

NWAC PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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



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.



May 2020 President's Report

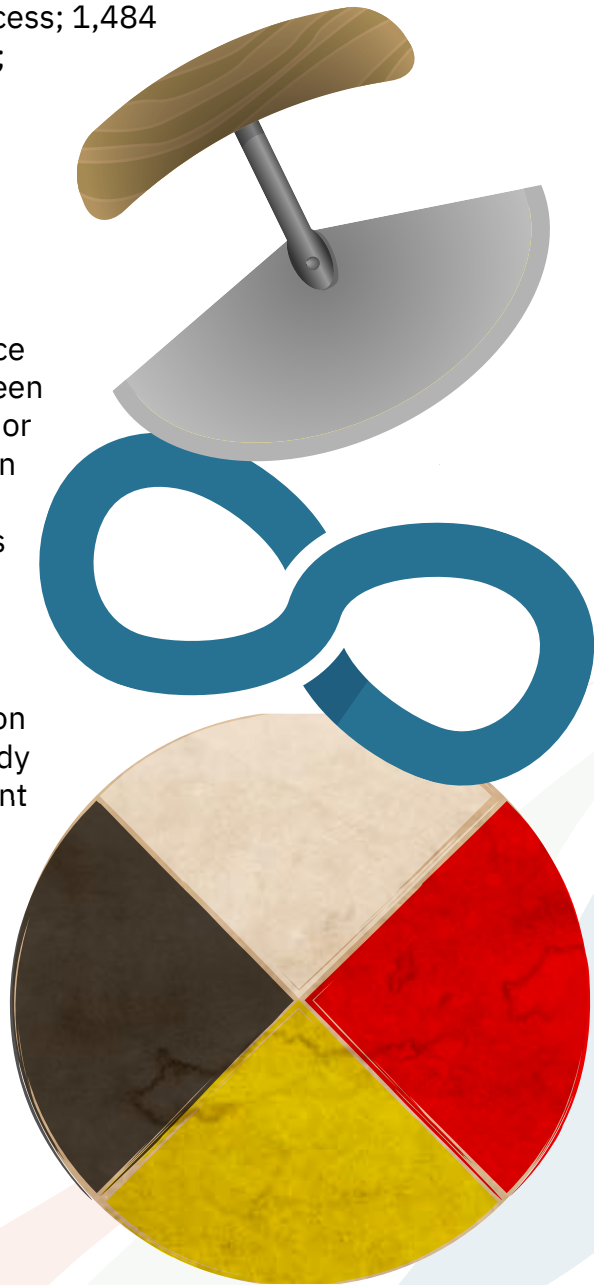
Dear friends,

As I write this, my thoughts are with the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and their families and communities. The inquiry into this national tragedy was nothing short of astounding in terms of its breadth and scope: 2,386 Indigenous people participated in the truth-gathering process; 1,484 family members and survivors gave testimony; 819 individuals shared through artistic expressions; 83 experts, knowledge keepers and officials provided testimony; 15 community hearings were held; and there were 9 separate knowledge keeper, expert and institutional hearings.

As you know, NWAC has been the national voice for Indigenous women since 1974. We have seen families whose loved daughter, sister, mother, or auntie has gone missing or been murdered torn apart. We have heard the stories of violence first-hand from survivors. Our collective hearts hold their stories and their memories.

We were front and centre throughout the three-year process. And as the first-year anniversary of the release of the Final Report on June 3, 2019, fast approached, we were already hard at work on pushing the federal government for its National Action Plan.

And when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, our work didn't stop. In fact, the restrictions placed on all Canadians to self-isolate and stay home in order to prevent community spread — a measure designed to enhance people's safety — only served to underscore the fact that COVID-19 only increases the risk of violence against Indigenous women.



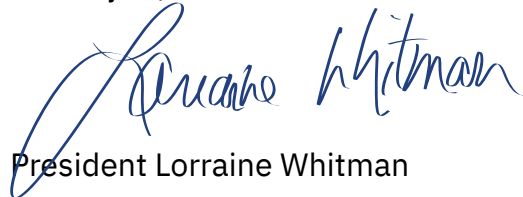
We conducted a series of nationwide, grassroots consultations, which found one in five women reporting they've been the victim of physical or psychological violence over the past three months.

The federal government promised that a National Action Plan responding to the Inquiry's report would be released in June 2020. It blamed the COVID-19 pandemic on its inability to do so.

The global pandemic has only served to highlight the precarious situation that Indigenous women and girls have found themselves in as a result of colonialism and discriminatory policies and practices against Indigenous people for over a century.

NWAC will continue to press for change. This was my main focus throughout the month of May. The Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people we represent expect no less.

