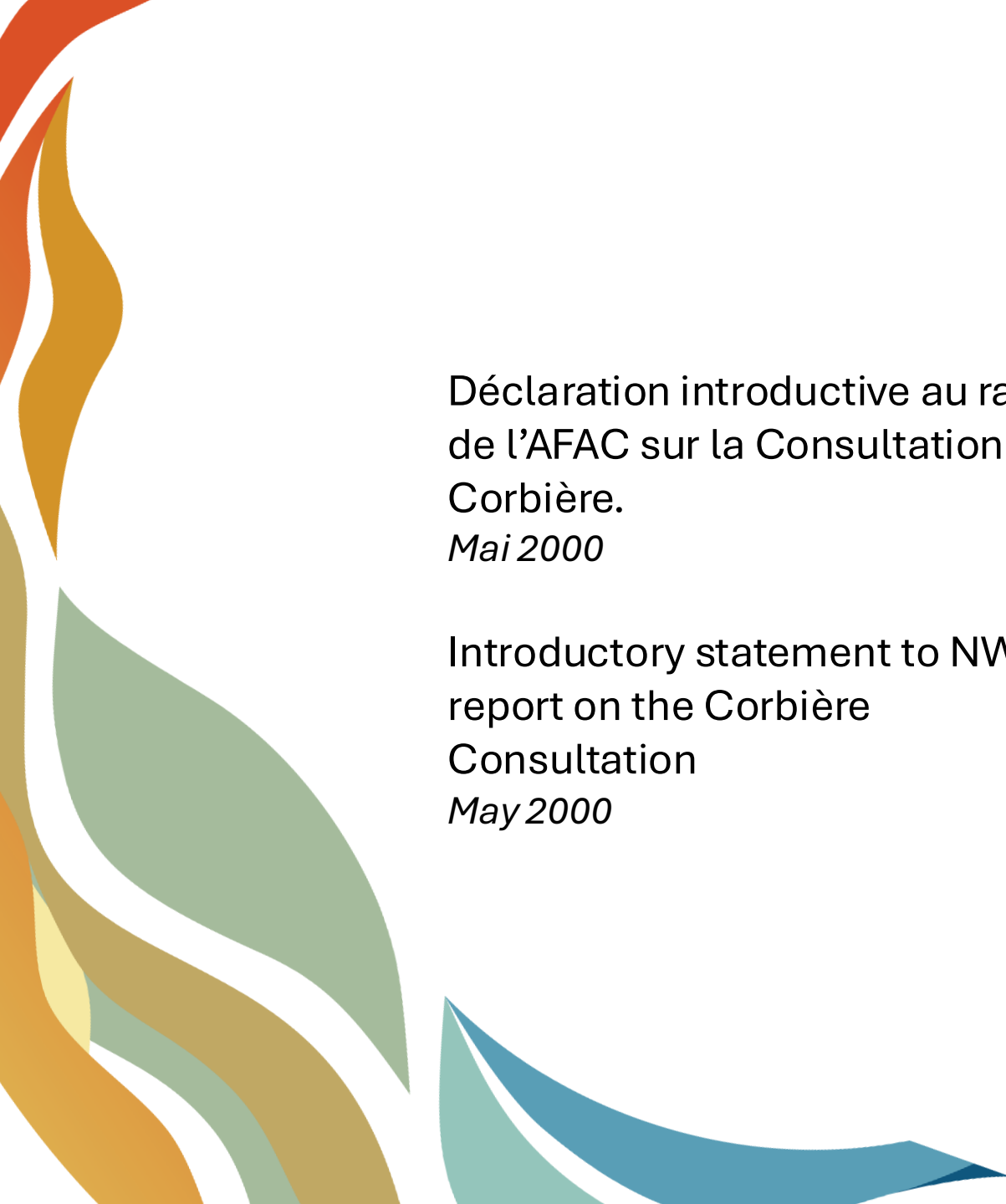
regions of the country are furious with the government for failing to make changes to Bill C-49, *The Land Management Act*, which is due to become law early this year. Buffalo believes this bill is just another way the

federal government is trying to limit its fiduciary obligation by off-loading that responsibly to First Nation governments. She points out that concerns voiced by women who see no provisions for the protection of wom-

en's matrimonial assets on a reserve in the event of a marriage breakdown, have not been addressed by law-makers as the bill goes through the House of Commons.

"The 14 First Nations that are involved in this process have to negotiate a land code with Indian Affairs. They have one year to do this. The problem I see is there's not going to be any uniformity. There's not going to be any national standards set," she said. "It's the same thing they did with Bill-31 where they gave the First Nations two years to come up with membership codes. They dumped the responsibility basically on the First Nations and there was no enforceability, no means to enforce the bill."

