

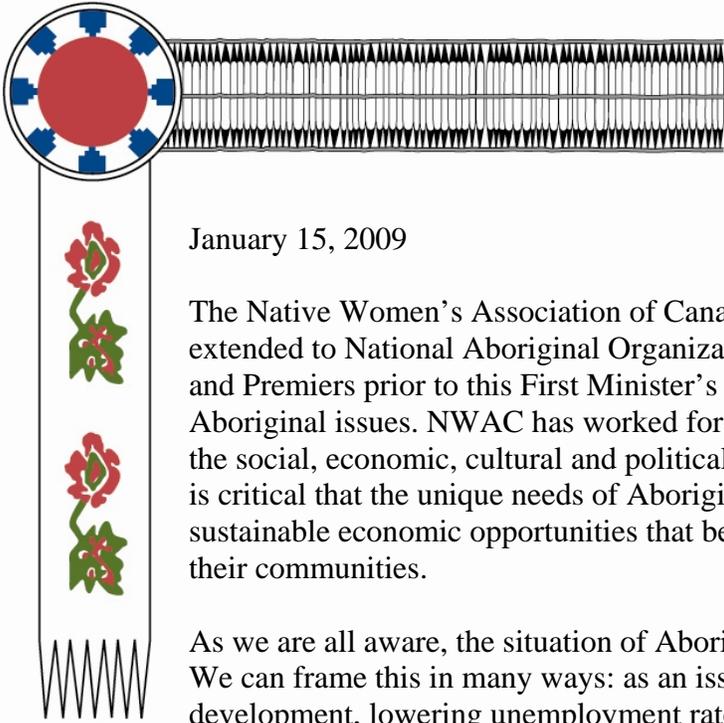


# **“Aboriginal solutions toward Stimulating Canada’s Economy”**

**Submission by the**

**Native Women’s Association of Canada**

**Prepared for the  
First Ministers’ Meeting with  
National Aboriginal Leaders  
January 15, 2009  
Ottawa, Ontario**



# Native Women's Association of Canada

January 15, 2009

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) appreciates the invitation extended to National Aboriginal Organization leaders to meet with the Prime Minister and Premiers prior to this First Minister's Meeting, and to focus this meeting on Aboriginal issues. NWAC has worked for over 34 years to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of Aboriginal women in Canada. It is critical that the unique needs of Aboriginal women are addressed by creating sustainable economic opportunities that benefit Aboriginal women, their families, and their communities.

As we are all aware, the situation of Aboriginal women in Canada requires improvement. We can frame this in many ways: as an issue of expanding opportunities for economic development, lowering unemployment rates, increasing educational attainment, or reducing women's personal experience of deprivation and hardship. What underlies any of these framings of the issues we face is that Aboriginal women experience greater barriers and poorer outcomes in all these interrelated spheres than do any other Canadians. The upcoming federal budget provides an occasion to again consider the needs of Aboriginal women, and to include specific measures that will improve their participation in the economy in the immediate future. NWAC notes that Aboriginal women are often mothers and heads of families: any positive change in their situation will also accrue to their children and families. In addition, our women act both as leaders and as agents of change in their communities: we believe that supporting their ability to assume this leadership role through economic measures is critically important. Any positive change for Aboriginal women will assist in strengthening their families, their communities and their nations.

NWAC believes that we are once more at a crossroads with regard to issues affecting Aboriginal peoples. The approaches that you endorse, and the policies and operational measures that result from these choices will fundamentally affect the well being of Aboriginal women in Canada. They will also set the context within which Aboriginal – non-Aboriginal relationships and accommodations are conducted over the next decade.

NWAC is aware that specific stimulus measures are being considered for the upcoming federal budget. NWAC holds that economic opportunities are dependent on, not merely influenced by infrastructure, housing, employment and training. The measures that are implemented must address the linkages between these issues. NWAC envisions an economic development plan that supports, advances and fully integrates Aboriginal women entrepreneurs into the Canadian economy. Activities must be situated in locations within Aboriginal communities and in the broader Canadian and international economies. Discrimination and inequalities within and outside of Aboriginal communities must be addressed to create real economic opportunities for Aboriginal women. They must also respect women's place as the first teachers of children and the many responsibilities

women have for the care of children. The following short to medium term measures are in line with the economic stimulus approaches already under consideration, and will aid in the development of Aboriginal women's capacity to engage in economic opportunities.

- 1) Infrastructure development must ensure that Aboriginal women are directly targeted for benefits accruing from the activities undertaken. For this reason, infrastructure spending on the construction, repair and renovation of housing – whether on-reserve personal housing, affordable or low-income housing, emergency shelters or second stage housing – is recommended. This time of downturn in the economy provides a good opportunity to invest in buildings, land and construction for the purpose of housing. NWAC is aware that an influx of funding for housing infrastructure would generate employment that initially benefits men because of the male domination of jobs and ownership in the construction industry. This issue is partially addressed in the discussion of employment and training below. In addition, our knowledge of who will be eligible for this housing suggests that it will predominantly be Aboriginal women who will derive direct benefits from the completed housing projects. CHMC, for example, has reported that 62% of Aboriginal lone parent households off reserve are in core housing need. Over 80% of these Aboriginal single-parent households are headed by women, who would greatly benefit from access to affordable housing. NWAC found during our work on matrimonial real property that access to emergency shelter and second stage housing is also primarily utilized by Aboriginal women and their children, and these services are required both on and off reserve.
- 2) Statistics indicate that Aboriginal women are now attending school at twice the rate of Aboriginal men and are nearly twice as likely to have a university certificate, degree or diploma. This statistic, however, masks the high proportion of Aboriginal women who are not able to complete a diploma or degree compared to Canadian women in general (for example, 41% of Aboriginal women have not completed high school compared to 23% of non-Aboriginal women). The multiple barriers facing Aboriginal women include the lack of educational prerequisites and the knowledge that enrolling in a program of studies may entail many hardships for themselves and their families due to the lack of appropriate financial and other supports.

Financial assistance for Aboriginal women for post-secondary education, including bursaries, scholarships, student loans, and federal post-secondary education funding must be continued, and funding levels and restrictions on entry modified to better meet the needs of Aboriginal women and their families. Age restrictions on bursaries, scholarships, co-operative programs and summer student job opportunities all create barriers to Aboriginal women's access to these supports. They should be eliminated. Increased funding levels to women to reflect the actual costs of child care and child support while attending school should also be implemented.

Finally, assisting Aboriginal women and girls to complete primary and secondary schooling ensures they have the foundation needed for diploma or degree studies. Financial assistance for transportation and day care costs are essential for those completing schooling up to grade 12, as is introducing an Aboriginal component into the K–12 educational system.

- 3) Aboriginal women generally face lesser returns from employment than Aboriginal men or non-Aboriginal women. The average income of Aboriginal women in 2005 was 27% less than that of Aboriginal men, and they face higher levels of unemployment. This reflects the concentration of Aboriginal women in low paying occupations: nearly 60% work in sales, service, and business finance or administration occupations.

Specific programs and opportunities addressing employment training and education must be developed with features that ensure Aboriginal women's needs and circumstances are accommodated. Aboriginal women will benefit from design elements that include:

- supportive and comprehensive training for Aboriginal women to enter non-traditional jobs, such as those found in the construction industry;
  - financial supports for women to attend training, including higher allowances for women with children, and full funding for transportation expenses and daycare costs;
  - the elimination of minimum and maximum age restrictions on entry into training and educational programs;
  - the elimination of Employment Insurance (EI) eligibility as a prerequisite for access to training for Aboriginal women; and,
  - special incentives for employers to hire Aboriginal women, especially in non-traditional occupations and industries.
- 4) A specific fund targeted to enabling new economic opportunities for Aboriginal women should be implemented. The terms and conditions for activities, eligibility criteria and selection of recipients for this fund should be determined by Aboriginal women for Aboriginal women. These development measures must include safeguards and processes that ensure that the benefits of economic development accrue to the community, not just to a few individuals. Economic development must also be balanced with environmental concerns, wellness and harmony in the community.
  - 5) Performance measures should be developed for both short and medium term stimulus activities to measure the extent to which Aboriginal women are benefiting from these economic measures. The decision-making structures and systems associated with this activity should ensure that a gender perspective is included in all development, along with the resources necessary to do so. Specific outcomes, such as the level of improvement in the quality of life experienced by Aboriginal women and their children and other key measures should be

established by Aboriginal women, and they should take a key role in conducting evaluation processes.

NWAC is aware that the federal budget is being tailored to respond to extraordinary situations caused in part by the global recession. Individuals in many industries are facing the threat of job loss, and there are fears that Canada's unemployment rate could reach 8% or higher. NWAC would remind government leaders that the unemployment rate among Aboriginal women, at 13.5%, is already in well in excess of this level. We are sympathetic to the needs of working and middle class Canadians who are facing debts, job loss, and uncertain times. These individuals, however, have already proven that they can succeed in the Canadian job market. Government intervention and aid must be targeted not only to those who are facing uncertainty as a result of global economic conditions, but also to those who have already been experiencing great difficulty in achieving educational and economic goals and financial security. The marginalization of Aboriginal women is now being exacerbated by the increased uncertainty, greater competition and worsening economic conditions in Canada. The government needs to target economic development funding, training and infrastructure activities directly to Aboriginal women, ensuring that they are able to participate in the labour market and the economy more broadly.

