



# SHINING THE SPOTLIGHT

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA NEWSLETTER



NEW INITIATIVES • ISSUE 10 • AUG 2022



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## A Message from the CEO

Language is one of the most important parts of any culture. It is the way by which people communicate with one another, build relationships, and create a sense of community.

In Canada, there are around 70 distinct Indigenous languages, falling into 12 distinct language families.

Preserving our languages is so important to connecting to our cultural, expressing our heritage, and preserving our history.

This is why I am so pleased that Heritage Canada is sponsoring the preservation of our history, our culture, and our languages through the Heritage Language Project. This initiative focuses on preserving the Algonquin languages, which were spoken by First Nations and American Indians residing in the northeastern part of North America.



A Message from the CEO Cont.

You'll read about this important initiative in the context of preserving Algonquin languages in this issue of *Shining the Spotlight*. The story talks about how languages merge when groups of people who speak two or more languages want to find an easy way to communicate with one another. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) recognizes there are subgroups of the Algonquin or Omàmiwinimowin language—and that's why we are so pleased to partner with Heritage Canada to begin preserving these languages.

Just as important as preserving our languages and history is the promotion and encouragement of the next generation of Indigenous leaders. Generation 4 Equality is meant to increase leadership skills among our youth—the next generation—and also promote gender equality for everyone.

NWAC hosted and facilitated the first-ever Generation 4 Equality Summit in August. Their voice is so important to our policy and program discussions, and I look forward to hearing more from our youth.

As always, NWAC remains at the forefront on important matters related to the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination and self-governance. We continue to press this point in discussions on implementing Bill C-15, *An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). All Canadian laws, including the *Indian Act*, must be brought in consistency with the Declaration if we are to be able to move forward.

And, as usual, NWAC will be on the ground at COP27, the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference, being held in November in Egypt. For the first time in recent history, the Government of Canada, led by Environment and Climate Change Canada, will host a Canada Pavilion at COP27. The Canada Pavilion provides a unique opportunity to showcase Canadian climate action, amplify global efforts and support for developing countries, profile the diversity of Canadian actions and perspectives on climate change, and promote Indigenous climate leadership.

NWAC is excited to be playing a leading role and President Carol McBride has been invited to join the Canadian delegation.

Last but not least, you'll read about our work on the MMIWG file. The perspectives and views of family members and survivors on all aspects of safety, which were shared during a Sharing Circle we held in July, are crucial to the work we are doing in this area, and will help inform our preparations for the annual Sisters-in-Spirit Vigils that take place in communities across the country on October 4.



*Lynne Groulx*



Artwork by @eloybida on Instagram, Visit: eloybida.com

## Communications

The Communications Team helps to advance the work of the Native Women's Association of Canada by showcasing individual projects and initiatives, by continuing to advocate for the rights of Indigenous women, and by engaging with NWAC's broader community across Canada.

Much of August was dedicated to calling upon the federal government to negotiate the return of Dawn Walker to her home, here in Canada. In early August, we issued a press release **urging the return of Dawn Walker** to face her charges of parental abduction and public mischief in her home country, which was also published **in French**. Shortly after, Dawn Walker was returned to Canada, and NWAC issued a public statement—both in **English** and **French**—expressing gratitude for her return home. President Carol McBride made a statement explaining why it was so important for Dawn Walker to be returned to Canada: ***"There are legal rulings in this country that Ms. Walker can rely upon as she deals with the charges laid against her."***

Also in August, NWAC's President Carol McBride issued a **public statement** applauding the appointment of Michelle O'Bonsawin, an Abenaki member of Odanak First Nation, in becoming Canada's first Indigenous Justice of the Supreme Court. The statement can be read in **French**.



Carol McBride

Communications Cont.