An invitation was extended to the AFN to comment on the anniversary of *Gathering Strength* but the AFN did not respond. The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada and the Congress of Aboriginal People also chose not to respond.



Déclaration introductive au rapport de l'AFAC sur la Consultation Corbière.

Mai 2000

Introductory statement to NWAC's report on the Corbière Consultation

May 2000



Native Women's
Association of Canada

May 2000

The Native Women's Association of Canada is honoured and pleased to release the results of its consultation as followup to the *Corbière* decision.

The consultation was held on the territory of the plaintiffs, Sault St. Marie, Ontario, to honour them for their self-sacrifice and tenacious efforts, which resulted in this ground-breaking decision. The consultation was held with the participation of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and the Ontario Metis Aboriginal Association. Participants came from all across Canada, and included status and non-status Indian, and Metis peoples.

The consultation was hard work and all the panelists and participants were up to the task. The result is a list of very practical recommendations that DIAND can begin to act on immediately, in order to facilitate elections and referenda taking place after November 20, 2000. The recommendations are included in this report.

The Native Women's Association of Canada strongly recommends that the government of Canada make strenuous efforts to ensure that the rights of non-resident band members to participate in the democratic processes of their bands are honoured and accommodated without any delay beyond the stipulated deadline, November 20, 2000.

The Native Women's Association of Canada is committed to continuing its involvement during Phase II, and until the full implications of the *Corbière* decision are realized.

The Native Women's Association of Canada wishes to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the panelists, the participants, the staff of the National Office and everyone else who worked hard to make the consultation a success.

Respectfully submitted.

Solutions sought to stamp out hate, racism

By Jeremy Brascoupe
Windspeaker Contributor

MONTREAL

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has launched a one-year campaign—Sisters in Spirit—to lobby the federal government to establish a \$10-million fund for research and education related to violence against Aboriginal women.

The launch was part of Hate and Racism: Seeking Solutions, a four-day conference held March 20 to 23 and hosted by the Indigenous Bar Association (IBA) and Quebec Native Women in Montreal.

The conference heard that between 1988 and 1995, five young Aboriginal women went missing along Highway 16 between Prince Rupert and Prince George, B.C., now commonly referred to as the Highway of Tears. NWAC reports that despite community protests, neither the police nor the media took the disappearances of these women seriously until 2002 when a non-Aboriginal woman disappeared on the same stretch of road.

NWAC also reports that 500 Aboriginal women living in Canada have gone missing over the past 20 years and government, media, and Canadian society as a whole have remained silent about

Aboriginal Nations, a member of the Order of Canada, and the former chief of the Assembly of First Nations, who, in his opening remarks to a gathering in Saskatchewan, made several disparaging remarks about Jews.

Jamieson said on the day of those comments, Aboriginal people lost their innocence.

"Too many of us said [Ahenakew] was victimized; too little said he was wrong."

"After those comments, we organized a symposium on racism," said Mark Stevenson, a Métis lawyer from B.C. who was president of the IBA at the time. At the end of the symposium, it was decided to hold a conference that addressed the issues of hate and racism and possible solutions to eliminate them.

March 21 is the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and March 19 to 28 marked Quebec's fifth annual anti-racism week, with events featured in Montreal, Laval, Quebec City, Sherbrooke and Gatineau.

"We supported Quebec's events," said Stevenson, adding they were a factor in determining when and where the conference would be held.

During a discussion in a non-governmental organization strategy session held at the conference it was decided there is a need for organizations to build a network

added Karen Eltis, interim director of community relations at the Canadian Jewish Congress, Quebec Region.

Many conference participants, including Jamieson and Eltis, said people need to speak out when somebody is a victim of racism.

"We all must speak out when somebody is demonized, even when that person is not of our culture," said Eltis. "When one person or group is demonized, we all are demonized."

"Education is crucial," Assembly of First Nations National Chief Phil Fontaine said to conference participants. "Children need to learn about Canadian history—the real history."

"Racism is a part of Canada's cultural heritage," added Jamieson.

Dr. Bahram R. Shahmardaan, author of "The Journey of Life Eternal," said hate is a result of the combination of "the instinct of self-preservation, the insecurity of the human mind and the force of inertia."

Shamardaan said all creatures, whether plant, insect, animal, human being or society, will strive to preserve and perpetuate who or what they are.

He explained that a nucleus of fear enters the human mind at birth with the sudden separation from the womb and "the gasping for life sustaining air in a radically new environment." This nucleus of fear leads to a closed and inse-

L'AFAC lance la campagne « Sœurs par l'esprit ».

