



NWAC

# PRESIDENT'S report



NOVEMBER 2023

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

**November** inspired a reflective energy. I started the month off strong meeting virtually with the Housing Minister, Sean Fraser. On November 2 we had a chance to get to know each other. I advised him that in direct response to the Final Report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous, Women and Girls (MMIWG) Calls for Justice, NWAC has developed and operates two Resiliency Lodges, in Quebec and New Brunswick with more to come. I also told him that NWAC prioritizes culturally safe housing and that we received funding from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to work on a prototype that is sustainable, affordable, accessible, and culturally appropriate (SAACA). We also had a productive discussion about the *Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy* and I reminded him of what we heard during engagements:

- That housing terminology should be decolonized (using words such as unhoused and housing insecurity).
- Prioritizing Indigenous-specific loans, grants, mortgages, rent-geared-to-income, portable housing benefits, fund supportive housing and emergency shelters.
- Fostering relationships with Indigenous suppliers, service providers and contractors.



I also urged the Minister to ensure Indigenous-led policy making.

In addition, I did a lot of planning and organizing for Board governance training. I was very happy to have the Board come together in person to learn more about our role and legal obligations as a collective. I thought the presenter was great and I especially appreciated that she grounded the presentation in an Anishinaabe worldview.

I thought it was very impactful for us all to revisit our strategic plan and discuss how the plan affects the communities we serve.

I want to thank everyone for your valuable input. It made me realize what a strong Board we have. It also made me realize that we have a lot of work to do but if we support each other, we can be successful in meeting our objectives and goals.

**On November 29**, I testified virtually in the *House of Commons Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs regarding Bill S-231, Increasing the Identification of Criminals (The Committee) Through the Use of DNA Act*. I told the Committee that NWAC supports the Senate's efforts to modernize the legal framework for DNA collection under Bill S-231. I advised that NWAC is especially encouraged by what Bill S-231 can mean for the families of MMIWG, whose cases remain unsolved. Bill S-231 proposes family searches, and widening the DNA bank, to be able to solve more cold cases.

I testified that although we don't know exactly how many unsolved MMIWG there are, the RCMP estimates there may be over one thousand. NWAC's research suggests this number is much higher. I urged committee members to keep in mind that cases related to human trafficking and sex work have a direct connection to the ongoing MMIWG genocide.



Gena Edwards, 1st VP and Lisa Smith, Adviser to the President, in Dubai at COP28. Photo supplied by Lisa Smith.

If any of the unsolved cases have DNA evidence without a match, Bill S-231's efforts may help solve those crimes. Widening the net to include those convicted of most offences to provide mandatory DNA samples will help. In addition to helping families of our MMIWG loved ones whose cases remain unsolved, Bill S-231 has the potential to reduce Indigenous women's mass incarceration. I also reminded the committee that the feedback I was sharing came from analysing this Bill from a Culturally Relevant, Gender-Based Analysis lens.

However, I did warn that Indigenous Peoples are more vulnerable to abuses of power, including privacy breaches; therefore, to assess whether Bill S-231 upholds and protects Indigenous Peoples' rights to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), to privacy, and to maintain control of their genetic resources like DNA, more research and review is needed. I recommended that when the Minister of Public Safety prepares their review on the second anniversary of Bill S-231's enactment, that the Minister also researches the Bill's impacts on Indigenous Peoples' collective and individual privacy rights within the familial searching regime.



Also, my adviser Lisa Smith and the 1st VP, Gena Edwards attended COP28. Some people asked me how the NWAC delegation was chosen. I would like to let everyone know that the invitation from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) calls for a technical expert. Last year's expert was Madeleine Redfern from Nunavut. This year, that technical expert was Gena Edwards given her PhD in global governance. This is Lisa's second COP, therefore she made sure our expert was supported.

Gena and Lisa participated in the 10th Facilitating Working Group for the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, the Indigenous Caucus, and did a successful side event on climate disaster relief. Their summary report is attached. Their side event at the Canadian Pavilion was a success.

The event focused on NWAC's project with the Canadian Red Cross around research into disaster preparedness using a culturally relevant, gender based, intersectional lens. In addition, there was an intimate conversation with COP28 delegates about their respective regional climate disasters. Given the recent wildfires, thawing of permafrost, intense hurricanes, and the fact that Indigenous Peoples are on the frontlines, it was at times an emotional conversation.

