

NWAC PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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



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.

June 2020 President's Report


Dear friends,

For me, June stands out in a number of ways. It's the month that the Government of Canada chose to honour the history, heritage, and diversity of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The intent of National Indigenous History Month — and National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21, the summer solstice — is to use this as a time for learning about, appreciating, and acknowledging the contributions that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people have made in shaping Canada.

This month and this day were, and are, to be used for 'teachable' moments, to promote a better understanding of Indigenous ways.

The killing of 26-year-old Chantel Moore and of Rodney Levi by police and RCMP officers, respectively, plus the assault on Chipewyan First Nations Chief Allan Adam as well as on an apparently intoxicated, staggering Inuk man in Kinngait, Nunavut, all took place within days of one another — and around the time that protesters were marching in the streets of America to demand change after the killing of George Floyd, a Black man, by police in Minneapolis. With respect to the Chantel Moore tragedy, I would like to thank Brandy Stanowich, President of the Indigenous Women's Association of the Maliseet & Mi'kmaq Territory PTMA and Elder Alma Brookes of New Brunswick, who assisted Chantel's family during this time of pain and mourning, and all those who came together for our sister during this tragedy.





Ironically, Chantel died on June 4, the day after the first anniversary of the release of the report by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. In another juxtaposition of events, the federal government had admitted just a week before Chantel's death that it has not created a promised national action plan to the Inquiry's 231 Calls for Justice. This failure to follow through as promised is difficult to take when, to mark National Indigenous Peoples Day, we hear Prime Minister Justin Trudeau saying these words: "We must continue to address the systemic inequalities and discrimination that Indigenous peoples experience in Canada — issues that have been amplified by the social, health, and economic impacts of COVID-19. The latest tragic events and protests [against racism] have also underscored how far we still have to go as a country, and the work we need to do to eliminate systemic racism from our society."

A series of nation-wide, grassroots consultations that NWAC held with our local member offices and with Indigenous women to determine how COVID-19 has been affecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women in Canada only served to confirm what we were hearing — that Indigenous women are facing more violent incidents since the pandemic began, often by an intimate partner.

These recent killings and assaults, the rise in domestic violence, and the ongoing tragedy of missing and murdered women and girls underscore the fact that we need action, now.

No longer satisfied to sit on the sidelines, we have kept the pressure on the government by releasing our own report card on the government's failure to follow through on MMIWG. On the right to culture, health, security, and justice alone, the government has made no progress and was given a failing grade.

We followed up by submitting our own proposed measures for government consideration in drafting its national action plan, as well as the measures we have taken as an organization to address specific Calls for Justice.

We are also calling for better protocols to be put in place by police forces across the country. To this end, I have sent directed communiqués to all provincial and federal Ministers who are responsible for policing and I held a teleconference meeting with RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki to begin the conversation on making the necessary revisions to policing in this country. NWAC wants to be an ally of the RCMP as it develops better procedures to enhance the safety of Indigenous people and prevent future

deaths. As outlined in a number of the Inquiry's Calls for Justice, we have posed four recommendations: equip all frontline police officers with body cameras; make non-violent apprehension the imperative when suspects are not brandishing firearms and train the police in de-escalation procedures rather than use-of-force when dealing with an Indigenous person suffering from a mental health issue; require the attendance of health professionals, social workers, or elders when officers are called to deal with an Indigenous person who is suffering from mental health issues or addictions; and form a task force to chart the road ahead.

I am pleased to report that the tremendous leadership role we have taken has received positive media attention across the country and even internationally. From op-eds in every major newspaper in every region of the country, to radio and television interviews, to regular news items, the message is clear.

Most importantly, NWAC is speaking for the voiceless: the thousands of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people who have gone missing or murdered, who are being killed needlessly by police, who experience violence or trauma and abuse regularly.