Windspeaker

Mai 2004

NWAC launches Sisters in Spirit Campaign

Windspeaker

May 2004



32e assemblée générale annuelle de l'AFAC

NWAC's 32nd Annual General Assembly

2006



NWAC honours achievements

By Ann Harvey
Windspeaker Writer

OTTAWA

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) chose four exceptional people to honour during the organization's annual general meeting held in Ottawa from Oct. 12 to 14, as this year's Jane Gottfriedson Awards were handed out.

Gottfriedson was a long time activist in British Columbia and a strong member of NWAC. She fought for the dignity and rights of all Aboriginal women and those who knew her remember her for her kindness, strength and mentorship.

The award is given both to honour Gottfriedson's memory, and to spotlight Aboriginal community members who have led in protecting the political and social rights of Aboriginal women.

One of this year's recipients was Gratia Bunnie, the disabled widow of Senator Samuel Bunnie who has been fighting to be allowed to stay in their matrimonial home at Sakimay First Nation with her nine-year-old granddaughter, Cianna. Bunnie was given the award in recognition of that fight.

The issue recently went to court and Sakimay First Nation's application was thrown out but it has since launched an appeal.

Bunnie said she was startled not only by receiving the award but also by the standing ovation she was given. She said she doesn't regard her fight as a fight only for women.

"I don't look at it as standing up for women's rights. I think it's more an issue of nation and of membership. We as First Nations people we need to look at each other as members of a nation, not as members of separate First Nations, because divided we're weak.

"What Sakimay is really telling me is, because my legal spouse is deceased, I am no longer welcome here, despite the fact that this is where my children and my extended children's fathers are from."

Bunnie said her son is living in British Columbia in a house on Cooks reserve. All he had to be was First Nations, a status Indian.

"To me, I'm not only standing up for First Nations women. I think I'm standing up for widows, for widowers, their children and their grandchildren. They have the right to come home to their community, their heritage, their tradition.

"What keeps me in my place more or less is I have a daughter. Her spouse is a Mi'kmaq from Nova Scotia, from a reserve called Shubenacadie reserve. They have a little girl who is a year old. Then my son has a spouse in B.C. who's T'sil' Kotin. They have three daughters together.

If anything were to happen to either my daughter or my son, it would be like me telling my son-in-law or my daughter-in-law, 'Go away. We don't want you.' That's not our tradition. That is not our custom," she said.

As a nation it doesn't make sense to splinter into small groups, she said.

If in order for your children to have membership in your First Nation, both parents have to belong to that First Nation, you're going to eventually wipe your own band out. All I ever wanted from the start was the opportunity to transfer my membership from my own First Nation to my late husband's First Nation.

"Little did I know there was a huge gap in the law that fails to protect men, women, widows, widowers, their children and grandchildren. Now as mothers and grandmothers, we women have to find the strength to take up the fight to protect the rights of these innocent victims."

Another of this year's Jane Gottfriedson Award recipients was Dawn Harvard, who was recognized for the years she had dedicated to improving the lives of Aboriginal families.

In the mid 1990s, Harvard joined the board of directors of the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) as a youth representative. She's remained involved in the association over the years, and now serves as the ONWA's president.

Harvard was the first recipient of the Trudeau Foundation Award in recognition of her work to improve the lives of Aboriginal families, and recently co-authored a parenting book with her mother, Jeanette Corbierre Lavelle, entitled *Until Our Hearts Are on the Ground*.

Alicia May LeGarde was also honoured with a Jane Gottfriedson Award.

LeGarde recently earned her bachelor of arts in nursing from Lakehead University and is currently employed at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Science Centre.

An exceptional student and a talented artist, the 23-year-old serves as a fine role model for other young First Nation people.

Rounding out this year's list of award winners is the only male recipient of the group.

Craig Benjamin was honoured for the many years he has dedicated to the fight for Aboriginal rights.

Through his work with Amnesty International, he helped spearhead the organization's research project focusing on the high numbers of Aboriginal women in Canada that have gone missing or have been murdered, and continues to work closely both with Amnesty International and with NWAC.

L'AFAC remet les prix Jane Gottfriedson à quatre lauréats annuels lors de la 33e assemblée générale annuelle.

Windspeaker

Décember 2007

NWAC hands out the Jane Gottfriedson Awards to four recipients at the 33rd Annual General Assembly.

Windspeaker

December 2007



Workshops raise awareness of SIS campaign

Laura Suthers
Windspeaker Staff Writer

EDMONTON

has been well over three years. Sisters in Spirit (SIS) was created and the campaign has been gaining the public awareness it needs to succeed.

was launched in March 2005 by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) in an effort to educate the public about the high rates of violence against Aboriginal women in Canada.

NWAC signed a five-year agreement with the federal government in November 2005 through SIS, NWAC will work with other Aboriginal women's organizations to promote the rights of Aboriginal women. They will also address the violence that faces Aboriginal women.

