

**Native Women's
Association of Canada**

***NWAC Workshop on Reclaiming Our Nations
Initiative:
Nation-Building and Re-Building – Gathering
Women's Wisdom***

Community Awareness and Engagement

Native Women's Association of Canada - Youth

**Prairie Land Centre of Excellence
595 Broadway
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Tuesday, November 22, 2011**

Background:

Through activism, policy analysis and advocacy, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) works to advance the well-being of Aboriginal women and girls, as well as, their families and communities. This work includes identifying gaps in the equal enjoyment of human rights by Aboriginal women and mobilizing action to address these gaps. A fundamental premise of NWAC's work is that the civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights of Aboriginal peoples cannot be realized without identifying the gender impacts of laws and policies applied to Aboriginal peoples and addressing the needs of Aboriginal women, in a culturally relevant way.

Prior to first contact, many Aboriginal societies were matriarchal and matrilineal in nature and focused on family, community and the continuity of tradition, culture and language. Aboriginal women were central to all of this as the first teachers in the home, as the healers, and as the givers of life.

While Aboriginal men and women had distinct roles, their roles were equally valued. The need to restore the value of Aboriginal gendered roles has motivated the development of culturally relevant gender-based analysis (CRGBA). CRGBA is a tool for use by anyone to assess policy, programs, projects, and/or legislation towards achieving more equitable outcomes for women and men and their families.

NWAC applies a gender perspective to human rights issues to ensure that decision-makers of all kinds - political leaders, judges, officials in all governments at all levels - are aware of equality gaps and issues that affect Aboriginal women and girls and have continued to do so with respect to the nation-building and re-building process.

NWAC and our Provincial/Territorial Member Associations have established positive reputations and have thorough structures in place to reach many women and their communities across Canada. NWAC has engaged and informed women, youth and Elders and their communities in discussions on nation-building, citizenship, and the relationships between our members, communities and Nations. Given that NWAC is also familiar with cultural practices, governance issues, protocols and traditions while dealing with First Nations, we were well placed to build on these established respectful relationships and have successful sessions with women on this important issue.

NWAC has facilitated a national dialogue on First Nations citizenship and membership. The dialogue was funded by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada as part of the Exploratory Process to respond to the range of issues related to Indian Registration, membership and First Nation Citizenship. In addition to holding Workshops, and asking women to identify issues that they have

experienced regarding Indian Registration within the Indian Act, we have asked women to fill out Questionnaires to provide us with their views on Nation-Building for our future generations.

**NWAC Workshops on Citizenship and Nation-Building and Re- Building –
Common Remarks**

First Nations were organized on the basis of Indigenous Nations with distinct structures of government. These structures included Hereditary Systems, Clan Systems, Federations, Confederacies and Military Systems, Economic and Cultural relationships and alliances among all Nations. The current *Indian Act* structure of reserves and the governance on reserves that have resulted from the imposition of the *Indian Act* does not reflect First Nations political, legal, or traditional governance. There is general consensus among First Nations that this situation must change.

At every session that was held, our participants have indicated that this process was only one small step in the process that needs to continue to happen among First Nations Peoples in discussing the issue of citizenship, membership, identity and Nationhood.

Participants at every session expressed concern with an Exploratory Process that lasts from April to November 2011, and stated that it was insufficient time to reflect on how we can move from the systemic barriers within current Indian Registration legislation within the *Indian Act* and policies within the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, to true methods of Nation-Building among our communities across the country.

Women repeatedly indicated that there needs to be a one-year, two-year, five-year, ten-year workplan and ongoing process for collaboration and meetings between the Government of Canada and First Nations' Governments and among First Nations' women both on and off reserves, their families and communities and for our leadership to continue to gather information, discuss options and to strategize on how to move forward.

Our women have indicated that we need to focus on rebuilding and supporting our governance structures, supporting women's participation in decision-making and increasing women's participation and inclusion in any consultations that occur to strengthen our Nations. They have also acknowledged that there are best practices across the country for inclusive approaches to citizenship and we need to continue to build on these positive efforts.

