



**Native Women's
Association of Canada**

***NWAC Workshop on Reclaiming Our Nations
Initiative:
Nation-Building and Re-Building – Gathering
Women's Wisdom***

Community Awareness and Engagement

**Days Inn Motel – Terrace Room
Portage La Prairie, Manitoba**

**Thursday, November 24, 2011
6:00 - 8:30 p.m.**

Background:

Through activism, policy analysis and advocacy, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) works to advance the well-being of Aboriginal women and girls, as well as, their families and communities. This work includes identifying gaps in the equal enjoyment of human rights by Aboriginal women and mobilizing action to address these gaps. A fundamental premise of NWAC's work is that the civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights of Aboriginal peoples cannot be realized without identifying the gender impacts of laws and policies applied to Aboriginal peoples and addressing the needs of Aboriginal women, in a culturally relevant way.

Prior to first contact, many Aboriginal societies were matriarchal and matrilineal in nature and focused on family, community and the continuity of tradition, culture and language. Aboriginal women were central to all of this as the first teachers in the home, as the healers, and as the givers of life.

While Aboriginal men and women had distinct roles, their roles were equally valued. The need to restore the value of Aboriginal gendered roles has motivated the development of culturally relevant gender-based analysis (CRGBA). CRGBA is a tool for use by anyone to assess policy, programs, projects, and/or legislation towards achieving more equitable outcomes for women and men and their families.

NWAC applies a gender perspective to human rights issues to ensure that decision-makers of all kinds - political leaders, judges, officials in all governments at all levels - are aware of equality gaps and issues that affect Aboriginal women and girls and have continued to do so with respect to the nation-building and re-building process.

NWAC and our Provincial/Territorial Member Associations have established positive reputations and have thorough structures in place to reach many women and their communities across Canada. NWAC has engaged and informed women, youth and Elders and their communities in discussions on nation-building, citizenship, and the relationships between our members, communities and Nations. Given that NWAC is also familiar with cultural practices, governance issues, protocols and traditions while dealing with First Nations, we were well placed to build on these established respectful relationships and have successful sessions with women on this important issue.

NWAC has facilitated a national dialogue on First Nations citizenship and membership. The dialogue was funded by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada as part of the Exploratory Process to respond to the range of issues related to Indian Registration, membership and First Nation Citizenship. In addition to holding Workshops, and asking women to identify issues that they have experienced regarding Indian Registration within the Indian Act, we have asked women

to fill out Questionnaires to provide us with their views on Nation-Building for our future generations.

**NWAC Workshops on Citizenship and Nation-Building and Re- Building –
Common Remarks**

First Nations were organized on the basis of Indigenous Nations with distinct structures of government. These structures included Hereditary Systems, Clan Systems, Federations, Confederacies and Military Systems, Economic and Cultural relationships and alliances among all Nations. The current *Indian Act* structure of reserves and the governance on reserves that have resulted from the imposition of the *Indian Act* does not reflect First Nations political, legal, or traditional governance. There is general consensus among First Nations that this situation must change.

At every session that was held, our participants have indicated that this process was only one small step in the process that needs to continue to happen among First Nations Peoples in discussing the issue of citizenship, membership, identity and Nationhood.

Participants at every session expressed concern with an Exploratory Process that lasts from April to November 2011, and stated that it was insufficient time to reflect on how we can move from the systemic barriers within current Indian Registration legislation within the *Indian Act* and policies within the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, to true methods of Nation-Building among our communities across the country.

Women repeatedly indicated that there needs to be a one-year, two-year, five-year, ten-year workplan and ongoing process for collaboration and meetings between the Government of Canada and First Nations' Governments and among First Nations' women both on and off reserves, their families and communities and for our leadership to continue to gather information, discuss options and to strategize on how to move forward.