Participants of the SIS initiative have been busy with organizing workshops and special events to bring all walks of life together to remember and support the Aboriginal women in Canada that have gone missing or been murdered, a number estimated at around 500. The events are also a forum to explore ways to protect Aboriginal mothers, daughters, and grandmothers.

Last year was the first ever SIS event, which took place on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Since then, communities have been offering their support by hosting their own vigils on Oct. 4 to raise public awareness and to honour the Aboriginal women all over Canada who have been missing or have been murdered.

The second annual SIS vigil was held internationally this year, with vigils in Columbia and Peru. Participants joined the campaign of

awareness by hosting simultaneous vigils in their countries. Both women and men joined together on Oct. 4 on Parliament Hill to draw awareness to the looming question—Why are Aboriginal women being targeted?

The community engagement and youth focused workshops that are held as part of the SIS campaign are geared to ending racialized and sexualized violence against Aboriginal women.

The events also provide participants with the opportunity to learn more about the SIS initiative.

With five workshops already behind them, SIS organizers are gearing up for five more in November.

The workshops are open to community service providers, law enforcement officials, Aboriginal health representatives, community leaders, shelter and group home staff, school representatives, youth, Elders and concerned community members.

One of the SIS workshops was held at the main campus of the Northern Institute of Technology in Edmonton on Oct. 16.

About 20 women attended the event from various organizations such as the Edmonton Native Healing Centre, Métis Child and Family Services, Women Building Futures, the Ermine Skin Women's Shelter, the Elizabeth Fry Society, Alexis First Nation school and the Boys and Girls Club of Edmonton.

The day kicked off with an opening prayer from a local Elder, followed by introductions from the facilitators and workshop participants. SIS, community development co-ordinator Theresa Ducharme briefly talked about the objective of the workshop and the purpose of SIS.

"The main objective for today's event is reaching out to those service providers and to also have

them help us raise awareness because we can't do this alone," said Ducharme. "We have two tool kits that have been developed to distribute to all of the front line workers to help us raise awareness. The toolkits are for the service providers to help the families who want to deal with the media. It's to show them that they do have rights. If they are uncomfortable they don't have to answer."

"Raising awareness is another objective for today and at the same time I feel that every time I'm out there, I feel that I'm teaching on behalf of the families and for the women who are missing that don't have a voice."

Ducharme opened up the floor to the participants to voice concerns and ask questions. It was a little slow getting started but once the women heard what each other had to say, the response was overwhelming.

"What is being done to better the relationship between Aboriginal communities and police?" one participant asked.

Ducharme told the women that's an area NWAC is focusing on.

"Media, police and government need to be educated. We need to deal with the racism and stereotypes," said Ducharme.

Most of the women in attendance were frustrated one way or the other, expressing concerns about the overloaded shelters, a need for better representation of the needs of Aboriginal women.

Half way through the day, Jimmy Hermen, an Aboriginal actor joined the workshop. A little surprised but happy that Hermen was there in support of the Aboriginal women, Ducharme welcomed him.

Windspeaker was able to sit down with Ducharme and ask her to define public awareness and if that awareness includes men.

"It's a huge issue and there's still that silence about it that it actually shocks me, like today," Ducharme said. "It's all women here. We've had a couple men walk in our last workshops. I'm not saying they don't care, but we need to raise that awareness again that we need their help. I'm so glad that Brothers in Spirit formed and I hope it spreads across Canada because we need them to be on board. It's their daughter, granddaughter, their wife or their auntie. I don't understand it."

During a break, Windspeaker caught up with Hermen and asked him how he felt about being the only male in attendance. The irritated look on his face said it all.

"To tell you the truth, angry, really angry, because where are all of the guys who talk big about, oh ya, my sister was hurt or whatever? Where are you, that's my question. It doesn't take much of an effort to come out and spend one or two hours of your time to give support. It just makes me angry. It makes me feel like, am I going to represent all of the men?"

Kari Thomason, a support worker for Project SNUG, a Métis Child and Family Services initiative, attended the workshop to gain more information that could assist her when she's trying to help women working on the street.

The Edmonton Police Service contacts Thomason in most instances before a prostitute is arrested to give the women a chance to get into a program and try to clean up. On call 24 hours a day, Thomason goes out to try to help women get off the streets and out of prostitution.

"Many of the girls have given my name to other working girls," said Thomason.

"If they've only been busted once or twice, it would be a

healthier aspect for them to get into a program and off the street rather than going to jail. Jail does serve a purpose for some of those hard-core girls and some of those hard-core girls have done hard time, so it's like, I don't want to go back to that life. I would rather these girls lose their charges and get off the street and live a healthier and safe lifestyle."

According to Thomason, between 80 and 90 per cent of the women she meets with are Aboriginal and range in age from 18 to 55. Thomason said most of the women are scared they don't want to end up like many of the Aboriginal women who have gone missing or been murdered.