We have been told that in order for further positive change to take place, there needs to

be full engagement of our people, our communities, and our Nations. First Nations must be able to determine the tools they need to develop inclusive and healthy Nations, based on the fulfillment of our rights to self-determination and by affirming effective, efficient and successful First Nations governments.

Participants repeatedly reiterated that the Government of Canada needs to take a broader and more inclusive approach to Indian Registration, expanding on the scope, beyond Bill C- 3 *Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act*, which was identified as a narrow interpretation to the *McIvor* decision. They also stated that the Government needs to commit to an in depth process to explore the complex and broader issues related to citizenship, membership and identity.

Comments were routinely made criticizing the current limiting exclusions from Indian Registration by the double mother rule and with the problematic policies that are currently implemented with the Unstated and Unrecognized Paternity that require a father to sign the birth registration where the couple is not married, in order for the child to receive full or accurate registration.

NWAC spoke about the need for a process that must include adequate funding for National Aboriginal Organizations in order to respond to the numerous requests, complaints, and emails that came in to the organization about the problems women are facing. The demands were many and quite regular from people calling NWAC for help. Often people expressed their preference to call NWAC rather than the Department because they would be assured that their requests would be responded to, whereas, they had been waiting for months to hear back from the Manitoba Registration Office.

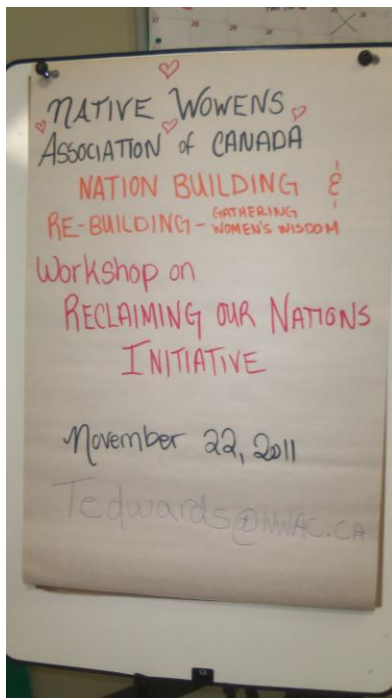
Our Provincial/Territorial members also requested that more funding should go to them to empower provincial and territorial organizations, and First Nations generally, to engage fully with the grassroots communities in exploring all possible solutions given the complexities of the issues. They would require additional funds to help them to come to a consensus on as many issues as possible over the coming years and not simply for an eight-month Exploratory Process.

Many women referred specifically to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the standard for a principled framework for partnership between First Nations and the Government of Canada. The Declaration's principles of partnership and respect can guide this work.

Participants affirmed that Article 3 of the UN Declaration: "Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By Virtue of that right they freely determine their political

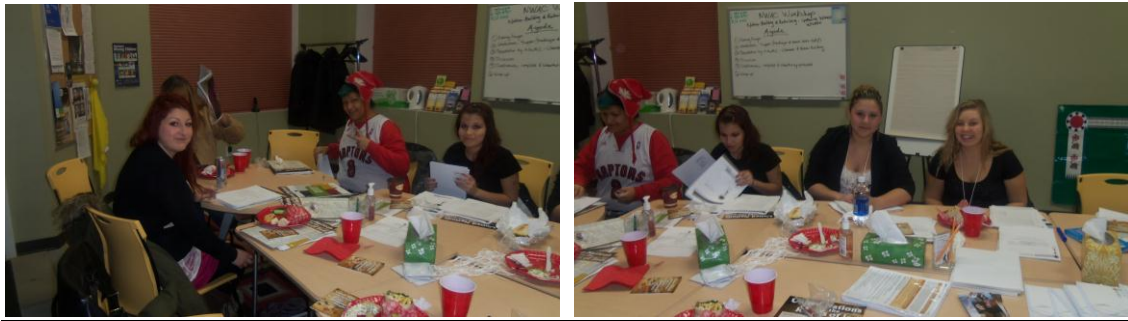
status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” There are numerous articles that affirm the right of self-determination, including related rights to lands, resources and territories and to indigenous cultural traditions and customs and systems of governance in all aspects of life. One of the general provisions of the Declaration sums up the vision of the advocates who fought for the adoption of the Declaration. It is Article 43, which states that, “The rights recognized herein constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.”

