

NWAC PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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



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.



March 2020 President's Report

Dear friends,

COVID-19 has turned our lives upside down. At NWAC, we have risen to the challenge. To help and support Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people in the fight against this terrible pandemic, NWAC has implemented initiatives and supports that include a dedicated web page, an aggressive social media strategy and phone support from our in-house Elders. We are also working on outreach tactics to inform and support women and gender-diverse people living in remote areas.

While our challenges may not all be the same, there is one thing that we all share — our heritage and culture. Despite the need to self-isolate and practise social distancing, we can still practise the ancient seven sacred teachings of unity, love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility and truth. We can still honour the Earth through songs, dances, prayers and drumming.

During the COVID-19 crisis, we must hold onto these practices, but also find new ways to celebrate our heritage and culture, and to 'connect' with one another. We can connect remotely and share our songs and prayers through Facebook or TikTok or Instagram. For example, you can join me every Sunday at 1 pm EST on [Facebook Live](#) for prayers, teachings and drumming. I encourage all of you to find ways to drum and sing in and outside your own home while enjoying everything that Mother Earth has provided. I would love to see videos and photos of how you are staying connected during this difficult time. Send them to communications@nwac.ca, and we will share them to create a community of hope, healing and strength.

It's so important for all of us to go for a walk in the forest or along the river — wherever you feel completely at one with nature. And if you go with a family member or friend, remember to keep six feet apart as you walk together.

As time goes on, you may feel mentally stressed, depressed or anxious. You can reach out to one of NWAC's three in-house Elders — their contact information is on our [website](#). During this time of crisis, they can offer you support and help build resiliency.

Be a true Rainbow Warrior. Take care of your community. Wash your hands. Practise physical distancing. Protect our Elders.