"They call 118 Avenue because that's where most of the girls have gone missing or been murdered. They want to see the girls," said Thomason.

"Many of the girls don't want to leave, they don't want to be dead. For some of the girls, addiction is too high. They get past that at times but until they're fully recovered, the girls simply can't be controlled."

For more than a decade, Thomason has been working with helping women out of prostitution and continue with it, "for the rest of my life."

"If I can see them step closer and closer off that street corner reward," said Thomason.

SIS community workshops are scheduled in Kamloops on Nov. 2, Nanaimo on Nov. 9, Thunder Bay on Nov. 9, Rupert on Nov. 9, The Pas on Nov. 20 and Fredericton on Nov. 22.

For more information on how to register for one of the workshops, call Theresa Ducharme toll-free at 1-800-461-4043 or visit the NWAC Web site at www.nwac-bq.org.

L'AFAC organise cinq nouveaux ateliers dans le cadre de sa campagne « Sœurs par l'esprit ».

Windspeaker

Novembre 2007

NWAC hosts five more workshops through their Sisters in Spirit Campaign.

Windspeaker

November 2007



Veillée annuelle des Sœurs par l'esprit
de l'AFAC organisée sur la Colline du
Parlement.

4 octobre 2009

NWAC's Annual Sisters in Spirit Vigil
hosted on Parliament Hill

October 4, 2009



37ème assemblée générale annuelle de l'AFAC

NWAC's 37th Annual General Assembly

2011



Michèle Audette est élue
présidente de l'Association des
femmes autochtones du Canada.

Windspeaker
Octobre 2012

Michèle Audette is elected as the
new President of the Native
Women's Association of Canada

Windspeaker
October 2012

New NWAC president brings survival experience to the table

By David P. Ball
Windspeaker Contributor

OTTAWA

Michèle Audette's journey in the Indigenous women's movement began right from her birth, she insists, when her mother married a non-Native man and immediately lost her status under now-repealed sections of Canada's Indian Act.

"She was kicked out from her community," Audette recalls. "So we had to live outside our community."

One day, as a child, she went to request funding from the Band Office.

"Ha ha!" she recalls a freckled and fair-skinned boy taunting her. "I'll get funding for the school!"

The boy's mother chimed in with an accusation that has haunted Audette ever since, and changed the course of her life.

"Michèle, you're not Native."

The mother's accusation turned out to be true. Despite speaking her Innu language, going hunting and fishing with her family, and her brown skin, she was no longer legally an Indian. The law's clear discrimination against Native women sparked a women's movement that fought successfully to repeal portions of the Indian Act.

"I realized that the Indian Act was discriminating against women," she said, describing the heady early successes of Indigenous women's activism.

Sitting in an Ottawa boardroom as the newly-elected president of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)—a three-year position that began Aug. 28—the 41-year-old activist says she's equally confident in high-level government meetings as she is surviving in the bush with few amenities.

Survival skills may not be on your typical Ottawa resumé, but for Audette the strength lies in



PHOTO: DAVID P. BALL

Michèle Audette is the new president of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

identity and culture. It's a strength she hopes will keep her grounded as she goes head-to-head with the Canadian government in her quest for Aboriginal women's rights.

"I'm really capable of being up north with no electricity, no running water, no technology—which is good sometimes!" she says, laughing. "And I can sit in the office of the Prime Minister and I'm not afraid, because I know who I am, and I know my culture."

Audette replaces Jeanette Corbiere Lavell as president of NWAC, who led the organization as a respected and high-profile voice on Canada's more than 600 missing and murdered Indigenous women.

Audette comes to her new role with a raft of experience, both as elected leader of Quebec Native Women, but also as Quebec's former associate deputy minister for the Status of Women under former premier Jean Charest.

It's a level of government

in what she describes as "a passion—not just a job"—to end violence against Indigenous women and tackle poverty in many communities.

"My heart beats, of course, to denounce the violence in our communities, and across Canada, for Aboriginal women," she said. "That is a priority for me."

"[I'm] always passionate for Aboriginal women's issues. I think it's going to be until my last breath. I'll be fighting, working and doing stuff for my family and for Aboriginal people."

For the mother of five—three of them boys—she brings to NWAC a passion for community-based solutions that value both men and women, but also a deep respect for female leadership.

"I love to be surrounded by strong women," she said. "It doesn't need to be a woman who has a certificate or a university degree. It could be an Elder in the room who has more wisdom than I do; she has more

"Being surrounded by those women—and men—are part of my actions, they're part of the solution and we need to work together. That's kind of my energy... I do work for women; I do fight to advance the quality of life, for equity, equality and human rights. Yes, I do all that. But in my nation, what I've learned: I gave birth to three beautiful men. They're a part of my life, and I will never, never, never, never think that I have to separate what I'm doing."