The women, men and Elders repeatedly reminded us that it is our right to determine our own membership according to traditional and historical practices, and which are affirmed in our Treaties, and is a fundamental right of every one of our Nations. Our citizenship and identity must be enforced and maintained by our own Peoples and not determined by the Government of Canada.



Creating a Movement for Change – Guiding Principles Established for Nation-Building/ Reiterated at Workshops:

- **Establish a Vision for the Future:** Create a shared vision and establish a mandate for change, backed by the people, the Council and the Chief, and all leaders, making sure it is inclusive of women, youth, Elders and families.
- **Map Your Journey:** Identify how you intend to achieve your community’s vision, adjust the plan when needed to overcome challenges.
- **Exercise Your Rights and Live Your Culture:** Learn your rights and responsibilities, your inherent and Treaty rights and exercise your rights by living your culture, understanding women and men, Elders and youth all have important roles.
- **Moving Away from the *Indian Act*:** Take the time to choose and develop your own governance structures that are community-based and community-paced, inclusive and not exclusive of our women, children and grand-children.
- **Strengthening Governance at all Levels:** Make laws that benefit all citizens and reflect culture, and establish government to government relationships based on respect.
- **Make Progress and Achieve Outcomes:** By being engaged in the economy and having control of our traditional lands, while governing according to our traditions and customs we can achieve outcomes, establish nation-to-nation relations and restore our nations to the thriving communities they once were.





NWAC Workshop on the Reclaiming Our Nations Initiative
Nation-Building and Rebuilding – Gathering Women's Wisdom

595 Broadway Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba

November 22, 2011
5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Make Your Voice Be Heard!!

Agenda

1. Opening Prayer by Elder Barbara Nepinak
2. Introductions – Supper will be provided.
3. Presentation by the Native Women's Association of Canada – Citizenship and Nation-Building
4. Discussion
5. Questionnaires Completed and submitted by Participants
6. Wrap-Up

Reclaiming Our Nations Initiative Workshop: Youth Voice

Nation-Building and Rebuilding- Gathering Women's
Wisdom



TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2011
5:30PM-8:00PM
595 BROADWAY AVENUE
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

*The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) would like to invite Aboriginal Women and Trans Women **Ages 16-29** to take part in a workshop on the Reclaiming our Nations Initiative. During this workshop the NWAC will be presenting on Nation Building, what it means, why it's important and what kinds of steps we can take to building and rebuilding our nations.*

Please come out and share your thoughts, experiences and voice with us and in appreciation for your time, travel and energy we would like to offer a dinner and a small gift for all registered participants

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Only 20 Spots Available

Please Contact Jade Harper, jharper@nwac.ca OR Call/TEXT (204) 952 4462

Registered participants will receive a confirmation via e-mail with an attachment including the Agenda, Background Information and Workshop Logistics.

Meeting Highlights

This workshop was held at Prairieland Centre of Excellence on Broadway Street, in Winnipeg, Manitoba on Tuesday, November 22, 2011. One of the staff members, who work for the Native Women's Association of Canada, but who resides in Winnipeg, was able to help organize this meeting with the youth and trans-gender community.

Our Elder for the evening was Barbara Neepinak, a well-respected Ojibway Elder, who is a member of the Pine Creek First Nations, and currently resides in Winnipeg with her husband Clarence, who is also a respected Elder.

Overall there were 15 participants from all over the Winnipeg area and can be described as a dynamic, experienced and educated group of young women, who provided a wealth of information which contributed to an interesting discussion.

The NWAC Facilitator explained that she has been facilitating a national dialogue on First Nations citizenship and membership. The dialogue was funded by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada as part of the Exploratory Process to respond to the wide range of issues related to the Indian Registration, membership and First Nation Citizenship.

She began by giving a brief history of Aboriginal peoples prior to first contact; in that many Aboriginal societies had been Matrilineal and Matriarchal in nature and focused on family, community, tradition, culture and language and then touched on the changes that the Indian Act and Indian Registration have altered our societies.