Thank you, Wela'lin



President Lorraine Whitman

NWAC Outreach and Engagement

MMIWG: Pushing for Change

Throughout the month of May, I held a number of teleconference calls. As always, for introductory calls, I introduce myself and provide some background on the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and the work we are doing to champion the interests of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people across Canada and an end to cultural genocide. I also talked about our Resiliency Lodge and Makers Space, both concrete examples of our work to help Indigenous women and gender-diverse people heal and recover from trauma and abuse.

I also took the opportunity to talk about MMIWG, stressing the importance of a federal government National Action Plan in response to the Inquiry's 231 Calls for Justice and as a critical stepping-stone towards reconciliation. NWAC is doing a lot of work in this area. During my teleconference calls, I talked about increased funding for shelters and safe housing options; the rise in domestic violence against Indigenous women during the COVID-19 pandemic; our research and policy work related to women's and human rights; and our outreach and engagement efforts with international bodies, including with the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, who visited Canada last year on our invitation. As the only national organization representing Indigenous women, it is critical that NWAC be included at federal government roundtables and so on, and that we be funded appropriately.



My May Agenda

May 1: Joined the Canadian Coalition to Reform HIV Criminalization in a call to action to attorneys-general to take the measures needed to end unjust criminal prosecutions against people living with HIV

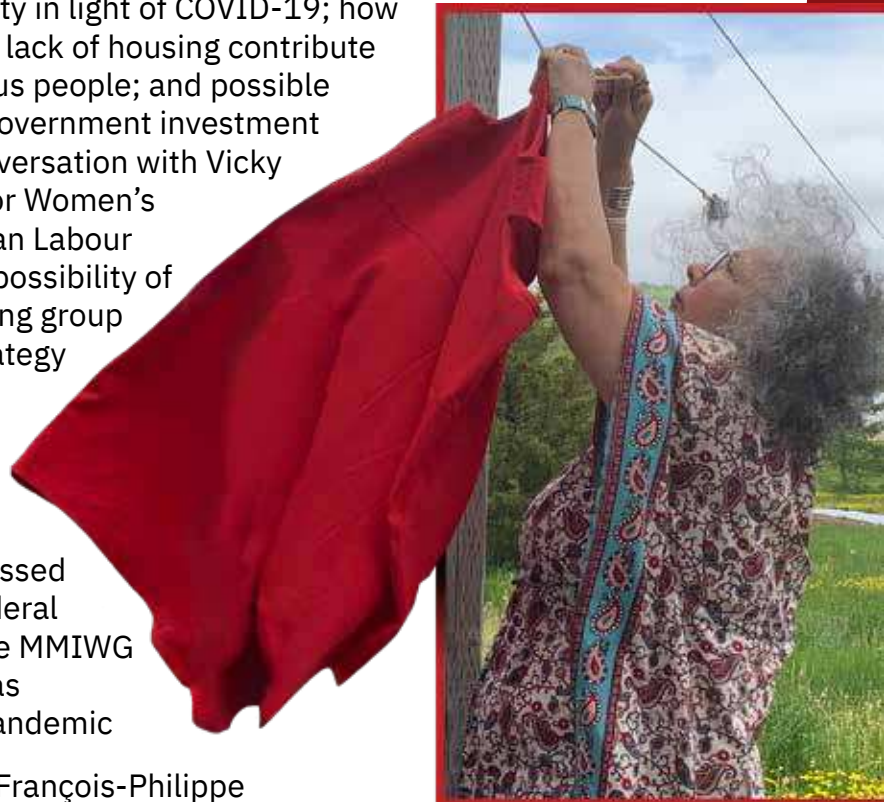
May 3 (Red Dress Day): Went on FB Live to talk about the Red Dress campaign, increase in domestic violence due to COVID-19, and the need for tools to make our communities healthy again

May 4: Introduced myself and NWAC to Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party. In addition to MMIWG, we also talked about children's vulnerability in light of COVID-19; how housing conditions and the lack of housing contribute to suicide among Indigenous people; and possible support from the NDP for government investment in NWAC's work. In my conversation with Vicky Smallman, National Director Women's and Human Rights, Canadian Labour Congress, I suggested the possibility of establishing a formal working group to develop a COVID-19 strategy focusing on women's and human rights.

May 5: Used Red Dress Day to promote No More MMIWG—in my video, I pressed home the point that the federal government needs to tackle MMIWG with the same urgency it has displayed to address the pandemic

May 7 (Water Is Life Day): François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Karina Gould, Minister of International Development, co-hosted a Virtual Roundtable on Canada's Feminist Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. As one of 14 civil society participants, I was honoured to take part. Specific points raised in my presentation included:

- The pandemic has increased the rates of violence against Indigenous women, as well as barriers to access to education, housing, economic empowerment, and justice.



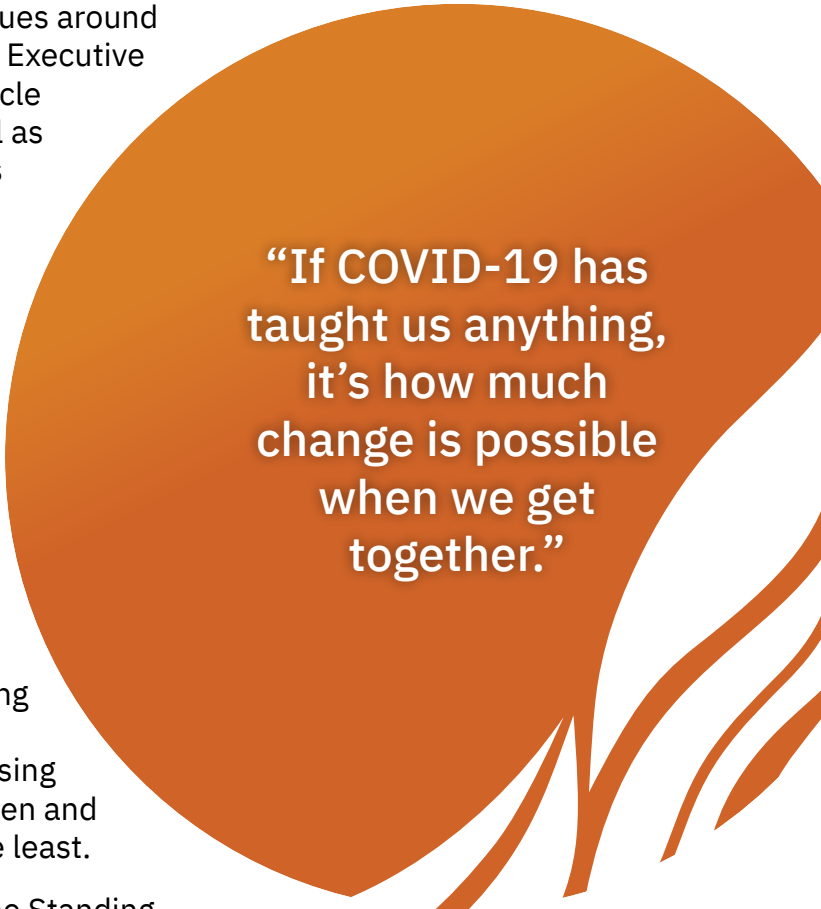
- While implementing its feminist agenda for peace and security abroad, Canada should also address all forms of discrimination, violence, and genocide at home
- Canada should also support NWAC's efforts to push for economic equality among Indigenous women (for example, our work with Indigenous women business leaders in the Americas).
- Canada can be a shining example for leadership in the area of safety and rights of Indigenous women by applying the approach it is using to address COVID-19.
- Canada should convene a high-level meeting with the OAS.

Minister Champagne was inspired by what I had to say.

May 12: Discussed common issues around violence with Lindsey Decontie, Executive Director, National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, as well as the lack of Indigenous women's shelters across Canada.

May 15: As an invitational speaker before the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, I outlined the findings of the needs assessment we conducted with our PTMAs to learn what, if any, progress has been made toward the creation of a National Action Plan. The lack of progress made by the federal government in addressing the 231 Calls for Justice issued by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is disappointing, to say the least.

Following my 'appearance' at the Standing Committee, I participated in a national online discussion organized by the office of Carolyn Bennett, the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, to discuss violence against Indigenous women and girls, and the government's response to the Inquiry.



“If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's how much change is possible when we get together.”

NWAC & the Media

Our hard work in pressing forward on MMIWG and the right of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people to be safe, secure, healthy, and empowered has been well received by the media, both provincially and nationally. NWAC issued the following statements and news releases this month:

Statements/News Releases:

- “Violence against Indigenous women during COVID-19 sparks calls for MMIWG plan” (issued May 12)
- “NWAC to tell MPs COVID-19 increases risk of violence against Indigenous women, urges government to release plan to meet Calls for Justice of year-old Inquiry” (issued May 15)
- “NWAC appalled by federal government’s national ‘lack-of-action-plan’ to address violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people” (issued May 27)

Media Coverage

- CBC News Manitoba
- The Canadian Press
- Radio-Canada International
- Alberta Native News
- The Globe and Mail
- Policy Options (magazine)
- TVO

“It is extremely disappointing to me that the federal government has not acted on the National Inquiry’s findings by first implementing a National Action Plan. I, and NWAC, want Indigenous families and communities to know that our missing and murdered women and girls will not be forgotten. We will continue to fight for equality, safety, and security for Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people across Canada.”



Water is life.



Native Women's
Association of Canada



L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

nwac.ca