



# Native Women's Association of Canada

Press Release – For Immediate Release

NWAC responds to \$10M announcement from the Department of Justice Canada

Ottawa, ON (November 9, 2010) - NWAC originally sent out a press release saying that we were supportive of a decision being made about the \$10M allocation of funds from the Department of Justice Canada on the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. However, at closer inspection, the NWAC and Sisters In Spirit have serious concerns of how this money is allocated.

While NWAC is supportive in principle to see the government of Canada taking steps to address the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women, we must undoubtedly express our disappointment with the exclusion of Sisters In Spirit in the ongoing development of public policy in the matter. There are several key elements the NWAC believes need to be addressed by the government in moving forward:

- The details in the announcement are not specific to Aboriginal women
- They do not include measures to address serious crimes like murder and speak only to violence as a whole
- Reinvents and conducts work that has already been done by Sisters In Spirit
- Does not address jurisdictional issues of the RCMP
- Allows any community groups in the Western provinces (BC, AB, SK, MB and excludes all other provinces and territories) to access funding; not necessarily Aboriginal-specific, or women-specific.

The wording in the 2010 federal budget stated that the funding would be “to address the disturbingly high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Concrete actions will be taken so that law enforcement and the Justice system meet the needs of Aboriginal women and their families.”

Based on the Budget 2010’s wording about “Taking Action to address violence against Aboriginal Women” and the Throne Speech praising Sisters In Spirit, NWAC was originally led to believe that it would be invited to join in a discussion with the Department of Justice Canada about the allocation of the \$10 million. This did not occur.

NWAC was supportive of the announcement on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October, 2010 because Aboriginal women have been waiting for this commitment from government and a decision on the allocation of funds towards tackling the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.

The announcement was delivered by the Minister of Status of Women (the Honourable Rona Ambrose) who was acting in the place of the Minister for Justice (the Honourable Rob Nicholson). In her introductory remarks, Minister Ambrose acknowledged NWAC, Sisters In Spirit, and the project “Evidence to Action”. This has proved confusing, as the

\$10M announcement is being linked with the current NWAC proposal that has been submitted to the Status of Women Canada for funding.

We cannot wait until 2013 for the RCMP to have their database up and running – this issue is too important. We cannot ask the families to wait two more years. Furthermore the limitations and restrictions on RCMP policies about gathering information about Aboriginal identity means that by design, their database will be inferior to the over 250+ variables in the SIS database and our research methodology.

But, the announcement was made, and the allocation of the \$10M has been made without direct consultation with NWAC. This announcement only addresses some of the short-term, immediately visible needs but allows systemic issues to fester.

The allocation of the \$10M shows how much the Department of Justice and Status of Women need NWAC's help.

The disproportionate number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women requires a disproportionate response. Therefore NWAC is requesting more money to be devoted to this issue in the 2011 federal budget, and that it needs to be solely dedicated to missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.

NWAC and the Sister's In Spirit not only want to share our obvious concerns and issues surrounding the government's announcement but would also like to strongly urge the government to:

1. Establish a new and transparent partnership with NWAC
2. Create a fund made available to families and communities of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in accordance with our plan of action
3. Consult with NWAC on funding priorities and allocations for the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.
4. Continue the policy and research activities with NWAC while the RCMP establish their information centers and databases in collaboration with NWAC.
5. Confirm government's ongoing support to the Sisters in Spirit movement and the Native Women's Association of Canada
6. Provide resources to address the root cause of violence

As the Native Women's Association of Canada, we respectfully request to have a seat at the table when deciding how future money will be allocated on issues that affect Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

## **Backgrounder: NWAC works with Status of Women Canada on Sisters In Spirit Funding**

The Native Women's Association of Canada's Sisters In Spirit initiative was first funded in 2005 as a five-year 'Research, Education, and Policy initiative'. It received funding through the policy branch of Status of Women Canada and approved by cabinet. The funding called for \$5M over five years. March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010 marked the end of Sisters In Spirit funding as a 'Research, Education, and Policy initiative'.

In the Speech from the Throne, Sisters In Spirit was mentioned specifically as a catalyst that brought the issue of murdered and missing Aboriginal women to light and that the government needed to take action of the disturbing number of unsolved cases. Within the April 2010 Budget announcement, Canada would invest \$10M over two years to address the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. This gave hope to Sisters In Spirit and its supporters that funding would be renewed. Shortly thereafter Sisters In Spirit learned that Status of Women Canada attempts to secure approval from cabinet had failed and that Sisters In Spirit 2 funding would not be renewed under the previous terms.

Bridge funding was secured to allow Sisters In Spirit to continue under existing funds through the Status of Women: Women's Community Fund. This bridge funding was intended for six months (April – October 2010) and allotted \$500,000 to continue the work mandate of Sisters In Spirit. Research for the database was included in the work plan and funding was given.

Recently, Sisters In Spirit was informed that under the Women's Community Fund there is no work allowed to be conducted for research, policy and advocacy. Since the bridge funding has come to an end, NWAC recommends that Status of Women Canada helps us find connections and build relationships with other federal departments to secure supplementary funding.

-30-

Katharine Irngaut, Strategic Policy Analyst  
Native Women's Association of Canada  
Tel : (613) 656-3022  
E-mail: [kirngaut@nwac.ca](mailto:kirngaut@nwac.ca)