Our women have indicated that we need to focus on rebuilding and supporting our governance structures, supporting women's participation in decision-making and increasing women's participation and inclusion in any consultations that occur to strengthen our Nations. They have also acknowledged that there are best practices across the country for inclusive approaches to citizenship and we need to continue to build on these positive efforts.

We have been told that in order for further positive change to take place, there needs to be full engagement of our people, our communities, and our Nations. First Nations must

be able to determine the tools they need to develop inclusive and healthy Nations, based on the fulfillment of our rights to self-determination and by affirming effective, efficient and successful First Nations governments.

Participants repeatedly reiterated that the Government of Canada needs to take a broader and more inclusive approach to Indian Registration, expanding on the scope, beyond Bill C- 3 *Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act*, which was identified as a narrow interpretation to the *McIvor* decision. They also stated that the Government needs to commit to an in depth process to explore the complex and broader issues related to citizenship, membership and identity.

Comments were routinely made criticizing the current limiting exclusions from Indian Registration by the double mother rule and with the problematic policies that are currently implemented with the Unstated and Unrecognized Paternity that require a father to sign the birth registration where the couple is not married, in order for the child to receive full or accurate registration.

NWAC spoke about the need for a process that must include adequate funding for National Aboriginal Organizations in order to respond to the numerous requests, complaints, and emails that came in to the organization about the problems women are facing. The demands were many and quite regular from people calling NWAC for help. Often people expressed their preference to call NWAC rather than the Department because they would be assured that their requests would be responded to, whereas, they had been waiting for months to hear back from the Manitoba Registration Office.

Our Provincial/Territorial members also requested that more funding should go to them to empower provincial and territorial organizations, and First Nations generally, to engage fully with the grassroots communities in exploring all possible solutions given the complexities of the issues. They would require additional funds to help them to come to a consensus on as many issues as possible over the coming years and not simply for an eight-month Exploratory Process.

Many women referred specifically to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the standard for a principled framework for partnership between First Nations and the Government of Canada. The Declaration's principles of partnership and respect can guide this work.

Participants affirmed that Article 3 of the UN Declaration: "Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By Virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." There are

numerous articles that affirm the right of self-determination, including related rights to lands, resources and territories and to indigenous cultural traditions and customs and systems of governance in all aspects of life. One of the general provisions of the Declaration sums up the vision of the advocates who fought for the adoption of the Declaration. It is Article 43, which states that, “The rights recognized herein constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.”

The women, men and Elders repeatedly reminded us that it is our right to determine our own membership according to traditional and historical practices, and which are affirmed in our Treaties, and is a fundamental right of every one of our Nations. Our citizenship and identity must be enforced and maintained by our own Peoples and not determined by the Government of Canada.



Creating a Movement for Change – Guiding Principles Established for Nation-

Building/ Reiterated at Workshops:

- **Establish a Vision for the Future:** Create a shared vision and establish a mandate for change, backed by the people, the Council and the Chief, and all leaders, making sure it is inclusive of women, youth, Elders and families.
- **Map Your Journey:** Identify how you intend to achieve your community's vision, adjust the plan when needed to overcome challenges.
- **Exercise Your Rights and Live Your Culture:** Learn your rights and responsibilities, your inherent and Treaty rights and exercise your rights by living your culture, understanding women and men, Elders and youth all have important roles.
- **Moving Away from the *Indian Act*:** Take the time to choose and develop your own governance structures that are community-based and community-paced, inclusive and not exclusive of our women, children and grand-children.
- **Strengthening Governance at all Levels:** Make laws that benefit all citizens and reflect culture, and establish government to government relationships based on respect.
- **Make Progress and Achieve Outcomes:** By being engaged in the economy and having control of our traditional lands, while governing according to our traditions and customs we can achieve outcomes, establish nation-to-nation relations and restore our nations to the thriving communities they once were.