Engaging with our grassroots community is important to us. One of the vehicles we use to do that is social media. By expanding our followers and by reaching new audiences, we are able to raise further awareness and leverage support for NWAC's efforts. For example, over a 28-day period in August alone, across all our social media accounts—**Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Instagram**, and **TikTok**—NWAC gained over 2,000 new followers and reached 805,652 accounts over a 28-day period.

This month we added to our social media initiatives by launching a **TikTok profile**, which has already shown impressive growth. We also created a **LinkTree** account, which acts as a media hub linking all our accounts and resources, including links to our **website**, our **videos**, the **President's Corner**, our **online art gallery**, our magazine **Kci-Niwesq**, our **newsletters**, and other initiatives and reports.

Social media highlights for the month included:

- collaborating with Project Forest on World Conservation Day
- showcasing pieces from over 30 Indigenous artists
- covering the Papal visit while keeping survivors at the forefront of messaging
- advocating for the return of Dawn Walker to Canada—a First Nations mother and survivor of domestic violence

**Be sure to follow us to stay up to date on all of NWAC's initiatives and updates! You can find us on **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Instagram**, and **TikTok**. And check out our newest resource, **LinkTree**!**



ARTWORK SHARED ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Shared from @mangeshig  
 www.mangeshig.com



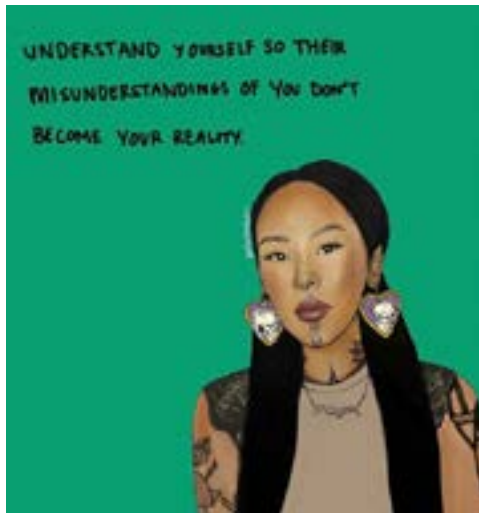
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Artwork by @eloybida on Instagram  
 Visit:eloybida.com



Art by Ocean Kiana



Art by @eloybida



## **The Heritage Language Project: Algonquian Languages**

Languages merge when groups of people who speak two or more languages want to find an easy way to communicate with one another. For instance, people of mixed heritage speak English Creole in Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Nicaragua, and Panama, which evolved from English, Spanish, and West African languages. English Creole also extends to Belize, the Cayman Islands, Saint Vincent, and parts of the United States (such as South Carolina and Georgia), with minor differences in vocabulary and pronunciation. Similarly, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) recognizes that there are sub-groups among those groups who speak the English language, just as there are sub-groups of the Algonquian or Omàmiwininimowin language, which have formally defined linguistics and syntax complexity.



Heritage Language Project Cont.

Proto-Algonquian is the original Algonquian language, spoken nearly 3000 years ago. Today, 30 different Algonquian languages exist throughout Canada and the United States. The traditional language changed after Algonquians began interacting with European immigrants in the 1600s. In Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Maine, and Massachusetts, some First Nations or American Indians speak the Mi'kmaq language, which descends from the original Algonquian language. The current oral language of the Mi'kmaq people helps the community make sense of the world. In July 2022, the Province of New Brunswick established a new *Mi'kmaw Language Act*, which recognizes the Mi'kmaw language as the province's first language. Other subvarieties of the Algonquian language spoken in the eastern parts of Canada, the United States, and by NWAC Language Keepers include Wolastoqiyik, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy. Wolastoqiyik is pronounced wool-las-two-wi-ig. The Wolastoqiyik people have used their oral language to pass down their way of life, protocols, art, and history. Contrastingly, the Maliseet-Passamaquoddy language comprises two languages, Maliseet and Passamaquoddy, which are dialects of the same language. The Maliseet and Passamaquoddy differentiation is much like the pronunciation nuances between Quebec French and Parisian French.

