

## **NWAC President's Report**

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



### **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.

## October 2020 President's Report

My Dear Friends,

The month of October was spent primarily on three files: missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG); the Mi'kmaq fisheries dispute; and gender-based violence.

To this end, with respect to MMIWG, the CORE Committee meets weekly to discuss and strategize over the anticipated federal government's National Action Plan. The results from our national roundtable, held January 18 and 19, 2020, were used to develop a report outlining the key priority areas to inform the government's national action plan.

The issue of missing and murdered women and girls is always top-of-mind for NWAC. Every year, we hold a Sisters In Spirit Vigil—and encourage other families and communities to hold their own as well—to honour those who have passed and to support the families who grieve. While this year's vigil was held virtually, the impact on those who took part or watched was as impactful as ever.

When it comes to gender-based violence, NWAC has been a strong voice, advocating for changes to policing, lobbying for funds to support women, girls, and gender-diverse people who have been impacted by rising incidences of violence since COVID-19 began. Our constituents are particularly vulnerable at any time, but even more so during the pandemic. The federal government has a draft action plan in place to end gender-based violence, and NWAC is at the table providing our input.

I held an initial meeting with the Moose Hide Campaign about the possibility of future collaboration and partnership. NWAC looks forward to continued discussions with this group, which raises awareness on the MMIWG issue at a grassroots level.

The recent fisheries dispute in Nova Scotia highlights the ongoing racism and violence experienced by Indigenous Peoples. In the past month, Mi'kmaq fishers were subjected to violence by non-Indigenous fishermen and the RCMP failed to intervene until it was nearly too late. To this end, I wrote a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, calling on him to intervene to protect the legal fishing rights of the Mi'kmaq, which the Supreme Court of Canada addressed and recognized in the 1999 decision of *R. v. Marshall*. NWAC's legal counsel also penned an opinion piece in the Halifax newspaper.

On Thanksgiving Day, I spent time with members of my family in the Atlantic bubble and delivered a hopeful message of support and encouragement to the women, girls, and gender-diverse people we represent.

In October, I also reached out to Indigenous students at Acadia University. As mental health is an issue during COVID-19, I felt it was important to check in with and deliver care packages to those who are self-isolating. With fall season coinciding with flu season, we're going to see an increase in anxiety levels, not to mention an even greater toll on people's mental and physical health. Being away from their families, plus being isolated due to the pandemic, plus the likelihood of facing discrimination along with the hurt and pain that brings, students will be feeling particularly vulnerable. I wanted the students to know that they haven't been forgotten.

Thank you, Wela'lin



President Lorraine Whitman



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## My October 2020 Agenda

### My October Agenda Sisters In Spirit Vigil

Every year on this date, NWAC honours the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people. The annual vigil is an emotional event for families, who are reminded once again about their loss. Yet, it offers an opportunity for healing. Crying together and showing our tears can help to heal the soul. Elders were also available to provide support.

This year's vigil was held virtually (live-streamed through our digital channels). I welcomed family members and participants, offered opening remarks, and invited Elder Roberta Oshkabewisens to lead the prayer. Viewers were invited to light a candle in memory of a loved one or to honour families who have lost a loved one, and families shared their stories of loss. Even 20 years later, the stories of missing family members still touch our hearts; they remind us that even through the pain, the families of missing loved ones still hope they will find closure one day.

A lit candle acts as a beacon—letting missing and murdered women and girls know they are forever in our hearts. Their spirits live on within us and they are not alone. At NWAC, we are here to support you – when you cry, do not excuse yourself. We all need to heal and to show our tears. Together, we need to heal our souls.



### National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence Roundtable, led by Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality & Rural Economic Development

As one of the national Indigenous leaders invited to participate in the roundtable, I opened my remarks with the statement that gender-based violence has increased dramatically since the start of the pandemic. Over the past six months, NWAC has reported significant



increases in domestic violence, calls to shelters, and demand on other social and community services.

I reiterated NWAC's concern about gender-based violence in Indigenous communities across Canada, and then focused on four main points concerning the draft action plan submitted for discussion:

- Pleased that progress is being made on an action plan to end gender-based violence
- Stressed the importance of involving all levels of government
- Pleased that one of the action plan's guiding principles (#4) is the need to "support Indigenous-led solutions" and that pillar #4 calls for "support for Indigenous-led approaches and responses"
- Sought support for NWAC's Indigenous-led Resiliency Lodge

Our Resiliency Lodge will go a long way to addressing gender-based violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls. The Lodge – for Indigenous women and gender-diverse people - offers an Elder-led, innovative approach to holistic healing. Our vision statement says it all: *We envision a world where Indigenous women and gender-diverse people live a good life free of violence, and where our strength and healing grow from our culture and our connection to the land.* Already, it has received tremendous support from federal deputy ministers and senators, corporate executives, and, most importantly, the grassroots community.