Then there was group discussion on the long term consequences to communities who had children put in residential school and what this action did to those Aboriginal communities.

Next there was a discussion surrounding the events leading to changes in the law regarding Indian Registration. One of the first changes noted was the Double Mother Rule which was enacted in 1951, followed nearly 23 years later in 1974 with the now famous Jeanette Lavell case.

There was a change in the legislation in 1984, when Bill C-31 was adopted into law in 1985. Since then we have had the changes to the Indian Act with Bill C-3 but that still did not address the discrepancy in Indian Status with regard to **S.6 1 (c) and (d)**. The women discussed how taking complaints seems to be the only way that real change

occurs in Canada regarding Indian Registration and they were supportive of Ms. McIvoer bringing the issue to the UN. They are awaiting the results.

The participants discussed the problem with having only one National Indian Registrar with the authority and discretion to decide who is and isn't Indian under the Indian Act. The group also discussed the many pitfalls to the application process for Indian Registration, prior to Bill C-3 and still today. There are barriers for women who have to pay for the cost of birth certificates when applying for Indian Status and the forms are very onerous for anyone to fill out. Also, the group discussed many of the delays they have faced in the application process.

The group discussed how the Government of Canada continues to do things unilaterally such as in May of 2011, when the department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada (INAC) decided on a name change while many of the Aboriginal Groups were at the United Nations on the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York City, leaving no one from the Aboriginal leadership to input in the decision or to respond to this action taken by the newly named Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC).

In June 2011 the Canadian Human Rights Act applies on reserves, yet the women still did not see any implementation or effect happening at the community level. Discussions ensued regarding the Government's further imposition of the Matrimonial Real Property Law S-2 on Indian reserves, with little to no regard for the many recommendations from First Nations.

The group discussed what it means to them to be Aboriginal/First Nations, and this led to the topic of the specific roles held by Aboriginal men, women and youth.

NWAC went through the survey with the women, asking one question at a time, allowing the discussion to flow, and to include or change anything that the women deemed necessary within the Women's Circle.

Elders are identified and acknowledged and then we can take them into account. The inclusion of language and the need for cultural traditions to be maintained was a paramount concern. Also mentioned was maintaining our art, sculpture, and our unique literature and poetry.

Identity was the next topic and the participants were asked to place themselves in this world by asking answering simple questions about themselves. Who is your family? Where are you from? Who is your Nation?

The discussion turned to the roles and responsibilities of community, family and yourself. It is a mother's responsibility to empower her children and to instill pride. The focus should remain on the children and youth; this reaffirms us.

The youth indicated that we have to continue to build our traditional and cultural knowledge. Be very careful as to what you hear and choose what is right for you. Remember it's more than 7 teachings – It's a way of life.

The group discussed how Elders need to be taken care of, valued as wisdom keepers and life givers to our peoples and how we need to also honour and include youth; they are the future of our peoples.

There was discussion regarding the balancing of religion and native spirituality and how to maintain that connection to our community/village that we once had. Participants spoke about how we need to acknowledge the distinct views for Two-Spirited people and Trans-Gendered, remembering the traditional roles that they held within our communities.

The group discussed how there needs to be more education around the subject and it needs to be directed to youth and adults. This will help prevent misunderstandings and prevent violence. We need to welcome back by our people and our families.

Education begins in schools and helps to develop pride in our ceremonies; there will be a return to tradition. If this happens there will be a need for family supports in order to maintain respectful, traditional ways. This falls back to identity; we need to reclaim who we are as First Nations Peoples.

Participants talked about First Nations' values and our connection to the land. It makes us strong, and has helped us in our survival with all the food production and helps sustain us. Caring for the land would give us an opportunity to both learn and teach others about land sustenance.

Health has become a very serious problem among our peoples. Physically we are not strong. Our diet is the major offender and we need to change or die.

Youth has this overwhelming desire to belong to a group. We need to instruct our youth on the differences between gangs and traditional warriors. We also need to empower young women to avoid the pitfalls of sexual exploitation. This happens in every major city throughout the land. Education is the key but it cannot be shame-based

The group talked about ways to have everyone involved in Nation building and people suggested that we teach Aboriginal history in elementary grades and that we have creative outlets and to have Life Skills classes.