Preserving these languages is integral to cultural connectedness and expression among First Nations and American Indians who reside in the country's northeastern part. Heritage Canada plays a vital role in sponsoring the preservation of history, culture, and languages. At NWAC, that initiative is called the Heritage Language project.





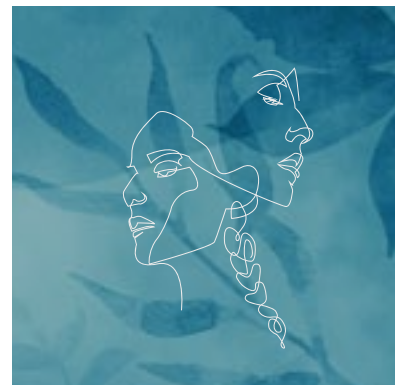
## WATER CARRIERS

## COP27 to Water Carriers to Disaster Preparedness: Fall 2022 a Busy Time for Environment Unit

In the last edition of *Shining a Spotlight*, we highlighted the involvement of the Environment Unit with Environment and Climate Change Canada in planning for the UNFCCC Conference of Parties, also known as COP 27. Since our last update, Steven Kuhn, Director General of the **Multilateral Affairs and Climate Change Directorate**, has extended a preliminary invitation to NWAC's President Carol McBride to join the Canadian delegation to COP27. NWAC will play a leading role as part of the **Canadian Pavilion at COP27**. The Environment Unit will provide technical support to NWAC's contribution to COP27.

We are also pleased to announce that the Environment Unit has just added two new projects to our portfolio: **Water Carriers Phase 2: Engaging Traditional Knowledge to Build Capacity and Engaging Indigenous Peoples in Climate Change Policy.**

Water Carriers Phase 2 will focus on empowering *"Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people as protectors of the water and amplifying the voices of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people in their role as water carriers."*



COP27 to Water Carriers to Disaster Preparedness Cont.

Engaging Indigenous Peoples in climate change policy will focus on the challenges associated with the impacts of climate change on Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people.

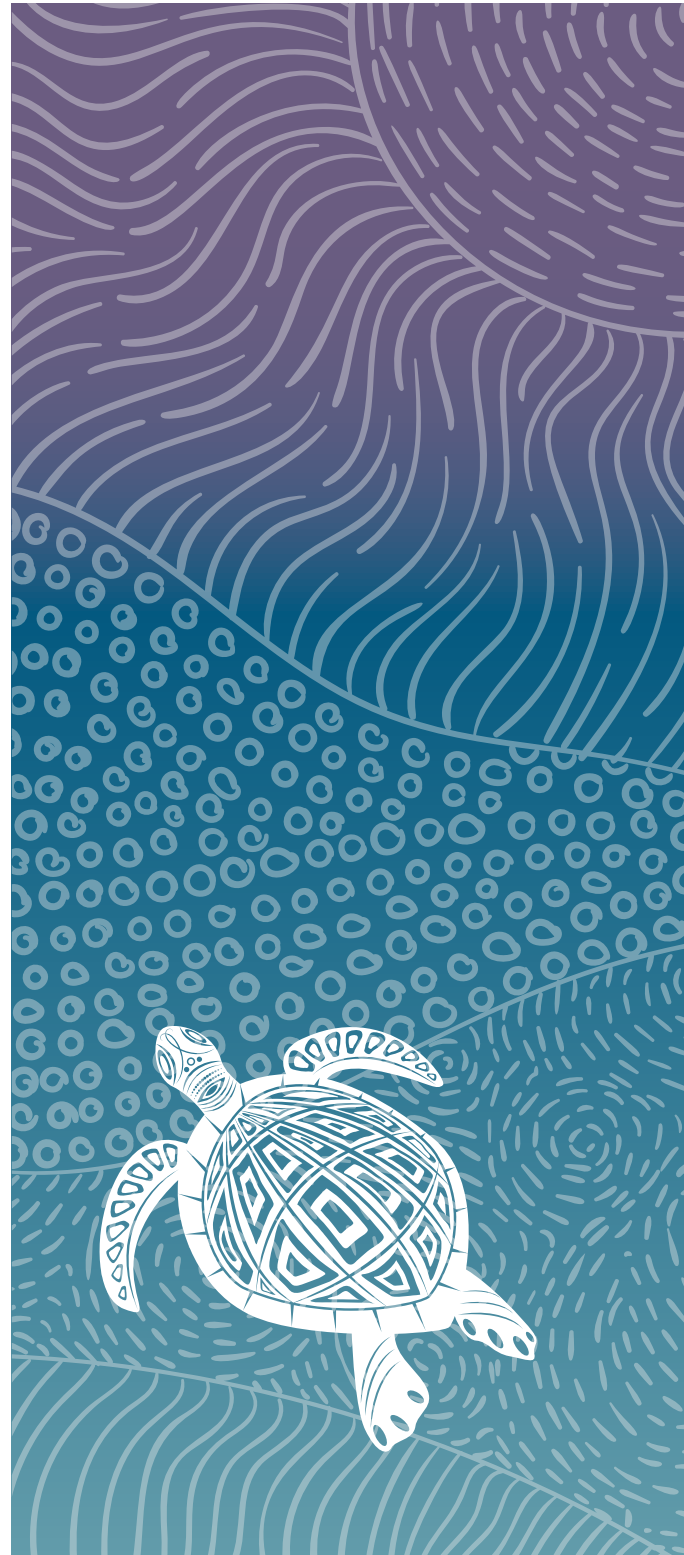
To execute these projects, the Environment Unit has just hired two policy officers.

