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Ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls must be a priority for Canadians in election year

OTTAWA - With federal political parties preparing for an election year, Amnesty International and the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) are calling on Canadians to help make ending violence against Aboriginal women and girls a priority for all politicians. Our organizations will be working with women's organizations and other allies across Canada to ensure that all parties make tangible commitments to end violence against Indigenous women and girls in the upcoming election.

Recently released RCMP statistics report the murder of 1017 Aboriginal women and girls between 1980 and 2012, with more than 100 others remaining missing under suspicious circumstances or for unknown reasons.

NWAC President Michèle Audette told a press conference on Parliament Hill today. "Each woman was somebody. She was also somebody's sister, daughter, mother, or friend and every one of them deserved to be safe from violence. They deserve more from our Government than excuses and a patchwork of underfunded and inadequate programs and services. We need solutions and actions that will make a difference in women's lives."

Alex Neve, Secretary-General of Amnesty International Canada said, "Instead of committing to the kind of comprehensive, concerted response that is so urgently needed, successive governments have rolled out the same piecemeal approach that has failed to provide Aboriginal women and girls the protection they need. Momentum for meaningful action is building across Canadians but we need more Canadians to speak out."

Ten years ago, Amnesty International published its major research report, *Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous women in Canada*. The report followed a nation-wide campaign by NWAC to focus attention on the severe threats facing Aboriginal women and girls. At the time, all parties in the House of Commons publicly acknowledged the need for action.

A full decade later, however, government response continues to fall short of what is required by the extreme scale and severity of this violence. Recommendations by Indigenous women's organizations—including a widely supported call for an independent national public inquiry—continue to be ignored.

On October 4th, vigils will be held in scores of communities across Canada and across the globe to honour the lives of Aboriginal women and girls lost to violence. The vigils are being coordinated by NWAC, and organized by community groups and affected families, with the support of a wide range of human rights, social justice, and faith organizations.

Amnesty International and NWAC are urging the federal government to work with Aboriginal organizations to implement a comprehensive national action plan, in keeping with Canada's international human rights obligations, and for this plan to be informed an independent national public inquiry to finally get at the root causes.

Beatrice Vaugrante, Director-General of Amnistie International Canada Francophone said, "International human rights standards require governments to do everything in their power to stop violence against women. In this case, the standard of action already identified by international human rights mechanisms is for Canada to hold an independent public inquiry and implement a systematic, coordinated national action plan."

Michèle Audette said, "We don't want to have to come to Parliament year after year, mourning the deaths of hundreds more of our women and girls. We stand united with other Canadians demanding real action now."

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is founded on the collective goal to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations and Métis women within First Nation, Métis and Canadian societies. As a national organization representing Aboriginal women since 1974, NWAC's mandate is to achieve equality for all Aboriginal women in Canada.

Amnesty International is a global movement of over 3 million people in more than 150 countries working together to protect and promote human rights. Our vision is of a world in which all governments respect and uphold the rights enshrined in international human rights instruments such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, and the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

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