Participants were interested in learning about concrete examples of the realities of our people on the ground. For example, they discussed how our people are vulnerable to human trafficking when displaced and being evacuated due to weather events. We advised that climate relief must consider the realities of our women and gender diverse people.

Thank you, Gena, and Lisa, for representing NWAC so well.



## BILL C-29, NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR RECONCILIATION ACT

I am happy to report that my office's lobbying efforts paid off. Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released the (TRC) 94 Calls to Action, we have been waiting for this bill since it implements call to action #53. The bill establishes a council with a board of directors who will oversee the implementation of the calls to action. This is urgent since we know that governments are not implementing these calls. We were disappointed to see the original text of the bill excluded NWAC. I testified in the House of Commons in October 2022 and proposed an amendment to the bill. The amendment was to include NWAC as a nominee for the Council's Board of Directors. The amendment was passed.

On November 30, 2023, the bill passed third reading in the Senate. NWAC is included in the final version despite attempts to exclude our organization from the bill. Once the bill receives Royal Assent and is up and running, NWAC will nominate someone for the Board of Directors ensuring that women and gender-diverse folks are represented in the implementation of the Calls to Action.



## MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS:

I made a statement and also spoke with CBC's *All in a Day* with Alan Neal about the report of the Correctional Investigator of Canada (CIC) released on November 1, 2023, called *Ten Years Since Spirit Matters, A Roadmap for Reform of Indigenous Corrections in Canada*. The CIC reported his frustration with the apparent inability—or unwillingness—on the part of federal officials to stem the increasingly disproportionate number of Indigenous people behind bars. Dr. Zinger correctly labels this a human rights travesty.

I urged viewers to think about the fact that 50 per cent of federally incarcerated women are Indigenous although we only make up five per cent of the overall population. I also spoke about Section 81 Healing Lodges (Indigenous run healing lodges) and the reasons why there are vacancy rates and identify actions that must be taken to increase and maintain higher occupancy rates.

I also did a media interview with a master's student at Carleton University. They are writing a feature article about how increasing police is not a safe prevention tactic for gender-based violence. We had a thoughtful discussion. I advised that money is better spent on culturally relevant programming and shelters.

### **Native Women's Association of Canada Echoes Zinger Report Findings: Over Incarceration of Indigenous Women Is A Human Rights Travesty**

Published on November 2, 2023



**Gatineau, Que.** – Statement by NWAC President Carol McBride in response to *Ten Years Since Spirit Matters, A Roadmap for Reform of Indigenous Correction in Canada*, report of the Correctional Investigator of Canada released November 1, 2023:



## STAFFING UPDATE:

During the month of November, we welcomed a new Executive Assistant (EA), Tiffany Stow. Tiffany (she/her/elle) is a mother and ally living in the shared Traditional Territory of the Algonquin and Ojibwe people, on the shores of Lake Temiskaming. She is deeply honoured and truly motivated in having been selected to fulfil the role of Executive Assistant to the President of the Native Women's Association of Canada, our Carol McBride.

As the daughter of an immigrant mother from the West Indies and a father whose family were European settlers, she was raised as an ally to Indigenous people before that was a common expression in the mainstream. She lived as a child from Prince George, BC to St. John's NL, with a stop in between in Thunder Bay, before the family returned to Ontario and settled in New Liskeard. While attending university in Toronto for Journalism at what is now TMU in the 90s, Tiffany had the opportunity to be taught by CBC's late great Stuart McLean and CTV's Kevin Newman, got to see a Nirvana concert at Maple Leaf Gardens, and reported on the judicial proceedings for the Tem-Augama Anishnabai at the final stages of the appeal for the land caution in n'Dakimenan. She missed the opportunity, some 25 years later, to help topple that statue of Egerton Ryerson.

Tiffany has humbly had the chance to learn from local Elders and Knowledge-Keepers in a previous working role with children's service providers in Temiskaming. She looks forward to working with our President, her Advisor, and on behalf of all Leadership, Elders, Board and Committee Members, staff and partners of NWAC as we approach the 50th Anniversary of this proud organization.



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Native Women's Association of Canada  
L'Association des femmes autochtones du Canada