We are also pleased to announce that the Environment Unit will be collaborating with the **Canadian Red Cross** to implement the **Inclusive Resilience: Reducing Disaster Risk for Canadians project**. The project is funded by Public Safety Canada's **Emergency Management Public Awareness Contribution Program**. NWAC's involvement will extend to the first two years of the project, which has a life cycle of four years.

In the first year of the program, NWAC will assist the Canadian Red Cross by conducting research into disaster preparedness using a culturally relevant, gender based, intersectional lens. We will also contribute to culturally relevant gender-based analysis (CRGBA+) review of project activities, materials, and approaches.

In year two, we will continue to support Red Cross by contributing to a culturally relevant gender-based analysis (CRGBA+) review of project activities, materials, and approaches.

The Canadian Red Cross project is expected to start in early September 2022.





## The Art of the Policy Brief

One of the key roles of the Executive Policy team is to write policy briefs for senior management, media representatives, and other team members as needed. As a team, we have written over 70 policy briefs (and counting) on topics such as MMIWG2S, the *Indian Act*, housing, criminalization, residential schools, biodiversity, Traditional Knowledge, and much more.

So, what is a policy brief? A policy brief, or a briefing note, is usually a short document—no longer than three pages—that presents the findings or recommendations on a particular topic. Once a topic has been assigned, the first step to writing a policy brief is to define its purpose and its audience; in other words, for whom we are writing. The policy team will then begin preliminary research on the topic and begin writing some of the core components.

At NWAC, the policy brief consists of three key sections: the position, the executive summary, and NWAC's role. The *Position* is short—typically one or two sentences—and conveys NWAC's core message on the topic. The *Executive Summary* follows. This one- to two-paragraph summary gives a more detailed background. *NWAC's Role* covers all related work the association has done, or continues to do, on the topic or issue in question.

The Art of the Policy Brief Cont.

Additional categories are added depending on relevancy, including the federal government's role, statistics, international policy, and connections to the MMIWG2S Calls for Justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

Overall, the main goal of a policy brief is to provide our audience with a condensed but fruitful amount of information on a topic. Thus, the content's organization and the ability to convey information are critical.



