

News Release

WORKING TOGETHER TO PREVENT AND ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

February 28, 2015 Ottawa, ON: Indigenous families and leaders, Premiers, provincial and territorial Ministers and representatives and Ministers from the Government of Canada met yesterday in Ottawa on needed action to prevent and address violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Indigenous women and girls are three times more likely to be victims of violence than non-Indigenous women. In May 2014, the RCMP released a National Operational Overview on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women. The research identified 1,181 missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canadian police databases between 1980 and 2012; of those 1,017 were murdered, and there are 164 investigations of missing Aboriginal women dating back to 1952.

In an unprecedented gathering, the National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls included representatives from families of missing and murdered Indigenous women, the Assembly of First Nations, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the Native Women's Association of Canada, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, Métis National Council, Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak / Women of the Métis Nation, all provinces and territories and the federal government.

Delegates committed to ongoing dialogue and coordinated action in priority areas, including prevention and awareness, community safety, policing measures and justice responses. Specific outcomes include the commitment to gather again in 2016 to assess progress.

The National Roundtable is a result of support expressed by Premiers at a meeting with National Aboriginal Organizations in August 2014.

Highlights:

Three priority areas were the focus of roundtable discussion and delegates agreed to coordinate efforts toward tangible and immediate action in each.

- **Prevention and Awareness**
 - Raising public awareness aimed at changing attitudes that devalue Indigenous women and girls and the contributions of Indigenous Peoples as an educational tool for violence prevention.
 - Reducing the marginalization of Indigenous women and girls by improving socio-economic development and outcomes.
 - Improving prevention and responses to violence within intimate relationships and families.
- **Community Safety**
 - Supporting Indigenous communities, organizations and individuals to develop safety initiatives that respond to their unique cultural, traditional and socio-economic needs and realities.
 - Engaging communities, governments, organizations and institutions, in supporting prevention, action, and intervention when violence has occurred.
 - Supporting and addressing safety and healing of individuals, families and communities.
- **Policing Measures and Justice Responses**
 - Improving the relationship between justice sector professionals, including police, and Indigenous Peoples and strengthening community-based policing in Indigenous communities.
 - Identifying strategies within the justice system to protect and assist Indigenous women and girls who are victims of violence.

Outcomes and Next Steps:

Delegates of the National Roundtable commit to continuing to work together in coordinating action to prevent and end violence against Indigenous women and girls, including the commitment to a second National Roundtable to be held in 2016. All Parties committed to working directly with Indigenous communities and organizations to move forward on Roundtable commitments to discuss efforts underway, progress and areas for further focus. Parties to the National Roundtable commit to using their respective reporting and accountability mechanisms to report on their activities and progress and will increase efforts at enhanced public reporting, and sharing information on effective collaboration efforts both within and across jurisdictions, organizations and communities.

Parties to the National Roundtable further committed to the development of a prevention and awareness campaign and accepted an invitation from the Province of Manitoba to host an inaugural forum to explore best practices and better coordinate and share information on policing and justice responses.

Quotes:

Ceremonial Family Witness Judy Maas from Blueberry River First Nation: “We will idle no more as our sisters, mothers, daughters, aunties, and grandmothers go missing and continue to be violated by any type of violence. We will no longer remain invisible. We will take our rightful place. Our voices are the voices of those who have suffered. Our children deserve better. We expect nothing less than a formal commitment by governments to implement the recommendations being heard.”

Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women Dr. K. Kellie Leitch, P.C., O.Ont., M.P.: “Our Government understands the heavy toll that violence has on victims, families, and communities. That’s why we are committed to taking concrete actions that address family violence and violent crimes against Aboriginal women and girls. And because everyone has a role to play, the Government of Canada will continue working collaboratively with provinces and territories, Aboriginal families, communities and organizations, to address this important issue.”

Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Bernard Valcourt: “Our Government recognizes that addressing violence against Aboriginal women is a shared responsibility that requires commitment to action from all partners, including at the community level. By meeting today and continuing to work together, we are sending a strong message that these abhorrent acts of violence will not be tolerated.”

Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde: “I commend the strength of the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and the leadership of Indigenous organizations, provinces, territories and the federal government for coming together for this unprecedented gathering. Ending violence must be a national priority and we must work together to ensure to uphold the fundamental right to life and security for every Indigenous woman and girl and to live free of discrimination. The commitments we made today must translate into action on the ground to keep Indigenous women and girls safe and secure. We will continue to work with Indigenous families, organizations and all levels of governments to end violence and we will continue the push for a National Public Inquiry to seek justice and to move on long-term solutions.”

Congress of Aboriginal Peoples National Chief Betty Ann Lavallée: “This meeting was a constructive step forward, but there is much more to do. The spirits of our sisters will not rest until justice is done and neither will we.”

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami President Terry Audla: “There is no one-size-fits all approach to addressing some of the significant issues we have been wrestling with today. Inuit welcome the commitments reached at this meeting and look forward to working with provincial, territorial and federal governments to develop specific means of addressing our most pressing needs, respecting the fact that violence has a human cost, and it also has an economic cost. Inuit live in some of the most remote communities in Canada, and the delivery of and

access to programs and services in our homeland will always cost more than it does to provide those same programs and services in Southern Canada.”

Métis National Council President Clément Chartier: Métis National Council President Clément Chartier: “The Métis Nation is pleased to witness the forward movement on addressing this most critical matter. The issue of murdered and missing Aboriginal women and girls has been plaguing our communities for far too long and concrete solutions must be explored and implemented. I congratulate the leadership of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal governments and organizations for taking this progressive step and thank the affected families for their continued determination to seek the justice this violation of life is demanding.”

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak / Women of the Métis Nation President Melanie Omeniho: “I acknowledge the work that has been achieved by bringing together the National Aboriginal Organizations, provinces, territories, the federal government and representatives from the families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women for this unique meeting. The life, safety and security of Indigenous women, which includes Metis women is a priority for Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak. It is an exceptional opportunity to work with other Aboriginal representative organizations and the various levels of government to build on a collective action plan that will assist us in addressing the overwhelming issues that result from the level of violence that some Indigenous women have been a victim of.”

Native Women’s Association of Canada Interim Action President Dr. Dawn Harvard: “We must work together – Aboriginal Peoples and all levels Governments to put in place measures that protect Aboriginal women and girls. Anything less is a denial of our basic human rights. The provinces and territories and Aboriginal Peoples have all supported the call for a national public inquiry and now we need to work together, along with the Federal Government to implement a comprehensive, national framework of action to end violence!”

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada President Rebecca Kudloo: “We know that Inuit women and children are at the greatest risk of violence in their homes and our members feel prevention is the most important and urgent issue to be addressed after this roundtable. They have told us that unresolved trauma and abuse is the most significant underlying cause to be addressed, and we look forward to a whole-of-government response in working together to address this major physical and mental health issue.”

Alberta Legislative Secretary for Aboriginal Education and Jobs, Skills, and Training Pearl Calahasen: “The discussions we had at today’s national roundtable were incredibly valuable. The Alberta government remains committed to taking action on the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls by continuing its work with Aboriginal leaders, communities and organizations to find solutions.”

British Columbia Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation John Rustad: “This significant gathering has resulted in a level of discussion never seen before and I thank the family members of missing and murdered Aboriginal women who dedicated their time and displayed great courage telling their stories. The B.C. government has taken action on all major themes from our provincial Missing Women Commission of Inquiry and we will continue to work with our Aboriginal partners on the systemic changes needed to create a legacy of safety for Aboriginal women and girls. This work, and our efforts nationwide, will be enriched by today’s dialogue.”