Thank you, Wela'lin



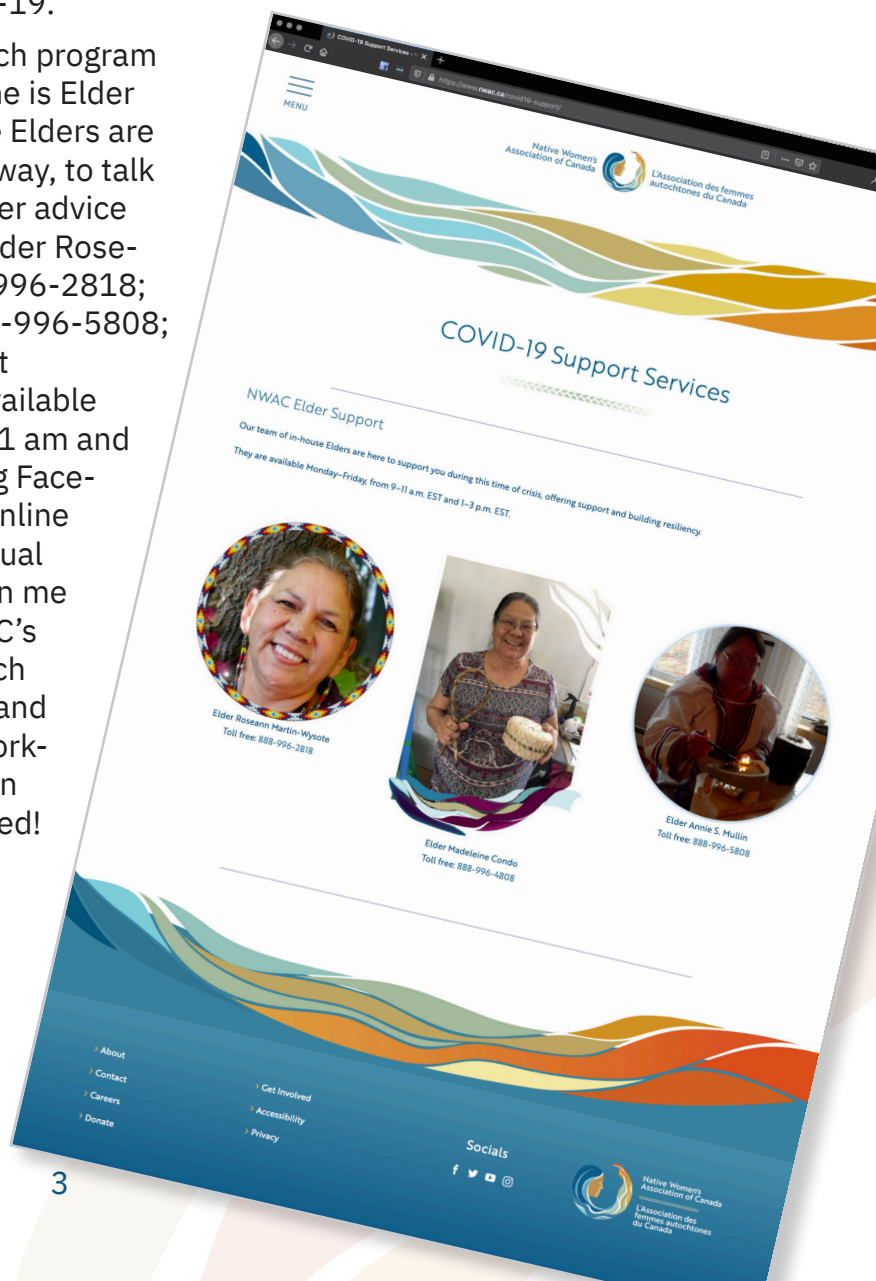
President Lorraine Whitman

Much of my focus during the month of March has been on two main topics:
COVID-19 and Indigenous women's rights.

COVID-19

On the COVID-19 front, NWAC is front and centre, providing up-to-date information and links to important government supports and resources. We are updating this information regularly, so please visit our website often. We have launched an aggressive social media campaign, using Facebook and Twitter to spread our messages to Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. Visit our Facebook page regularly for inspiration and support. Check our website at <https://www.nwac.ca/covid19/> for information and resources related to COVID-19.

A centrepiece of our outreach program through this challenging time is Elder support. Our three in-house Elders are only a toll-free phone call away, to talk to you, comfort you, and offer advice and support. You can call Elder Roseann Martin-Wysote at 888-996-2818; Elder Annie S. Mullin at 888-996-5808; or Elder Madeleine Condo at 888-996-4808. They are available Monday to Friday, from 9–11 am and 1–3 pm EST. I am also using Facebook to organize a weekly online prayer, drumming and spiritual teaching session; please join me every Sunday through NWAC's Facebook page. And, to reach people in Canada's remote and Northern regions, we are working on a targeted information radio campaign, so stay tuned!



Advocacy and lobbying

Indigenous women's rights

As your NWAC president, I continue to push the message about the importance of Indigenous women's voices being heard at policy- and decision-making tables. This month I held teleconference calls with the following individuals:

- Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development — including NWAC in discussions and meetings / March 12
- Pam Damoff, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services — collaborating on housing initiatives / March 18
- Paulette Senior, CEO and President of the Canadian Women's Foundation — working together on how to keep women safe through COVID-19; forming joint partnerships related to economic development / March 27
- Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown Indigenous Relations — how the federal government can support Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people during COVID-19 / March 25

I and Elder Madeleine Condo met Senator Rosemary Moodie in person on March 10 to discuss the protection and welfare of Indigenous children.

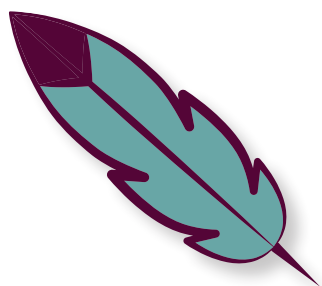




International Women's Day

A highlight for me this month was International Women's Day (IWD), on March 7. As one of the keynote speakers at the Ottawa march, I made reference to the colonial practices that have contributed to higher rates of violence against Indigenous women compared to non-Indigenous women. I called on the Government of Canada to implement the Inquiry's Calls for Justice in order to end colonialism, cultural genocide and violence. I marched alongside Catherine McKenna, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, and participated in a panel on gender-based violence at Ottawa City Hall. To mark IWD, I posed in the #EachforEqual stance — illustrating visually how individual actions can create a collective phenomenon.

To conclude IWD, S Magazine featured seven exceptional women who use their power and strength to stand together while fighting for equality for all. I was proud to have been selected. I hope my words resonate with you: "An equal world is an enabled world. On this day and all other days, I and my Indigenous sisters, through NWAC, commit to continuing out work to restore Indigenous women's rightful place."



Promoting NWAC's Message

In addition to connecting with political representatives directly, I also use other methods to promote the important work we are doing on behalf of Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people. Putting pen to paper, so to speak, I wrote two op-ed pieces for *The Hill Times*, Canada's twice-weekly newspaper, which covers the Parliament of Canada, the federal government and other federal political news.

The first piece, published March 7, looked at how colonial policies and attitudes have stripped Indigenous women and girls of their humanity. Implementing the Final Inquiry's 231 Calls for Justice would go a long way to achieving reconciliation.

Stop treating Indigenous women's bodies as empty of humanity and implement the calls for justice

By LORRAINE WHITMAN MAR. 7, 2020

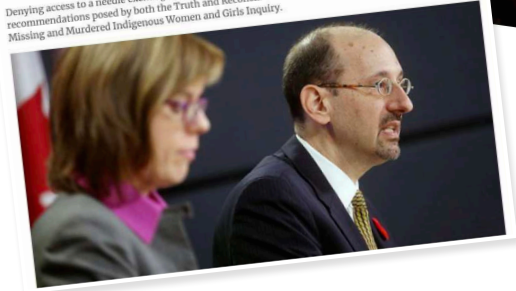
Colonial policies and attitudes have stripped Indigenous women and girls of their humanity. Implementing all 231 calls for justice would go a long way to achieving reconciliation.



Correctional Service of Canada must do better

By SANDRA KA HON CHU AND LORRAINE WHITMAN MAR. 16, 2020

Denying access to a needle exchange program flies in the face of human rights and the spirit of the recommendations posed by both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry.



On this note, I wrote to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on March 9 asking why NWAC was not invited to participate in the First Ministers' Meeting on March 13, which followed a March 12th meeting with national Indigenous leaders. We are the only national Indigenous organization representing half the Indigenous population — females. NWAC can't be silenced that easily, and so we will be using Facebook as our 'discussion table' to highlight what we are doing in response to the Calls for Justice.

The second piece for *The Hill Times*, published March 16, was co-written with Sandra Ka Hon Chu of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. We wrote about the need for a culturally safe and trauma-informed prison needle exchange program.



March 9, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, PC, MP
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Re: First Ministers' Meeting, March 12, 2020, Ottawa, ON

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

I am writing today to express my extreme disappointment that the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) was not invited to participate with other national Indigenous organizations in the First Ministers' meeting planned for March 13th in Ottawa. I have made several calls to your office and I have received no response.

On February 1st, 2019, NWAC signed an historic Accord with Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada as represented by the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations ("Canada"). Our role as a national voice of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender diverse people is formally acknowledged in this historic agreement, and is of equal status as the agreements signed with other national Indigenous organizations who also represent section 25 rights holders.

Furthermore, NWAC has participated in past FPT and First Ministers' meetings, including the most recent meeting with the Ministers of Transportation and Infrastructure of the Provinces and Territories. NWAC's exclusion from the upcoming First Ministers' meeting is a departure from past practice and — simply put — unacceptable. The leaders of the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Métis National Council were all invited to "discuss how they can work together to advance the priorities of First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation." This meeting will determine critical issues impacting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender diverse people.

The voices of Indigenous women are no less valuable than other Indigenous voices. The NWAC can provide expert advice on complex gender and intersectional issues and contribute solutions and strategies to the discussions.

NWAC was founded on the collective goal to enhance, promote and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women. Since 1974, NWAC has been a national voice of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender diverse people from coast to coast to coast.

Prime Minister, you said there is "no room for us" in the relationship with Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender diverse people are the backbone of our rights and is contrary to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In the spirit of reconciliation, I respectfully ask that you extend an invitation to NWAC to attend the First Ministers' meeting on March 13th so that our voices may be heard and forward to receiving your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Whitman

Lorraine Whitman
President
Native Women's Association of Canada

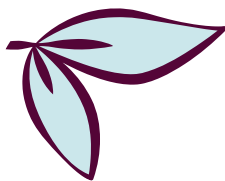
cc: Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Carolyn Bennett, PC, MP
Christa Freedman, Deputy Prime Minister
Katie Telford, Chief of Staff, Office of the Prime Minister
Rick Theriault, Policy Advisor, Office of the Prime Minister

Celebrations, Openings and Festivities

On March 4, I spoke at an **Enhanced Citizenship Ceremony**, held at Acadia University in Nova Scotia. My speech highlighted the importance of inclusivity and diversity. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made a surprise visit.

The **Indspire Awards** represent the highest honour the Indigenous community bestows upon its own people. After 27 years, the Indspire Awards have honoured 373 First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals who demonstrate outstanding achievement. I was honoured to be a presenter at the 2020 award ceremony, held on March 6 at the National Arts Centre.

Although not a celebration in the strictest sense, I was so pleased to hear that **Luis Almagro was re-elected as Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS)**. NWAC and OAC have forged a wonderful working relationship. In congratulating Mr. Almagro on his re-election, I expressed my excitement in being able to continue our work to advance the rights of Indigenous women here in Canada and around the world.



"On this day and all other days, I and my Indigenous sisters—through the Native Women's Association of Canada—**commit** to continuing our work to **restore** Indigenous women's rightful place."



Native Women's
Association of Canada



L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

nwac.ca