The question of Indigenous feminism is a thorny one in Aboriginal communities and amongst academics, with some dismissing it as a Western notion, and others embracing the term. Audette remembers approaching her mother one day to ask if there was an Innu word for feminism. For her, it reinforced the need for men to be part of the solution to end violence against women.

"It doesn't exist in my own Innu language," she said. "But that doesn't mean that we cannot create a new word for it... But

where, when NWAC takes action, men are part of the solution. That's why a community approach is more important than just pushing the men aside."

Tackling poverty is also a major priority for Audette—what she describes as "systemic violence" that is directly linked to Canada's colonization of Indigenous peoples, like violence against women.

"The links are so clear for me," she tells *Windspeaker*. "With the Indian Act, we were totally, totally dispossessed of who we are, our cultural identity, and citizenship. We have no more rights; it's just some delegated power."

"We became completely, completely dependent on the federal government. That, for me, is unacceptable. Plus, the residential schools, and everything that the law brought to us, for me it's systemic violence... I'm tired of being seen as minors in the eyes of the federal government."

And so Audette stares out through the blinds of the NWAC boardroom, which faces out over the downtown core of Canada's capital city, only blocks from the Parliament buildings. She faces hurdles ahead with the federal government recently announcing a minimum 10 per cent cut to dozens of Aboriginal organizations' budgets, including NWACs, and a government and public with little appetite to acknowledge the depths of the injustices experienced by Indigenous women.

In the midst of this struggle, however, Audette is optimistic. Asked what she'd say to Prime Minister Stephen Harper if he were in the room, she replies without hesitation.

"Well, Stephen Harper," she laughs, "you'll hear a lot about me! I won't remain silent!"

"When I wake up every morning, I say 'Thank you' to the Creator, and I'm open to advance another step with other

Veillée annuelle des Sœurs par
l'esprit de l'AFAC organisée sur la
Colline du Parlement.

4 octobre 2013

NWAC's Annual Sisters in Spirit
Vigil hosted on Parliament Hill

October 4, 2013





Veillée annuelle des
Sœurs par l'esprit de
l'AFAC organisée sur la
Colline du Parlement.

4 octobre 2014

NWAC's Sisters in Spirit
Vigil hosted at Parliament
Hill

October 4, 2014



Dawn Lavell-Harvard, présidente de l'AFAC, participe à la veillée annuelle « Sœurs par l'esprit » de l'AFAC.

4 octobre 2015

President Dawn Lavell-Harvard pictured marching at NWAC's Annual Sisters in Spirit Vigil.

October 4, 2015



Gwen Brodsky, avocate de l'AFAC, Shelagh Day de la Commission des droits de la personne et le grand chef Stewart Phillip prennent la parole lors d'une conférence de presse à Vancouver concernant une enquête sur les causes profondes de la violence faite aux femmes autochtones au Canada.

Gwen Brodsky, Counsel to NWAC, Shelagh Day of the Human Rights Committee and Grand Chief Stewart Phillip address a news conference in Vancouver regarding an investigation into the root causes of violence against Indigenous women in Canada.

January 12, 2015

The Canadian Press/Jonathan Hayward

Dawn Harvard-Lavell
(à droit), présidente de
l'AFAC, assiste à la
rencontre de
Claudette Dumont-
Smith, directrice
générale de l'AFAC,
devant les médias sur
la Colline du
Parlement.

Dawn Harvard-Lavell
(right), President of
NWAC looks on as
Claudette Dumont-
Smith, Executive
Director of NWAC,
addresses the media
on Parliament Hill.

The Canadian
Press/Sean Kilpatrick
2015



La président de l'AFAC, Dawn Lavell-Harvard (à gauche), lors d'une rencontre avec la ministre de l'Emploi, MaryAnn Mihychuk, pour discuter du développement du marché du travail et de la nécessité d'augmenter le financement du programme de la SFCEA.

NWAC President Dawn Lavell-Harvard (left) at a meeting with Minister of Employment MaryAnn Mihychuk discussing the labour market development and the need to increase funding for the ASETS program.

