

## **NWAC President's Report**

This publication highlights the various activities the President has undertaken throughout the month of March.



### **LORRAINE WHITMAN**

Lorraine Whitman was elected as the President of the Native Women's Association of Canada on September 14, 2019. Prior to her presidency at NWAC, Ms. Whitman served as President of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association and has been advocating for Indigenous women's rights over the past 45 years.

## March President's Report

My Dear Friends,

This year, UN Women has chosen as the theme for International Women's Day (IWD) **Women in leadership**. The March 8 event offers both an opportunity to celebrate the tremendous efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as highlights the gaps that remain.



Indigenous women have always been leaders in our communities. Since the Creator made all things, this has been our way, our culture, and our tradition.

But now we are demanding leadership from others—from governments, police, the health care system, and so on. When it comes to rights and justice, we have not moved the yardstick very far. We still have far to go.

This year on IWD, I said that we will not accept another Chantel Moore killed by police; another Joyce Echaguan dying on a hospital bed alone and abused; another Barbara Kentner murdered by racists. We will not accept another year without a national action plan in response to the findings of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG).


Interestingly, the theme chosen by the organizers of this year's International Women's Day is **Choose to Challenge**. From the IWD organizers:

*A challenged world is an alert world. Individually, we're all responsible for our own thoughts and actions, all day, every day. We can all choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequality. We can all choose to seek out and celebrate women's achievements. Collectively, we can all help create an inclusive world. From challenge comes change, so let's all choose to challenge.*

And so I challenge the federal government to take corrective action, through this national action plan, to address the historical, multigenerational, and intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous women and gender-diverse people and to end their social and economic marginalization.

I also challenge world leaders to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are distributed widely, as Indigenous women in some countries are being told they will have to wait a few years before they can get their shot. While we can't be there physically for Indigenous women beyond our borders, we can be there for them in our hearts, our spirit, and our prayers.

Wela'lin, Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lorraine Whitman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lorraine" being more prominent than the last name "Whitman".

President Lorraine Whitman



[@LWhitman\\_NWAC](https://twitter.com/LWhitman_NWAC)

## My March Agenda

To mark IWD as a whole and to keep a spotlight on NWAC's activities, I spoke at and attended a number of IWD-sponsored events and held media interviews over the course of the month of March. I made contact with and took part in high-level virtual meetings with Ministers and Indigenous Chiefs. And, I met virtually with grassroots Indigenous people here in Canada and around the world as well as national and international Indigenous leaders through the NWAC-sponsored International Summit of the Americas on Violence Against Indigenous Women.

### Meeting with Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

The federal government had been working on the draft law (Bill C-15) to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Canada. NWAC participated in two meetings held by Justice Canada in late October 2020 with Indigenous women's organizations. We provided detailed comments on the draft law at this time. However, last November, NWAC was shut out of a key consultative meeting, after which we immediately issued a press release and requested a meeting with David Lametti, Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of Canada. That meeting finally took place on March 4.



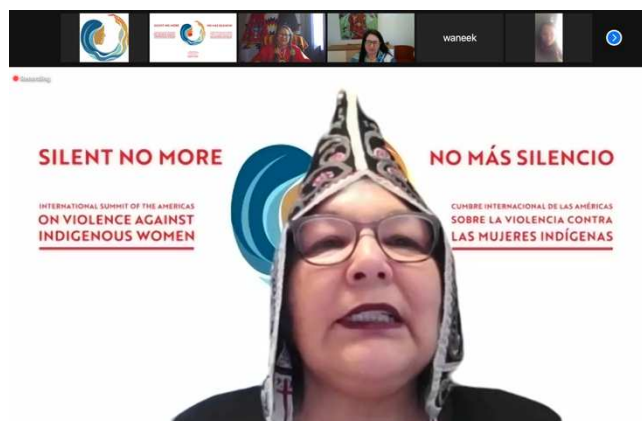
At this virtual meeting, I expressed NWAC's concern about being excluded from the consultation process into Bill C-15, which is a welcome first step in the right direction for greater reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

I stressed the following key points:

- Male-led Indigenous organizations do not approach issues from our perspective and so NWAC must be part of the implementation process.
- It's important that Bill C-15—especially the section requiring monitoring and oversight, and provisions that ensure consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples—not be watered down during the consultation process.

