



NWAC

PRESIDENT'S

Report



JULY 2023

nwac.ca

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



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The first of July is always a suitable time to reflect on reconciliation and the relationship between the state of Canada and Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples do not have to reconcile; we have to decolonize.

On July 10, 2023, Manitoba Premier Heather Stefanson hosted Canada's Premiers and their delegations for the 2023 Summer Meeting of Canada's Premiers. This meeting took place in Winnipeg. As is custom, the Premiers met with Indigenous leaders the day prior to the meeting. In anticipation of the meeting, the Métis National Council (MNC) and Inuit Tapriit Kanatami (ITK) made a joint announcement to oppose NWAC's participation at this important high-level meeting. ITK, MNC (and AFN) have a permanent bilateral mechanism on joint priorities with the government of Canada whereas NWAC has an accord with the department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs (CIRNAC). The government has a pattern of excluding NWAC from meetings due to this





arrangement which they refer to as a distinctions-based approach. In addition, ITK and MNC oppose “non rights holders” (i.e: advocacy organizations) from meetings calling it a matter of respect. As the Board of Directors know we are rights holders. We represent Indigenous women and gender diverse people from coast to coast to coast and we must be at all decision-making tables. I spoke with CBC National News on this issue. I was disheartened that our sisters and brothers would oppose our participation since in so doing they are reinforcing colonial attitudes and adding to the marginalization of Indigenous women, girls, transgender and gender diverse people.

In terms of the meeting, I was supported by our Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Lynne Groulx and Mel Critch (co – chair, of Manitoba Moon Voices Inc. (MMVI)). The meeting was successful. I highlighted the urgent need for safe and affordable housing (among other things). There was a sense of community in the room and our interventions were well received.



President McBride at Meeting of National
Indigenous Organization Leaders and Premiers



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As the meeting progressed, the sound of drumming from an outside protest echoed through the room. Indigenous people (including NWAC) are demanding that the local Prairie Green landfill be searched for the remains of Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran, two Indigenous women who are believed to have been murdered by a serial killer. It was heartbreaking to know that our host can make a difference. Premier Stefanson can make the decision to search the landfill but is stubbornly not budging.

Our office holds daily meetings to triage email requests and respond to invitations. **On July 12**, our office received a letter from Senator Carignan to discuss Bill S-231, Increasing the Identification of Criminals Through the Use of DNA Act. Conservative Senator Carignan is the sponsor of the bill (which completed second reading in the Senate on November 3, 2022).



NWAC has a personal stake in amendments to the Criminal Code since our people are grossly overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

On July 21st, I had the honour of having a virtual coffee chat with Bernadette Marshall, the President of our Nova Scotia Provincial Territorial Membership Association (PTMA). I am always in awe of Bernadette's energy and passion. Nova Scotia is a leader in many ways and was a wonderful host for the 2023 North American Indigenous Games. I really appreciate these chats since they strengthen my relationship with the PTMAs. The PTMAs are the backbone of NWAC and are my utmost priority.

On July 24, there was an AGA committee meeting which was successful in ironing out logistics for the upcoming Annual General Assembly. My office is actively preparing for the AGA scheduled for August 12, 2023. I look forward to a successful meeting with NWAC's full membership. Good internal governance is of the utmost importance for me as President.

On July 26, I virtually attended the Meeting of Ministers of the Environment and National Indigenous Organizations, and Local regional Indigenous Representatives. The theme was water governance. There was a productive conversation. I spoke about the realities of our people when it comes to clean





water. I spoke about the mother who is forced to bathe her child in dirty water. Not only is clean drinking water a human right but as water carries, it is also a spiritual right. I also spoke about the water carriers project that NWAC is engaged in and offered our portal to all Ministers so they can hear firsthand the experiences our women face in relation to water governance. I was invited to a local meeting on the same day. It was a housing roundtable hosted by New Democratic Party leader, Jagmeet Singh in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories (NWT). Grace Blake, our President of our NWT PTMA connected us with her Executive Director, Agatha who represented us well. Agatha is well versed in the housing needs of our people in the NWT. Thanks Agatha!

On the same day, there was an extensive cabinet shuffle. Of particular note was the shuffle of CIRNAC Minister, Marc Miller into Immigration. I look forward to fostering a positive relationship with CIRNAC's new Minister, Gary Anandasangaree. Our office is preparing congratulatory letters to the new Ministers which we will leverage as meeting invites. We will stack the fall with meetings with the new cabinet.



There was a productive Board of Directors Meeting on July 27. We had numerous issues to discuss. For example, we prepared the bylaw package that will be brought forth to our AGA (among many other things).

On July 31, I had the honour to participate in the Women and Gender Equality FPTI in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. The beautiful island was a great backdrop to a productive meeting. It was a pleasure to watch the President of our PEI PTMA, Matilda Ramjattan in action. She is a valued advocate.

Last but certainly not least, I welcomed a new addition to my team. We are pleased to announce Chelsey McBride as my Executive Assistant (EA). Chelsey will be replacing Yvonne Haddad while she is on maternity leave.

Chelsey McBride is a proud Indigenous woman with roots in the Timiskaming First Nation. Her journey is marked by a rich tapestry of experiences, each contributing to her versatile skill set. Proficient in both English and French, Chelsey possesses strong networking and interpersonal abilities, fostering connections effortlessly. Chelsey's career spans from executive assistance roles at Indigenous Services Canada to her most recent position as Acting Chief of Staff at Canadien Heritage, where she navigated the complexities of the Director General's office.

Welcome to the team Chelsey! **We are so happy to have you!**

We will miss Yvonne dearly, but we are happy to have an experienced, keen and organized EA to take the reins. Chelsey will be an asset to the team, for sure.





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