Many of our policy briefs are for internal use. However, NWAC has also published policy briefs, which are available on our website, including one titled **Impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous Women and Gender-Diverse People**.

The Executive Policy team will continue to develop these critical policy briefs—both for internal use and public consumption—to ensure accessibility to knowledge on key policy areas.





## Generation 4 Equality

### *Shining the Spotlight on* **Generation 4 Equality**

This month, we are *shining the spotlight* on NWAC's Generation 4 Equality, an online platform that links Indigenous youth across Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat. The platform is meant to share the resources needed to promote gender equality for everyone, while increasing leadership skills for Indigenous youth.



Generation 4 Equality and its social media activities foster virtual discussions, develop resources, and create support for youth to bring gender advocacy initiatives to their communities.

Through the Generation 4 Equality virtual platform, youth may share ideas, build leadership and advocacy capacity, and gain knowledge and skills by accessing information, asking questions, and connecting with others who are working hard for gender equality. This platform includes and celebrates the voices and experiences of Indigenous youth of all genders who are advocating for and celebrating gender equality and gender diversity.

In August 2022, NWAC facilitated the first Generation 4 Equality Summit held on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people at its headquarters in Gatineau and its Resiliency Lodge in Chelsea, both in Quebec. This Summit brought together six diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth who are all leading important conversations and making waves in their home communities (and beyond) around topics of gender equality and advocacy.

*Shining the Spotlight on Generation 4 Equality Cont.*

The two-day Summit incorporated collaborative arts projects while engaging in inspiring and informative discussions around what resources, learning, and unlearning needs to happen in order to advance gender equality and improve the lives and safety of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people. In the future, watch out for webinars, online platforms, and educational resources that will be developed based on the exciting and important conversations held over the course of the two-day Summit. These will be available on the Generation 4 Equality website and shared on NWAC social media.

Want to get involved or talk more about this platform or gender equality with us? Visit [generation4equality.ca](https://generation4equality.ca) to learn more and share your ideas!



# INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY



## **International Advocacy:** Reflecting the Health Realities of Indigenous Women, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender-Diverse People

The world changed in 2020. As a health pandemic loomed and COVID-19 spread around the globe, people were forced to isolate in their homes. Unfortunately, the frequency and severity of domestic violence and intimate partner violence increased, creating what activists refer to as a “shadow pandemic.”

In addition, physical distancing and lockdown measures reduced supports and heightened the mental health challenges faced by many Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people.

This begs the question, how can NWAC’s international advocacy help curtail the shadow pandemic and associated mental health concerns?



International Advocacy Cont.

In August, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO)) invited Member States and civil society organizations to provide written input on the subject, which will be used to develop joint guidance on mental health, human rights, and legislation. The publication will be a resource for countries when considering legislative measures to support the transformation of mental health systems, in line with international human rights law.



NWAC will ensure that WHO's country guidelines reflect the lived experience and realities of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people living in this country. NWAC will advocate for culturally appropriate measures when it comes to mental health care. We will advocate for suicide prevention measures and a trauma-informed approach to health care. We will stress the importance of land-based healing and other culturally relevant approaches that are often forgotten in colonial systems of health care and wellness.

Stay tuned. There will be exciting international news come fall.



## Indigenous Self-Government and UNDRIP

On June 21, 2021, Bill C-15, *An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, received Royal Assent and came into force in Canada. The Act establishes a structure for the Government of Canada and Indigenous Peoples to cooperate in implementing the Declaration through long-term reconciliation, healing, and collaborative relationships.

The UN Declaration outlines a wide range of collective and individual rights that serve as minimum requirements for upholding Indigenous Peoples' rights and promoting their survival, dignity, and well-being.

Articles 3 and 4 of the Declaration affirm Indigenous Peoples' right to self-government and self-determination.