### Meeting with Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Bennett

Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, called a teleconference meeting with NWAC for March 8 to provide an update on the federal government's national action plan concerning missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG). As a member of MMIWG working groups, NWAC is pleased to play a role in developing the National Action Plan.



NWAC has also established our own working groups with our provincial and territorial members. These groups are collecting important insight and best practices to reduce violence against Indigenous women—information that will be key to developing the plan.

During this teleconference call, CEO Lynne Groulx also took the opportunity to bring the minister up to date on the impending Summit and Steven Pink, NWAC's general counsel and chief operating officer, focused on core funding for NWAC.

### **Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence**

On March 11, I took part in an update meeting of Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), Minister Maryam Monsef's Advisory Council on Gender-Based Violence. The focus of this meeting was to discuss and develop potential actions to be included in the Indigenous-led approaches theme for the national action plan to end gender-based violence. This plan is to complement and align with the overall National Action Plan on MMIWG.

### **International Women's Day / Canadian Women in Sports Event**

For International Women's Day, March 8, I was honoured to be asked to speak at a virtual event whose theme was "Choose to Challenge: Women's Resilience in the Time of COVID-19." The event was held in partnership between the Halifax Regional Municipality's Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO and Halifax Central Library.

As someone who values the importance of staying healthy, eating healthy foods, and getting daily exercise, it is more important than ever for Indigenous women to take care of themselves post-pandemic. Many Indigenous women have lost their businesses during the pandemic, while others have faced increased exposure to violence to due isolation in violent scenarios at home.

We need to see and have something in tune that's going to immediately be able to help recover (from) the violence that's occurring. We need to support our women and sisters in no matter what country ... they look at Canada as being a strong national women's organization, which we are, but we need to give them the support to know they can be



just as strong, they are not alone.

On International Women's Day, I told the audience that I am celebrating all Canadians who have listened and learned about reconciliation and Indigenous history in the country, and all the women who are lifting each other up against the odds.

### **International Summit of the Americas on Violence Against Indigenous Women**

The International Summit of the Americas on Violence Against Indigenous Women on March 29–30, which NWAC hosted, was held to:

- address the violent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people, including on their direct physical and mental well-being
- examine the intersectionality of violence and explore best practices to address the violence
- highlight the crucial importance of traditional healing and resiliency

With no end to the pandemic yet in sight, the need for urgent and effective remedies for this shadow pandemic of violence is all the more pressing. The Summit aimed to identify international, national, and regional solutions that will enable decision-makers to take action.

This Summit brought together visionaries, knowledge keepers and leaders, grassroots Indigenous women, representatives of governments, industry, and media from across the hemisphere, to discuss what is inarguably one of our most pressing human rights concerns.

I joined Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, in welcoming attendees on the first day. At the close of the second and final day, I gave the closing remarks, followed by a closing prayer from NWAC's National Grandmother Roberta Oshkawbewisens.



### **Promoting traditional arts and crafts**

Through our Makers Space workshops, NWAC is helping to reinvigorate and promote traditional arts and crafts. This month, I participated in two workshops: mini-canvas tipi wigwams; and porcupine quill brooch making.

## Media Interviews

I held a number of media events around International Women's Day, including with Global News, CBC, CBC Live, CBC Nova Scotia, as well as with:

- Mariah Caruso, news reporter at CKLB Radio in Toronto—Interviewed focused on federal government's national action plan, which is meant to be a "living document"; the core working groups of which NWAC is a member, whose work will feed into the national action plan
- Sarah Garofalo, assistant news editor for York University's *Excalibur* publication—Interview focused on Barbara Kentner and racism in the Thunder Bay community and police force; the National Inquiry's 231 Calls for Justice into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; and the special days set aside to honour those missing and lost lives, including the February Red Dress Day and the October national vigil.



*Celebrating International Earth Day. Let's do our part and take care of Mother Earth.*





Native Women's  
Association of Canada



L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

[nwac.ca](http://nwac.ca)