Meeting Highlights

The NWAC Facilitator acknowledged the Peoples of the territory on whose land we had gathered and thanked the organizers for having us there to discuss issues impacting on our Nations. She acknowledged and thanked Angela Roulette for helping to get the information out to the women in advance of the meeting and for forwarding invites to women so that they would attend the session. Then she acknowledged the Elder Barbara Nepinak and turned the meeting over to her to start the Opening Prayer for the meeting.

Elder Barbara Nepinak did the Opening Prayer to start the meeting off in a good way, bringing everyone together for a common purpose. She is a well-respected Ojibway Elder, who is a member of the Pine Creek First Nations, and currently resides in Winnipeg with her husband Clarence, who is also a respected Elder.

There were 22 participants present, all were women but one. There were members from the Sandy Bay Ojibway Nation, Pine Creek Ojibway Nation, Ojibway Nation - non-status, Long Plain First Nation Tribal Registry, Dakota Tipi First Nation, Dakota Plains First Nations, Wet'suwet'en First Nation, B.C., Long Plain First Nation, and the Swan Lake First Nation.

The NWAC Facilitator did an overview of the agenda and opened the meeting by introducing herself. While everyone ate their supper, she did an overview of the history of Indian Registration, why NWAC was there that night for this initiative, and to discuss how we can move from the *Indian Act* to reclaiming our Nations.

Afterwards others were able to introduce themselves and able to talk about what it means to be Aboriginal. Each participant had her story to tell, sharing what was important to them about their lives, and why it is that they came to this meeting, and how they hope that their input will be used to advance issues for future generations.

The Facilitator provided an overview of some of the activities that we do at the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), within the Human Rights and International Affairs Directorate. We provided the women with a wealth of documentation that has been written by NWAC, by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), and by other Aboriginal women and legal organizations on the topic of citizenship, membership, governance, and Nation-Building and Re-Building to ensure that the women present could review materials in advance of the meeting and organize their thoughts on the topic before engaging in these discussions.

NWAC also provided additional copies of materials so that each representative could bring the documents back to the women they serve or associate with in their communities, organizations, and circles to ensure that the materials are distributed as

widely as possible. Hundreds of copies of the Questionnaire have been distributed and in addition, others have been directed to our website to fill out the survey and return it to our office at reclaimingournations.ca.

NWAC provided the history of relevant case law that have brought us to this point including the Lavell case, the United Nations complaint by the now Senator Sandra Lovelace, and then the subsequent Bill C-31, which saw many women and some of their children regain and gain Indian status under the Indian Act, yet many problems with registration continued.

Further discussion took place regarding Bill C-3 Equity in Indian Registration and the group discussed many of the challenges they are facing. They also discussed additional problems unrecognized paternity policies by the Department of AANDC.

Discussion took place regarding the Information Pamphlet on Bill C-3 and its purpose. The group discussed the passing of the actual law and then talked about other people's opinions. They spoke about how by limiting registration it will lead to our eventual extinction. The participants asked NWAC to continue to help and try to get as many men women and children registered by lobbying the Government to expand their definitions in Indian Registration.

The women also spoke about possibly developing a Manitoba Native Women's Association who would then become part of the NWAC Board and several women expressed their interest to connect with other Aboriginal women and to be active on all issues that impact on us.

The group worked through the Questionnaire together and their responses are indicated within the next section of this report. The women indicated that they needed more opportunities like these in order to be able to have time to talk about issues like this.

Afterward, the Facilitator from NWAC thanked everyone again for their participation and gave everyone her business card. She offered her help to anyone that needed and stated that they could email her and that she would do her best to help in any way possible. She stated that if she could not help that she would network and connect the person with someone else who could be of assistance.

The Elder Barbara Nepinak offered a Closing Prayer to thank the Creator for our many blessings and wished us all a safe journey back home to our families.

Questionnaire Answers

1. What role do you see for Elders, youth, women, men and families in the re-building of your Nation? How will/should the diverse voices be heard in the process? How will everyone be involved in the implementation?