An Indigenous health model that stresses holism and encompasses the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realms of health and wellness is at the heart of our programming approach. Programs and services are based on four pillars of healing:

- Elder-led healing, where Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and other members of the integrated care team use strength-based, trauma-informed, empowering methods and practices to provide support
- Land-based healing, where guests revitalize their connection to the land and its relationship to their spirit while re-learning traditional practices and customs and building resiliency
- Culture-based healing, which incorporates cultural healing activities, such as ceremonies and sweats, and promotes Indigenous languages, medicines, and wellness practices



- Holistic person-centred care, where programming is adapted to suit individual needs, values, expectations, and preferences

### **Moose Hide Campaign Partnership**

The [Moose Hide Campaign](#) is a grassroots movement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and boys who are standing up against violence towards women and children. The Moose Hide Campaign has spread to communities and organizations across Canada. Local campaigns have started in government offices, in colleges and universities, on First Nations reserves, in friendship centres, in community organizations, and within individual families. The goal is to distribute 10 million moose hide squares across the country.

I held an initial meeting with the Moose Hide Campaign about the possibility of future collaboration and partnership, and look forward to continuing our discussions.

### **Minister's Meeting to Address Racism Experienced by Indigenous Peoples in Canada's Health Care Systems**

Indigenous Services Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada held an urgent meeting on October 16 to begin a conversation with Indigenous people and health care professionals on systemic racism in federal, provincial, and territorial health systems. This initial meeting was held to present the government's proposed approach to the sharing dialogue.

Experts and stakeholders all gave similar examples of serious rights breaches of human rights—nurses and doctors refusing to provide service; inadequate service delivery resulting in further health harms and distress, and even leading to death. Everyone expressed the need for coordinated and standardized investigation systems of systemic racism, the use of traditional approaches when serving Indigenous people, and the role of health professional regulatory bodies. However, no expert talked about mental illness checks, which is an important feature of health care service delivery.

This and future dialogues—a second gathering is to take place in January 2021—will help to inform concrete short-term measures for governments, educational institutions, health professional associations, regulatory colleges, and accreditation organizations to implement. The goal of these meetings is to reach agreement on a national action plan. I have asked to be a speaker at these future meetings.

### **UNDRIP Consultation Session**

The federal government is engaging with Indigenous peoples and organizations, among other groups, on its draft legislative proposal concerning UNDRIP. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the United Nations on September 13, 2007. The government is committed to introducing legislation to implement UNDRIP by the end of this year.

I participated in the technical dialogues held October 29 for Indigenous women's groups, with representatives from the Department of Justice and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. At the meeting, I asked that a reference to the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice be inserted into the preamble of the draft proposal, to give a Canadian context.

On the whole, I have serious issues and concerns about the consultation process and timelines, as all of us who have been invited to consult have not been given enough time to analyze the draft proposal and provide meaningful comments.

### **Response to Fisheries Issue**

Numerous calls were placed to community members about the harassment, and violence exhibited against Mi'kmaq fishers in Nova Scotia. I have expressed outrage at the racism that exists towards Indigenous fishermen, and the RCMP's inaction at the beginning of the violence.

I and NWAC made numerous posts on our social media accounts supporting the Mi'kmaq's fishing rights and calling on the Prime Minister to intervene personally. I made a personal visit to the Saulnierville wharf to show my support and posted photos from that visit. My tweets on the issue received hundreds of likes and retweets.



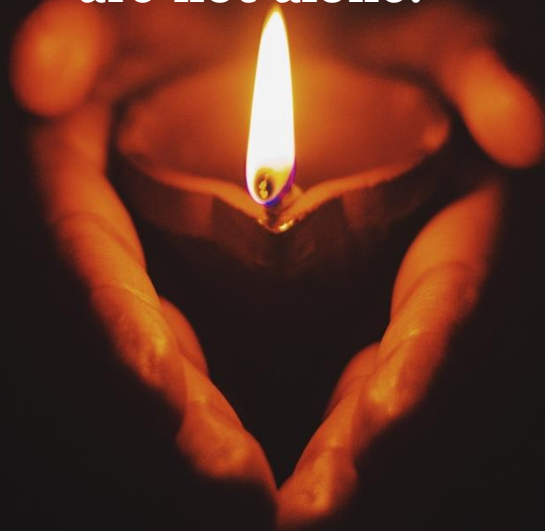
Too late, charges are now being laid against the non-Indigenous fishermen who emptied lobster traps, burned vehicles, vandalized buildings, destroyed lobster boats, harassed Mi'kmaq fishers, and burned down the lobster facility. Local people were threatened if they served Indigenous fishers.

The Supreme Court of Canada addressed and recognized the fishing rights of the Mi'kmaq in the 1999 decision of R. v. Marshall, including the right to a "moderate livelihood." Yet, 21 years later, the Government of Canada does not recognize those rights. These serious issues of violence and the failure of the government to act sooner has caused a break in the relationship with the Crown.

And yet, I feel this could all have been resolved 21 years ago.

See our [opinion piece](#) published in the Halifax Chronicle-Herald by Adam Bond, NWAC's legal counsel.

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Native Women's  
Association of Canada



L'Association des  
femmes autochtones  
du Canada

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