Canada should be recognized worldwide as the country with many Nations, rich with Aboriginal culture. Friendship Centres need to be funded so they can continue to act like a community resource. The Thunder Bird House acts like a spiritual place and there is a similar program at Youth for Christ but it is very spiritual in nature.

Today's parents have access to materials on how to educate their children, whereas past generations were robbed of those skills by Indian Residential Schools. Participants spoke about the need to have access to traditional schools both on and off the reserve with more youth and Elder Mentorships.

The group talked about what the most important resource would be for Nation-Building. They discussed the need for more information to be shared such as on the Aboriginal Canada Portal, which is currently available to First Nations. The participants referred to food sustainability, life skills, family and parenting skills, support for traditional teachings, and the ability to use our language as essential elements.

They said we need to target each group (men), (trans), (women), (youth), (Elders) regarding their input, and that we need to have ongoing Human Rights Education and Advocacy.

Women talked about having Cultural Welcome Centres that would be designed for culture, language and identity as being essential for our self-worth and our future.

The participants discussed how each government could benefit by applying our ways, and how those ways can be implemented into their laws and policies as a way of turning things around in this country.

The Meeting wrapped up at around 8:30 p.m. and the Elder closed the meeting for the group.

Questionnaire Answers

1. What role do you see for Elders, youth, women, men and families in the re-building of your Nation? How will/should the diverse voices be heard in the process? How will everyone be involved in the implementation?
 - We need Elders to Empower women's voices.
 - Youth requesting more youth centers.
 - Men and women should be asking their leaders for money to run operations within the community.
 - Education is a main component in helping people
 - People need to go back to the old ways of living.
 - Empowerment and education to children who have been bullied and are shamed for who they are
 - People should hook up to their friends and family using every media tool that is available magazines; face book, etc. to find out what is going on in their communities.
 - Attend circles with Elders when and where you can.
 - It takes everyone to fight for our children. They have to be educated about our teachings; because in 20 years they will be the ones here.
 - There is a responsibility by everyone to connect with one another and to pass on knowledge.
 - Rebuilding our Nations begins with educating ourselves. Strength in numbers!
 - We need confidence building workshops.
 - We need more teachings in our schools.
 - Seeking out an Elder who can educate me in my cultural traditions.
 - Elders should be our decision makers. Elders should teach Canadians traditional ways so they can learn to get the most out of this beautiful country.
 - Have outside media come onto the reserves and report their conditions there.
 - It would be nice if the Elders were respected.
 - Elders should be passing on traditions language and teachings.
 - Make it mandatory that all Canadian Education systems must teach the traditions of Aboriginal peoples.
 - Everyone must working together to rebuild our communities. The diverse voices should be instructed into how our community will be changed.

2. What are the key steps and activities you deem necessary for Nation Re-Building? What actions must to be taken? What would be the outcomes?

- Truth , respect, instilling power and confidence
- Food, shelter and caring teachings
- Education
- Communication
- Ensure medical care and medicines are readily available
- Special places for our Elders and daycare for our children
- Documentation of how we use to run the reserves the traditional way
- The outcomes of steps taken could be healthier knowledgeable people
- Develop a voice and use it
- People need to unite with others in their community to protect their land
- Finding why and how we are the change so that the next generation can carry on
- Workshops for human rights confidence
- Language learning pow wows
- More education in schools
- Teaching our children about traditional ways
- Youth gatherings for teachings
- Mentorships between youth and Elders
- Youth teach the Elders and the Elders teach the youth.
- Empower women to speak out
- Have more schools with an Aboriginal educational component.
- We need to be open-minded and very respectful in getting people's attention and getting people's opinions on all issues.

3. What would be the most important resource that you would need for Nation Re-Building? How would you make sure that you have them available to you? Would these be different for women/men/Elders/youth?