- Elders are our teachers.
- Elders, Men, Women, and Youth should create their own Councils. I believe that all the groups must work together to rebuild our nations.
- Elders get together and share their knowledge and mentor the youth.
- To be helpful to our family and our future generations.
- If young people could be motivated towards change there can be no limit to what they can achieve.
- All groups to have their own Councils and put forward their ideas, then all groups meet and discuss an action plan. Have these Councils have meetings or conferences until you have a plan to make changes.
- Gather and educate the community about Aboriginal and treaty rights.
- Give individuals the right to speak on behalf of themselves or for the family, or for the community.
- Regain knowledge within our youth and ourselves.
- Elders teach the youth their language, culture and traditions.
- It is up to the youth to educate themselves about Aboriginal rights.
- Women, individuals, and families need to have discussions about Aboriginal rights and their First Nation.
- We need to work collectively, and not against one another.
- Our Elders are currently untapped, valuable, resources.
- Women as teachers and men as warriors.
- Elders should help people who need to be helped.
- Record your oral history for younger generations.

2. What are the key steps and activities you deem necessary for Nation Re-Building? What actions must to be taken? What would be the outcomes?

- Involvement in all age groups
- More information should be given to the Manitoba Chiefs.
- We need more information such as this on Bill C-3. It should be given to each household on each reserve.
- We need to live healthy lifestyles.
- All age groups need to be more knowledgeable in our ancestral rights.
- More Aboriginal teachers as role models are needed.
- An Aboriginal school on reserve. I think we need to get the youth involved, and this would do it.
- Public schools that have significant Aboriginal enrollment should carry the option of an Aboriginal language rather than French.
- If we have an Aboriginal school we could have an Elder come in to give us teachings.
- Our leaders need to have some accountability and responsibility for the problems we face.
- In order for Nation Building to occur we need to relearn our traditions.
- We need to adopt our traditional value systems and teachings.
- We need to work to change stereotypes and to educate our people to be proud and respectful of each other.
- Our families should be providing healthy stable homes.
- More cultural teachings need to happen in the schools.
- Better healthy homes and respectful home situations would go a long way.
- More teachings at public schools more information about our teachings, offering alternate language options so our youth can foster their language.

3. What would be the most important resource that you would need for Nation Re-Building? How would you make sure that you have them available to you? Would these be different for women/men/Elders/youth?

- Get alcohol and drugs off the reserve.
- Educate non-Aboriginal people about our culture.

- Instill pride in our identity and to feel a part of our Nation.
- More Aboriginal teachers in the school system.
- We need better funding for more Education.
- There needs to be more opportunities for training, and training centres.
- We need to benefit from economic development in our territories without harming the environment and our people.
- Need to address issues that directly affect us.
- Racism and oppression repeat itself. If we instill pride in our identity then we will feel like we are a part of society.
- If today's parents do not know the traditional way of life they should consider learning and understanding the teachings.
- Use the radio to discuss issues that may arise since Bill C-3 and the new hot issue of Matrimonial Real Property Rights.
- APTN talk shows could be accessed.
- Finding a way to rid our community of drugs and alcohol and to get the Chief and Council to support the initiative.
- We need training centres for our leadership, Chief and Councils should have the skill sets to manage human resources in their communities. Operating dollars should provide education for skill sets for trades and careers such as plumbers, lawyers, electricians etc. This is necessary because Aboriginal women are having children at 4 times the national rate and they could fill the labour gap for the retiring population. Yet the government is recruiting people from other countries. This breeds an aura for discrimination. ie why are Native people not hired for certain jobs?
- There is no reason why our people should have to go hungry in a country as wealthy as Canada.
- We should give back to our own people.

4. How can we use our culture, traditions, and inherent rights to advance our efforts? What accountability mechanisms have been put into place to ensure equality and benefits to everyone, over the long-term? How and who will you track your progress?

- Meet with Elders on a regular basis.
- Practice our culture and traditions.
- Involve youth because they are our future. Role –modeling to teach our youth about our traditions.

- