



**Native Women's
Association of Canada**

**L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada**

Head office

85 Albert Street, 12th floor
Ottawa, Ontario

K1P 6A4

T: 613-722-3033 613-722-7687

Toll: 1-800-461-4043

reception@nwac.ca www.nwac.ca

House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada
K1A 0A6

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Dear Ministers,

I am writing to you in advance of the Throne Speech that will announce the new session of Parliament and signal your government's intentions as it moves forward on a new agenda for Canada and Canadians. I am writing to you to impress upon you, as you determine your priorities for the coming year, the desperate need to stop the ongoing violence being perpetrated against Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people, and your obligation to do what you can to improve their socio-economic well-being.

I don't need to tell you that Indigenous people, in general, and Indigenous women, in particular, are among the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society, and that they endure living conditions which fall far below those enjoyed by most other Canadians.

It was with joy, and cautious optimism, that we first heard the Prime Minister say five years ago that no relationship is more important to Canada than the relationship with Indigenous peoples. Since then, we have had moments of profound hope, including the announcement that your government would keep its promise to hold a National Inquiry into the ongoing tragedy of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. And we have experienced great disappointments. Chief among them is the failure to begin serious work on a National Action Plan to address the violence.

We are pleased to learn that committees have now been created to provide consultation opportunities for that plan we were hoping to see tabled last June. But we have serious reservations about the committees' composition, and concerns about whether they will provide a real opportunity for input from the Indigenous women who have been driving this issue.

The purpose of this letter is to reiterate your duty to take the problems of Indigenous women seriously, and to ensure that your work to address these critical issues did not end with the calling of the National Inquiry.

While we know that governments do not write Throne Speeches to elucidate detailed legislative objectives, we will be listening for indications that you appreciate the magnitude of the economic and security problems faced by First Nations, Inuit and Metis women, girls, and gender diverse people and that you understand the urgent need to address them.



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To that end, I would like to detail some of the initiatives we hope to see brought before Parliament in the coming session – initiatives that would make significant improvements in the lives of Canada's Indigenous women at the grassroots level.

First, we hope that you take concrete action on the most pressing Calls for Justice issued by the National Inquiry. We provided details in our proposal we sent to you in May.

The most crucial is the release of a National Action Plan. This does not have to be fully-formed. It merely needs to be a starting point for addressing the violence, and a living document that can be improved and updated over time.

Our other proposals could be part of that action plan or enacted independently. There is no reason to delay the establishment of a national task force of investigators that will re-examine and, if required, re-investigate, unsolved cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

There is an urgent need to build a national database that will quantify the number of Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people who are missing or have been murdered.

And now is the time for the creation of a violence-prevention unit within the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) that will also oversee the implementation of the Calls for Justice. Without it, there is no way to measure progress on this issue over time.

In recent days, some of you have been invited to tour our new Resiliency Lodge, a facility NWAC has built in Chelsea, Que. where Indigenous women provide culturally appropriate and holistic healing for other Indigenous women. This initiative, which we created without the assistance of governments, is an example of best practices in healing, meets the Calls for Justice 7.1 and 7.2, and could and should be replicated across Canada.

Ministers, I don't need to tell you that the only way to improve the lives of Indigenous women is to reduce their dire levels of poverty. Around the world, it has been shown that, when Indigenous women are given the resources to become entrepreneurs, their industry lifts the well-being of entire communities.

To that end, we are calling for the establishment of a national network to advertise the products and services of Indigenous women in both the national and international markets. And we are asking you to establish a database of Indigenous women entrepreneurs that can be accessed by companies who want to promote and sell their wares.



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Now is the time to create the position of liaison officer who will ensure that Indigenous women know about procurement activities and are provided access to them.

Now is the time to establish a seed money fund that will assist Indigenous women who want to start their own businesses.

Now is the time to make the financial investments that will help Indigenous women work and sell their goods and services online.

Now is the time to develop special programs to promote employment opportunities for Indigenous woman by providing the training and certification that will give them a foothold in fields like information technology or cottage industries such as garment creation.

On the legislative front, we hope that a bill to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People will be at the top of your agenda.

And, more broadly, we are looking for continuing action and additional resources to help Indigenous women cope with the mental health issues, substance abuse, and violence that has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are delivering services to our communities to help them deal with these challenges, but a great need remains.

Thank you Ministers for your time, for your commitment to improving the relationship between Canada and Indigenous women, and for your ongoing determination to help raise them out of poverty and secure their safety.

We are eager to work with you in the days and months ahead as partners in this vital cause.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Whitman
President of the Native Women's Association of Canada

cc : *Chrystia Freeland via e-mail*
cc : *Carolyn Bennett via e-mail*
cc : *Maryam Monsef via e-mail*
cc : *Marc Miller via e-mail*