2016





43ème assemblée générale annuelle de l'AFAC

NWAC's 43rd Annual General Assembly

2017





Représentants des jeunes de l'AFAC

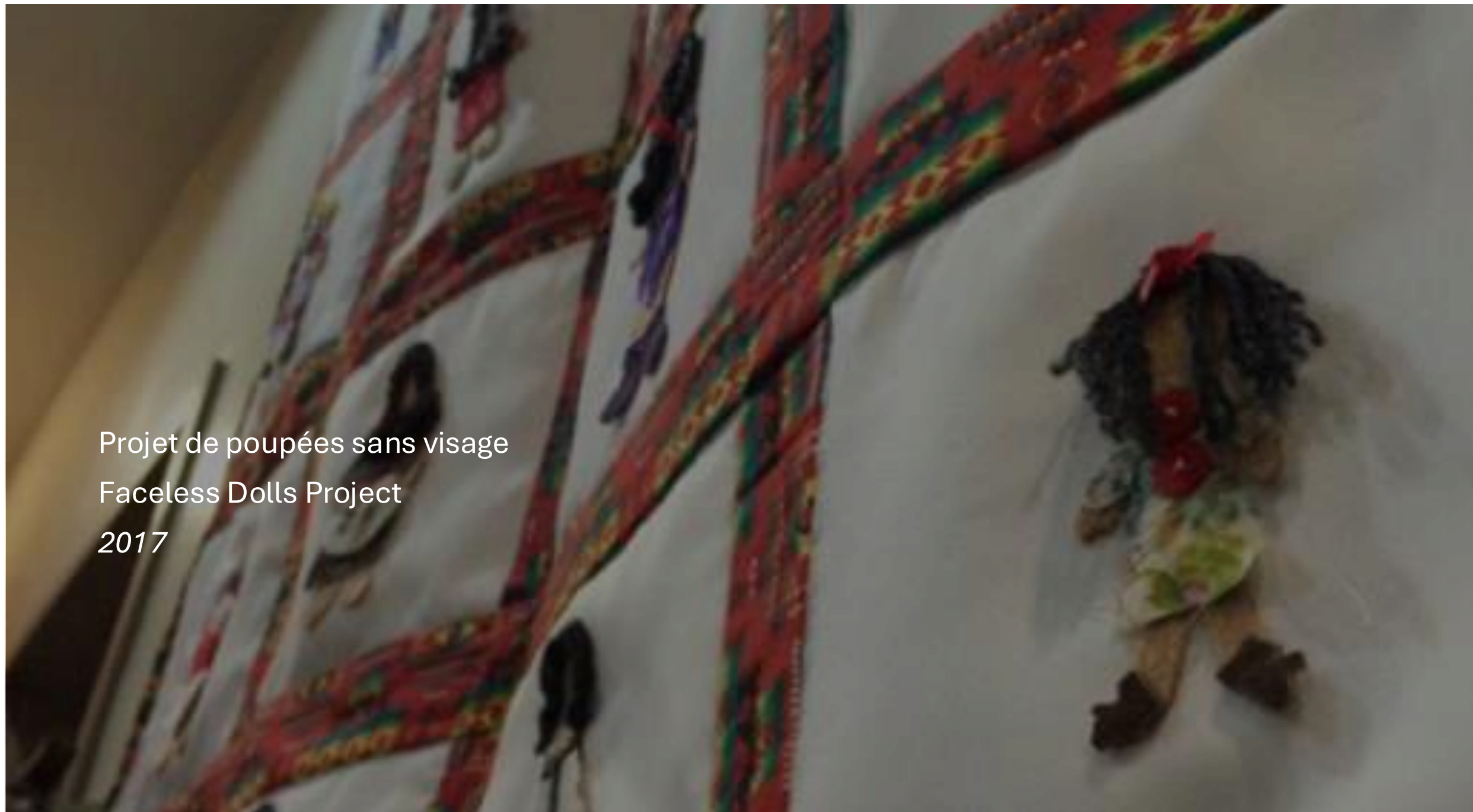
NWAC Youth Representatives

2017

(l-r) Felicia Bailey (YT); Jaylene Delorme-Buggins (NT); Kayla Meeks (ON); Mary Anderson (ON); Kelsey Parks (NL); and Carrington Christmas (NWAC/AFAC).



Projet de poupées sans visage
Faceless Dolls Project
2017





Veillée annuelle des Sœurs par
l'esprit de l'AFAC.

4 octobre 2018



NWAC's Annual Sisters in Spirit
Vigil

October 4, 2018



La présidente
Francyne Joe
assiste à un
sommet des
Nations unies.

President
Francyne Joe
attending a UN
Summit

2018



44ème assemblée générale
annuelle de l'AFAC



NWAC's 44th Annual General
Assembly

2018



Veillée annuelle des Sœurs par l'esprit de l'AFAC. 2019

NWAC's Annual Sisters in Spirit Vigil 2019





L'ancienne présidente Michèle Audette lors d'une cérémonie organisée par le gouvernement fédéral à l'issue de l'Enquête nationale sur les femmes et les filles autochtones disparues et assassinées.

Former President Michèle Audette at a ceremony held by the federal government on the end of the National Inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

2019



Francyne Joe et Carolyn Bennet, ancienne ministre des Relations Couronne-Autochtones, signent l'accord entre le Canada et l'AFAC.