Thank you, Wela'lin



President Lorraine Whitman

Taking a Stand

In May, with the first-year anniversary drawing near, we wrote to Ms. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, offering eight measures that could form the basis of the government's national action plan. We asked them to:

- keep their promise to release an action plan;
- establish a national task force of investigators to resolve the files of missing and murdered women;
- establish a national database to record the details of the crimes committed against Indigenous women;
- provide funding to establish a unit within NWAC to work on the issues related to the Calls for Justice and to monitor progress;



- provide financial help in launching a public awareness campaign aimed at eliminating racism and sexism;
- bring NWAC to the table whenever decisions are being made that impact the rights of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people;
- support a virtual international summit to examine the best practices of other countries in the Americas to deal with COVID-19 and its impacts on Indigenous women; and
- help to expand the scope of our major project designed to heal those who have been damaged by MMIWG.

“We cannot afford to do nothing in the face of the violence that continues to take the lives of Canada’s First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women.”

NWAC is determined to keep the spotlight on the federal government’s inaction in moving ahead on any of the 231 Calls for Justice presented in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Taking a leadership stand and fighting for those without voices — for Chantel Moore, who was killed by police on June 4; for all the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; for those who are facing trauma, abuse, and domestic violence today — this has been my main focus these past four weeks.

On June 3, the first anniversary of the Final Report on MMIWG, NWAC held a news conference, where we released our report card and survey findings, and I delivered a speech. Two days later, I issued a statement on the death of Chantel Moore. This was followed up by a statement issued on June 18 on Canada’s lost bid on the UN Security Council, where I pressed home the point that “if Canada led by example at home, it would have the moral right to lead by example abroad.”

Five days later, on June 23, NWAC issued a statement calling on police and politicians to end police violence against Indigenous people. As a follow-up to this last statement, I wrote an op-ed on the need for police reform, which has been published in major newspapers across the country.

All of this work has served to keep the pressure on the government and to shine a spotlight on the issues impacting Indigenous women and communities across Canada. Regional, provincial, and national media, as well as international bureaus including the BBC in England, have heard our clarion call for action.

Individual High-Level Meetings

I used my teleconference meetings with various high-level individuals to discuss the:

- lack of concrete follow-up to the National Inquiry's Final Report by the federal government;
- our report card on the government's failure to draft an action plan (we gave the government a failing grade across the board);
- current COVID-19 pandemic in Canada and the heightened risk of domestic violence for Indigenous women, citing NWAC's own findings;
- NWAC's work in addressing specific Calls for Justice and the list of actions we have undertaken this past year;
- measures we have proposed to the federal government that could be the founding basis for its National Action Plan (as yet not formulated, 12 months after the Inquiry's Final Report);
- incarceration of Indigenous women; and
- measures that need to be taken by police forces and the RCMP to reduce unnecessary violence of Indigenous people.

June 2 — Teleconference call with Chris Aylward, National President of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, to inform him of the work that NWAC is doing and discuss the federal government's inaction concerning MMIWG.

June 5 — Virtual meeting with Dr. Elina Steinerte, Vice-Chair, UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, to discuss the Indigenization of Canada's prison population and the heightened risk of COVID-19 infection for Indigenous women in prison. We also talked about the UN Working Group visiting Canada in the near future.



June 11 — Virtual meeting with Francisco Cali Tzay, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to discuss the lack of follow-up by the federal government on the Inquiry's Final Report, the rise in domestic violence due to COVID-19, and NWAC's discussion paper on Canada's international obligations to ensure effective reparations for the human rights violations of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

June 30 — Teleconference call with RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki to talk about recent killings and assaults of Indigenous people by police/RCMP officers, discuss the broader issue of systemic racism with Canada's police forces, and how NWAC and the RCMP can work together to enhance the safety of Indigenous people and prevent further deaths and assaults.





Lorraine celebrating Pride Month in Annapolis, Nova Scotia



Lorraine's husband, Thomas, and daughter Zabrina celebrating Father's Day

Congratulations to all the Indigenous elementary, high school, and post-secondary graduates. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed challenges for you. I and NWAC are proud of your accomplishments!





Native Women's
Association of Canada



L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

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