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Statement submitted by Native Women’s Association of Canada, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

We, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), stand committed to addressing the ongoing poverty and discrimination faced by Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender-Diverse+ (WG2STGD+) Peoples in Canada. These disparities and challenges are in direct contradiction to the principles of gender equality and empowerment, which Canada recognizes as vital for building better futures for all. We also emphasize the significance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in addressing these issues.

Poverty and Discrimination Against Indigenous Peoples

It is imperative to recognize that deep discrimination against Indigenous Peoples permeates all aspects of their lives, particularly in the realms of poverty, housing, and health. Data from the 2021 Census indicates that the poverty rate for Indigenous peoples living in the provinces was 11.8 per cent in 2020, significantly higher than the 7.9 per cent rate for Canadians living in the provinces, excluding First Nations living on reserves.

This alarming disparity extends to housing, with First Nations people and Inuit, especially those living on reserves, being more likely to live in houses in need of major repairs. First Nations people (19.7 per cent) and Inuit (26.2 per cent) were most likely to live in houses in need of major repairs, while First Nations on reserve were approximately 25 per cent more likely than those off reserve to live in a household in need of major repairs. Also, importantly, 17.1 per cent of Indigenous peoples lived in crowded housing, impacting their well-being and quality of life. In healthcare, hospitalization rates for mental illness are considerably higher in Indigenous communities, with rates three times higher for First Nations, 2.2 times higher for Inuit, and 2.1 times higher for Métis.

The tragic death of Atikamekw woman Joyce Echaquan in a Québec hospital in September 2020 due to racism, misogyny, and neglect, further highlights the profound impact of anti-Indigenous systemic racism. In response to this incident, Joyce's Principle, aligned with Article 24 of UNDRIP, seeks to ensure Indigenous Peoples' rights to equitable access to all social and health services without discrimination. We call upon the Government of Canada to urgently develop a costed, measurable action plan to implement the 231 Calls for Justice, recognizing these as legal imperatives under international and national legal obligations.

We also stress the need to increase funding for projects and programs that provide Indigenous WG2STGD+ Peoples access to safe housing, shelter, legal assistance, and healing services, thereby addressing the economic disparities and discrimination faced by Indigenous communities.

Sustainable Gender Financing and UNDRIP Application

UNDRIP plays a crucial role in addressing economic and human rights issues for Indigenous Peoples. Section 3 of UNDRIP enacts the right to self-determination for Indigenous communities, while Sections 5, 20, and 21 provide economic human rights for Indigenous Peoples. In this context, it is disheartening to note that Minister Patty Hajdu announced budget cuts for Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) in August 2023.

The proposed budget cuts, decreasing ISC's spending from \$39.6 billion to \$16.9 billion in 2024–2025 and \$16 billion in 2025–2026, are concerning. NWAC urges for the strict application of the principles outlined in UNDRIP, emphasizing the

need for core and sustainable funding. This funding must be directed to national and regional Indigenous women's and 2SLGBTQIA people's organizations, with a focus on combatting and preventing violence against them.

Obstacles to Economic Empowerment for Indigenous Peoples

Economic disparities and discrimination continue to plague Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender-Diverse+ Peoples. As of 2021, unemployment rates for Indigenous people were approximately 4.1 per cent higher than those for non-Indigenous individuals, with a 3 per cent difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. In 2016, it was found that while Indigenous women-owned 69 per cent of Indigenous businesses, they received only 31 per cent of funding directed toward Indigenous businesses.

Adverse conditions stemming from colonization and paternalistic government approaches have created an environment where Indigenous WG2STGD people are politically disenfranchised and economically marginalized. As a result, they face significant barriers to economic resiliency, including funding inequities, limited employment opportunities, and insufficient programs for professional training.

Indigenous entrepreneurs must overcome substantial hurdles, including Indian Act legislation that impedes business development on reserves and the inability to qualify for loans from mainstream financial institutions due to a lack of collateral/equity. The lack of credit history, education, and limited access to markets in rural and remote areas further complicate matters.

For Indigenous Women, additional challenges abound, encompassing a lack of financial resources or assets to start or expand businesses, financial literacy, personal confidence, awareness of available resources and opportunities, and the absence of programs specifically tailored to their needs. These hurdles perpetuate systemic barriers in accessing male-dominated fields.

Internet Connectivity in Indigenous Communities

Access to reliable high-speed internet is a vital tool in the modern world. It is essential that all Indigenous communities, including those in rural, remote, and reserve areas, have access to rapid and reliable internet connectivity. Regrettably, many Indigenous communities continue to be underserved, lacking the infrastructure needed to offer high-quality fixed broadband services. This lack of connectivity has been a long-standing barrier to education, healthcare, and economic growth in these communities.

In conclusion, gender equality is not only a pressing moral and social issue but a critical economic challenge. By closing the gender gap, we can make development stronger and more sustainable. The global economy's potential for growth could increase significantly by granting women the same equity as men in the labor market. To achieve this, we must prioritize political leadership, investments, and comprehensive policy reforms to dismantle systemic barriers.

NWAC calls upon the Government of Canada to address these disparities, recognize Indigenous Peoples' rights and the obligations outlined in UNDRIP, and commit to core and sustainable funding to combat violence, support economic empowerment, and provide essential services to Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender-Diverse+ Peoples. Only through collective action can we create a more inclusive, equitable, and just society, ultimately achieving gender equality.

Notes and references:

Other Consulted sources:

<https://ngocsw.org/ngocsw68/>

<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/u-2.2/FullText.html>

<https://believe.earth/en/10-ways-to-promote-gender-equality-in-daily-life/>

<https://ecosoc.un.org/en/about-us/ecosoc-subsiary-bodies/functional-commissions/CSW/documentsaction-during-2023-session>

<https://www.cepal.org/en/news/womens-affairs-ministers-and-authorities-latin-america-and-caribbean-will-meet-reaffirm>

NWAC Policy Briefs

- Statistics On Poverty And Inequality
- ISC Budget Cuts
- Health Inequities
- Employment Barriers/Equity
- It Skill And Training For Indigenous Peoples
- Internet Connectivity In Indigenous Communities
- Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs

NWAC Final Report: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Act Implementation-April 14, 2023 (legal unit)
