

NWAC PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This publication highlights the various activities the president has undertaken throughout the month of February.



LORRAINE WHITMAN

NWAC's President

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.

February 2020 President's Report

Dear friends,

Indigenous people have been fighting to have the Canadian government recognize our land and human rights since the beginning of colonization. Time and time again, we have stood up for what is inherently ours, only to have been pushed aside. This history of repression and oppression is at the heart of the Wet'suwet'en protests, which took place during the month of February. They have become a defining moment for Indigenous land and title rights in Canada.

Understandably, with so many differing opinions within Indigenous communities, between Indigenous people and the government, and among Canadians in general, it has been difficult to find a way forward. However, a few lessons can be drawn from the protests to help guide us in the future.

First, some progress has been made towards reconciliation. But progress is difficult given what Indigenous people have endured as a result of colonization. The impacts of residential schools and day schools, the 60's scoop, the missing and murdered Indigenous women, and the child welfare system—all these and more remain indescribably painful.

Second, there is an enormous knowledge gap regarding Indigenous peoples in Canada. This gap must be addressed immediately. Many actions by the federal government and the RCMP during the Wet'suwet'en protests can be attributed to both a lack of understanding and an ignorance of the rights of Indigenous peoples. *The National Inquiry's Final Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* is a valuable resource for informing and communicating Indigenous issues and challenges—as are the many materials produced by NWAC, especially with respect to issues and challenges faced by Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people.

This leads me to my final point. Indigenous women must be involved in discussions involving their land rights, political rights and human rights at the outset. Our women possess a unique and powerful connection to the land. We are also often the most affected by issues being discussed.

Going forward, I ask all parties to recognize and respect Indigenous people's rights, employing partnerships, communication and respect.

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President Lorraine Whitman

The month of February was very busy, juggling NWAC governance with government meetings and public engagements and supporting the work of the national office.

Communications

My role as the President of NWAC is to be the political voice for the organization and, most importantly, for Indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse and Two-Spirit people. As your 'voice' it is important for me to reach out to all of you at the grassroots level, to our allies and to the wider Indigenous community. An important communications tool for me to do that is through social media. Tweeting, posting messages on Facebook and using videos all give me an opportunity to connect with all of you directly, immediately and personally. We have developed a high profile communications strategy that will enable me to use additional tools even more frequently to communicate and keep you informed.



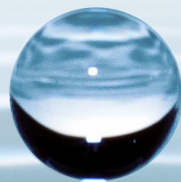
Advocacy and Lobbying Work

As your President, I am also actively lobbying and advocating for Indigenous women and gender-diverse people to be represented at high-level political tables. For true reconciliation to take place, it is critical that our voices are heard and that an Indigenous gender-based lens is applied in all policy- and decision-making.

On this note, on February 10, I met with representatives from the Canada Energy Regulator (CER), previously called the National Energy Board. The CER keeps watch over the companies that operate oil and gas pipelines and electrical powerlines that cross a national, provincial or territorial border. Bill C-29, which enacts the Impact Assessment Act and the Canadian Energy Regulator Act, to amend the Navigation Protection Act and to make consequential

amendments to other Acts, was recently passed. Conserving our waters is critical to the well-being of Indigenous women and their families—environmentally and spiritually, as water is a basic need. It is important for NWAC to be at policy- and decision-making tables to have our voices heard on issues such as these. My goal is to provide advice to the CER on potential candidates for setting up an Indigenous advisory committee. This committee would be made up of Indigenous women, Elders and youth from across the country.

Four days later, on February 14, I was pleased to take part and deliver remarks on behalf of NWAC at a meeting of National Indigenous Organizations and the Council of Ministers (FPT) Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety. I talked about how transportation has been a unifying thread for Canadians. I pointed out that transportation has also contributed greatly to the disproportionate issues that affect Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. For example, when we talk about food insecurity, we need to talk about the barriers that Indigenous women and gender-diverse people face when trying to access affordable food. Factors such as the high costs involved in transporting good-quality, affordable food to families living in our northern and remote regions factor heavily into the discussion. In my remarks, I also talked about the danger that transportation presents for Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. Travelling long distances to attend school, or to access health care and social services, or to buy groceries and goods are a daily reality. This fact of life poses a particular danger to Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people every single day.



Celebrations, Openings and Festivities

Being out there in the greater community is a welcoming change of pace from high-level meetings. Celebrations, openings and festivities are also an opportunity to advance the work of NWAC and promote our message that Indigenous women's voices matter and must be heard.

On February 7, we held a meeting with staff and members of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association about plans for establishing a Nova Scotia Resiliency Centre in Truro. A lot has been selected and I had the privilege of seeing where the centre will be built.

Then it was on to a meeting with world-renowned architect Oman Ghandi and his colleagues, for a high-level discussion on a project to design a culturally appropriate small home. NWAC is hoping to partner with Mr. Ghandi on a pilot project for the first home to be built.

I was pleased to be asked to deliver the opening prayers and remarks at Acadia University's Midwinter Feast on February 11. I spoke to the students, president, the chief and council from Glooscap First Nation, and educators on the importance of this gathering to the Mi'kmaq. The Mi'kmaq have traditionally celebrated the feast after the first new moon of January. Midwinter marks the end of the year and the start of the new ceremonial year. The ancient feast is a chance to pay thanks to the Great Spirit/Creator for life, health and sustenance. Drummers, dancers and storytellers brought the intent of the feast to life.

I also met with students from L.E. Shaw Elementary School, where I once taught.





Native Women's
Association of Canada



L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

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