Before European settlers came to the land known as Canada today, Indigenous Peoples were already in occupation of this land. They had their own systems of government, which were an expression of their socioeconomic, cultural, and spiritual differences. The settlers established partnerships with Indigenous Peoples through treaties, trade, and military alliances. But as time went on, these early partnerships broke down and were replaced by colonialism-based laws, policies, and decisions.



The *Indian Act* displaced Indigenous Peoples' own governance systems when enacted in 1876. It was used to impose control on Indigenous Peoples and assert control vested in the federal Indian affairs minister.

Over the years, Indigenous advocacy efforts led to various changes to the *Indian Act*. Today, the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples remains foundational to rebuilding nation-to-nation relationships and the path toward self-government.

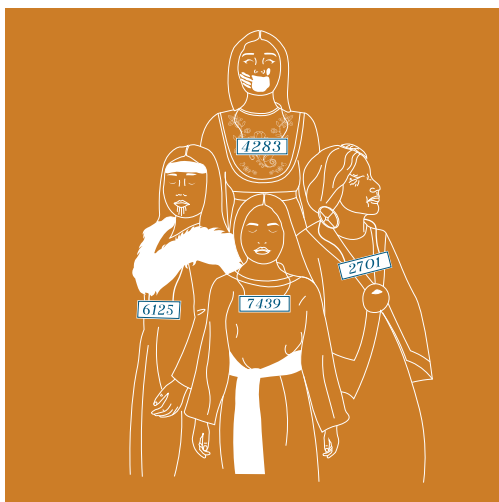
Section 35 of the *Constitution Act*, 1982 recognizes the right to Indigenous self-government. These rights have been clarified in the leading cases of *R v Sparrow*, *R v Van Der Peet*, and *Delgamuukw v BC*, among others. As of today, through the land claim process and negotiations, some Indigenous communities exercise their right to self-government.



Though Canada recognizes that Indigenous Peoples have an inherent right to self-government, under section 35 of the *Constitution Act*, 1982, in reality, except for communities with self-government negotiation agreements, most Indigenous communities are still governed by the *Indian Act*.

#### Implementing UNDRIP to Achieve Self-Government and Self-Determination

By assenting to Bill C-15, Canada indicated it is willing to grant Indigenous Peoples the right to self-government and self-determination. This right includes determining their own political status, pursuing their economic, social, and cultural development, granting them autonomy in matters relating to their own affairs which include their own membership, and providing the means for financing this autonomy.



The Act provides that all Canadian laws should be brought in consistency with the Declaration. This includes the *Indian Act*, which has been the primary legislation governing Indigenous Peoples' affairs. When juxtaposed with UNDRIP, the *Indian Act* falls short of the self-government and self-determination rights recognized by the Declaration. This is especially seen when it comes to the determination of indigenous memberships and governing bodies. The membership provisions in the *Indian Act* have led to discrimination, exclusion from their communities, and the loss of Indigenous cultures and identities.

If the Government of Canada is truly committed to implementing UNDRIP, it cannot ignore the issue of self-government and self-determination or implement it halfway. Legislation that maintains Canada's control over Indigenous Peoples' governance, like the *Indian Act*, must be amended or repealed.

MMIWG



## MMIWG & Highlights From the Sharing Circle

The MMIWG Unit was hard at work during the month of July, producing a 15-page report for Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs based on a Sharing Circle we held on June 20, 2022, at the NWAC Resiliency Lodge in Chelsea, Quebec. During the Sharing Circle, 15 MMIWG family members and survivors shared their knowledge, views, and perspectives on community-led definitions of safety. This resulted in nine policy recommendations on emotional safety, safe housing, cultural safety, and safety for the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community.

With respect to emotional and cultural safety, the individuals we engaged with said that NWAC's Resiliency Lodge made them feel safe and supported because they were surrounded by people who had similar lived experiences and were in a culturally relevant space. With respect to safe housing, the individuals who attended the Sharing Circle talked about how access to safe, affordable, and culturally relevant housing was necessary and a prerequisite to all components of their safety.

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*Thank you for reading*