Strong women create and maintain strong families and strong communities. NWAC calls upon the government to assist strong Aboriginal women to support themselves and their families. NWAC is committed to working in partnership with the federal/provincial and territorial governments to promote and support economic development opportunities for Aboriginal women. We invite you, as leaders, to engage in this important work with us so that we can ensure concrete positive outcomes for Aboriginal women and their families.

### **Socio-Economic / Employment:**

- A. Over 40% of Aboriginal women live in poverty.
- B. In 2006, 51% of Aboriginal women aged 15 and over were employed, compared with 57% of non-Aboriginal women.
- C. In 2006, 13.5% of Aboriginal women were unemployed versus 6.4% of non-Aboriginal women yet the participation rates were nearly the same (59.1% and 61.6% respectively).
- D. In 2001, the highest rates of unemployment (22%) were experienced by Aboriginal women living on reserve.
- E. In 2005, the average income of Aboriginal women was 27.7% less than Aboriginal men.
- F. Aboriginal women were less likely than their male counterparts to be employed, at 51% and 57% respectively, both have risen since 2001 but the gap remains unchanged.
- G. Aboriginal women with jobs are most concentrated in low-paying occupations: 59% worked either in sales, service, or in business finance, or administration jobs.
- H. The median income for Aboriginal women in 2005 was \$3,600 (down from \$5,000 in 2001) less than non-Aboriginal women, at \$15,600. It was also \$3,000 less than Aboriginal men (unchanged since 2001).
- I. The average employment income for First Nation women in First Nation communities was approximately \$1,500 less than First Nation men and approx \$8,400 less than the Canadian average for women.
- J. 27% of income for Aboriginal women comes from employment insurance and social welfare benefits, compared to 16% of their non-Aboriginal counterparts.
- K. In 2000, 36% of all Aboriginal females were classified as living in a household with incomes below the Low-Income Cut-off, which is double the figure for non-Aboriginal women.
- L. The unemployment rate of Aboriginal female youth was about 2.1 times higher than that of their Canadian counterparts.

### **Education:**

- M. 41% of Aboriginal women have not completed high school, whereas the figure was 23% among non-Aboriginal women (this gap has increased since 2001).
- N. Aboriginal women over 15 years are nearly twice as likely (7.1% versus 4.5% respectively) than Aboriginal men to have a University certificate, degree or diploma.
- O. In 2006, 59% of Aboriginal men over the age of 15 years had completed (at the least) high school compared to 77% for non-Aboriginal women.
- P. In 2006, 36% of Aboriginal women over 15 had completed a postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree (compared to 50% of non-Aboriginal women). Of these women, 30% reported business, management and/or public administration as their major field of study. The second most reported field of study (22%) was health, parks, recreation and fitness.
- Q. In 2006, 6.3% of Aboriginal women aged 25 and over had a university degree, compared with 16% of their non-Aboriginal counterparts.
- R. Pregnancy and the need to care for children were cited as the main reason Aboriginal women aged 15-19 living off-reserve quit high school.

- S. Of Aboriginal women aged 25 to 44 living off-reserve who had started, but had not completed a post-secondary program, 34% cited “family responsibilities” as their reason for not completing, while 21% reported “financial reasons.”
- T. Aboriginal women are now attending school at higher rates than both non-Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men.

**Housing:**

- U. 87% of Aboriginal women lived with family members in 2001. Because most reserves do not have shelters, women fleeing violence often escape to a friend and relative’s home. This exacerbates overcrowding on-reserve.
- V. The main causes of family homelessness were lack of affordable housing, poverty, family violence and inadequate funding for social programs. For more than 40% of families, family violence was among the factors that caused them to leave their homes.
- W. In 2006, 35% of Aboriginal children lived in a lone parent family compared to 17% of non-Aboriginal children.
- X. 19% of Aboriginal women 15 years or older are lone parent families, compared with 8% for non-Aboriginal women.
- Y. Aboriginal women are part of a highly mobile population: Between 1991 and 1996, 58% of Aboriginal women changed their home compared with 37% of non-Aboriginal women.
- Z. For more than 40% of families, family violence was among the factors that caused them to leave their homes.
- AA. 71% of Aboriginal single-parent households live off-reserve. Over 80% (82.5%) of those households are headed by single female parents.
- BB. More than half of all female single-parent households live in core housing need (In 1997, CMHC reported that 62% of Aboriginal lone parent households off reserve were in core housing need the majority of whom are Aboriginal women).
- CC. 19% of Aboriginal women 15 years or older are leading families, compared with 8% for non-Aboriginal women.