Manitoba Premier Gregory Selinger: “This roundtable is about the families from across the country who have suffered an unimaginable and tragic loss. Mothers, daughter, sisters and wives have been taken from them and their families are left behind to pick up the pieces. For some families, they have the heartbreaking task of caring for children who will never see their mothers again. This gathering helps us to move forward on addressing the critical issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada.”

New Brunswick Minister Responsible for the Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat Dr. Ed. Doherty M.D.:

“Violence against Aboriginal women and girls impacts Aboriginal communities and families throughout New Brunswick. We are pleased to have this opportunity to work together and stimulate discussion and collaboration in addressing violence against aboriginal women and girls not only in New Brunswick, but across the country”.

Newfoundland and Labrador Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General Judy Manning:

“In 2014, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador supported a provincial, all-party resolution calling for a national inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. We are prepared to work with the Government of Canada on such an initiative and committed to cooperating with all jurisdictions to eliminate all forms of violence against Aboriginal women and girls. We acknowledge those families and individuals that attended the Family and Peoples Gatherings, and we thank them for having the courage to share their stories.”

Northwest Territories Premier Bob Mcleod: “Our experience in the Northwest Territories is that we are stronger and more successful when we work together as partners. This has been at the foundation of our commitment to engage with Aboriginal governments and organizations in the spirit of respect, recognition and responsibility. As the Chair of the National Roundtable I am very encouraged by the willingness of all the participants to engage in a meaningful national dialogue about concrete action and solutions to address the crisis of violence against Indigenous women and girls.”

Nova Scotia’s Minister of Community Services and Status of Women Joanne Bernard: “I am honoured to have participated in this important and timely discussion. I urge all Canadians to become more engaged and aware as we move to address the disproportionate rates of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.”

Nunavut Minister of Family Services Jeannie Ugyuk: “Keeping Indigenous women and girls safe and well is a shared, national responsibility; one that can no longer be ignored. I am humbled to have been part of today’s gathering. On behalf of the Government of Nunavut, I commit to working towards a framework to end this violence once and for all.”

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne: “Too many Aboriginal women and girls have experienced violence, been murdered or gone missing. This loss not only affects aboriginal communities across the country, but Canada as a whole. I am proud that Ontario has joined leaders across Canada to ensure that Aboriginal women and girls can live safely and reach their full potential.”

Prince Edward Island Minister of Community Services and Seniors and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women Valerie E. Docherty:

“Now is the time to take action and address the crisis of the disproportionate number of indigenous women and girls who are missing or murdered in Canada. By working together respectfully we can improve the lives of Indigenous women, girls and their families. I am hopeful that the work accomplished today will initiate collaborative efforts from all levels of government and Aboriginal organizations that will result in achievable action items.”

Quebec Minister responsible for Native Affairs Geoffrey Kelley, and Minister of Justice Ms. Stéphanie Vallée:

“In August 2014, during the meetings of the Council of the Federation, the Government of Quebec supported the proposal by First Nations members that a national roundtable be created to study the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women. We are already working on the wide variety of issues that arise from violence against Indigenous women with First Nations organizations in Québec, but we know that we can always do more. Our presence here today is a reflection of our willingness to collaborate with the other provinces as well as the federal government to share our resources and our experiences so as to end violence against Indigenous women and girls.”

Saskatchewan Minister of Justice and Attorney General Gordon Wyant: “I’m proud of the services offered in Saskatchewan to help address violence against Aboriginal women and girls, as well as initiatives geared towards prevention and awareness. We recognize that more needs to be done and by working together, we can share ideas and develop appropriate responses to reduce the risk of violence against Aboriginal women across the country.”

Yukon Premier Darrell Pasloski: “On behalf of the Government of Yukon and all Yukoners, I reaffirm our commitment to preventing violence against Aboriginal women and girls. I also want to acknowledge the strength and resilience of the family members who attended the roundtable, and the determination of everyone here to create communities where Aboriginal women and girls are safe.”

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