- Funding for education (on and off-reserve)
- More first Nations Schools, and if not possible, have language classes available
- Provide or open resource centers

- Elders to teach the youth. Would be nice to have a place where we can go for health, food, teachings, education.
- Push the culture!
- Open and fund more friendship centres.
- More inspirational speakers are needed in the schools.
- Advertise ceremonies gatherings and sharing circles.
- Elders' teachings drumming classes.
- Traditional dancing, and pride in traditional crafts are important.
- Partnerships and networking are great assets.
- Workshops like this to inform people about what's going on.
- The notion of Human Rights and what that means to everyone in school. Deal with identity issues early on.
- We need to eliminate shaming and bullying.
- Need to develop self-confidence and pride in one's identity.

4. How can we use our culture, traditions, and inherent rights to advance our efforts? What accountability mechanisms have been put into place to ensure equality and benefits to everyone, over the long-term? How and who will you track your progress?

- Going back to the Holistic way of life where our Elder's will track our progress.
- We can make it our duty to implement our culture and traditions onto every reserve.
- Teaching from our Elders on traditional ways. I will mark my own progress with my grandmother. Education is the tool our community will mark my progress.
- Searching for where they belong; if they are sure of who they are and proud of it no need to get into gangs.
- I mark my own progress.
- Progress can be marked by what has developed or been created since the beginning of your journey.
- Increased language skills.
- Becoming a story-teller. Learn the culture through the Elders.

5. Do you know of any traditional roles that women and men held in relation to governance and decision-making within your nation? Could they be useful today?

- Men were the protectors, and Elders teach us our history and values.
- Women were the providers and care givers and the children - they are our center.
- Respect each other; children are learners, dreamers and future.
- Trans-gendered were warriors, ceremonial wife/husband.
- Elders are our teachers and knowledge keepers.
- Embracing our ceremonies and our teachings.
- Not very well educated on the traditions of our people. I'm just beginning my journey.
- The women were always the decision makers. They were the ones that kept the community going. Today, I can see that women are taking back their positions and reclaiming their nations.
- The role of the pipe carrier is still there, because my mother has carried a pipe for some time and she is considered as a spiritual healer in the community.
- Men were the hunters. Women were the gatherers, prepared the food, and cooked the meals.
- Yes, men were the hunters, women were the gatherers. Elders always did the ceremonies. Continuing with this model can only help our communities.
- Having the Elders and youth present during a policy making meeting.
- Address the need of transgender men/women.

6. In the past, what resources were the most important in helping you achieve success in your challenge? Do you know of any best practices/ model that are being used by a Nation that may be useful to others?

- All forms of native craft, i.e. beading, art, poetry, sculpture, music, dancing can be very calming.
- Prevention
- My parents
- The Sweat lodge and the Sun Dances
- My grandmother, my mother, and my aunts
- Never letting rejection kill my spirit
- Cultural Centre such as Sage House and Thunder Bird House in Winnipeg are good examples

- Gaining knowledge in school and work. Integrating the culture into education and going to aboriginal run programs.
- I was never taught that I could use my ancestry to help me through my challenges.
- Workshops, classes, traditional teaching, pow wows and life skills.

7. What role do you deem appropriate for other governments (federal and provincial) and with the private industry in advancing your goals?

- Education, Research, partner with healthy businesses self sustain and anti-gang.
- Funding has always been appropriate way of saying I'm sorry.
- Speak your mind. There are not many mind readers.
- Still taking in everything. Never knew very much about my culture, local Friendship Centres can play a role in building identity.
- Empowerment, resources, advocates, television, organizations, books, known websites, and movements/organizations can all support the re-building of our Nations.
- If the governments change the views they have of Indigenous people, a more positive outlook will be injected upon the population of Canada.
- Provide one stop shop centres and First Nation run post secondary schools.
- Follow our roots and bring back traditional teachings in the homes.
- We need to be more educated about our traditions. It is our duty to find out about it.
- Support and funding for education is always necessary.
- They should be there to help and guide whenever and wherever they are asked.
- Partnershipd with wealthy businesses and other than governments could help us become self-sustaining. This means that there will be more money for more programs.
- We need to have Train the Trainer Programs funded.
- There needs to be more funding to NWAC for more workshops like these.

Thank you for your input; it will be included into a final report and posted on our website at www.nwac.ca