1 février 2019

President, Francyne Joe, and former Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Carolyn Bennett, signing the Canada-NWAC Accord.

February 1, 2019



La présidente Lorraine Whitman en compagnie du premier ministre Justin Trudeau après une cérémonie de citoyenneté à l'Université Acadia. Lors de la cérémonie, la présidente Whitman a souligné l'importance de l'inclusion et de la diversité.

4 mars 2020

President Lorraine Whitman with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau after a citizenship ceremony at Acadia University. President Whitman spoke at the ceremony about the importance of inclusivity and diversity.

March 4, 2020



La présidente Lorraine Whitman (à gauche) en photo avec l'aînée Madeline Condo (à droite) et la sénatrice Rosemary Moodie (au milieu) après une réunion sur la protection et le bien-être des enfants autochtones.

10 mars 2020

President Lorraine Whitman (left) photographed with Elder Madeline Condo (right) and Senator Rosemary Moodie (middle) after meeting to discuss the protection and welfare of Indigenous children.

March 10, 2020



La grand-mère Roberta Oshkawbewisens se promène au milieu d'une exposition de robes rouges en l'honneur de la Journée des Sœurs par l'esprit.

Octobre 2021

Grandmother Roberta Oshkawbewisens walking amongst a display of red dresses in honour of Sisters in Spirit Day.

October 2021



Ouverture du nouveau siège de l'AFAC
Opening of NWAC's New Headquarters
2022



L'AFAC organise la Journée de la vérité et de la
réconciliation au siège national
30 septembre 2022

NWAC hosts a Truth and Reconciliation Day Event at
the National Headquarters
September 30, 2022



La présidente Carol McBride en photo avec l'ancienne présidente de l'AFAC, la sénatrice Michèle Audette, après une réunion au siège de l'AFAC.

5 octobre 2022

President Carol McBride photographed with former NWAC President Sen. Michèle Audette after a meeting at NWAC's Headquarters.

October 5, 2022

La présidente Carol McBride lors d'un déjeuner
avec Son Excellence la gouverneure générale
Mary Simon (en haut) et le Premier ministre
Justin Trudeau (en bas).

24 avril 2023

President Carol McBride pictured at a luncheon
with Her Excellency Governor General Mary
Simon (top) and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau
(bottom).

April 24, 2023



La présidente, Carol McBride, rencontre le Dr. Ivan Zinger, enquêteur correctionnel, sur les questions de surreprésentation des femmes autochtones dans les établissements correctionnels fédéraux.

President Carol McBride meeting with Dr. Ivan Zinger, Correctional Investigator, on issues of overrepresentation of Indigenous women in federal corrections facilities.

April 25, 2023



La président Carol McBride et la
Rapporteuse spéciale sur les
formes contemporaines
d'esclavage lors de leur rencontre
à Gatineau.

President Carol McBride and
Special Rapporteur on
Contemporary Forms of Slavery
Tomoyo Obokata at their meeting
in Gatineau.

2023





(de gauche à droite) Aînée Constance, Angelina Perea, Amy Sock et Dawn McDonald assistent en tant que déléguées de l'AFAC à la 68e session de la Commission des Nations de la condition de la femme à New York.

12 mars 2024

(left to right) Elder Constance, Angelina Perea, Amy Sock, and Dawn McDonald attending as NWAC delegates at the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York City.

March 12, 2024



Présidente Carol McBride (à droite) en photo avec la députée Leah Gazan (à gauche) lors de la 68e session de la Commission des Nations Unies sur la condition de la femme à New York.

12 mars 2024

NWAC President Carol McBride (right) photographed with MP Leah Gazan (left) at the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York City.

March 12, 2024



La première vice-présidente, Gena Edwards, représentante nationale des jeunes, Angelina Perea, et Cheryl Alexander, membre du conseil d'administration, lors de la 23e session de l'Instance permanente des Nations unies sur les questions autochtones à New York (à gauche). Également en photo avec Caron, présidente du Ralliement national des Métis (à droite), et Woodhouse, Cheffe nationale de l'APN (au milieu).

15-18 avril 2024

First VP, Gena Edwards, National Youth Representative, Angelina Perea, and Board Member Cheryl Alexander at the 23rd session of the United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues in New York. Also photographed with Métis National Council President Caron (Right) and AFN National Chief Woodhouse (Middle).

April 15-18, 2024



50e assemblée
générale annuelle
de l'AFAC

NWAC's 50th
Annual General
Assembly

September 20, 2024

50e assemblée générale
annuelle de l'AFAC

NWAC's 50th Annual General
Assembly

September 21, 2024



La président Carol
McBride en entrevue
lors de la 50e AGA de
l'AFAC.

President Carol
McBride being
interviewed at
NWAC's 50th AGA

September 2024

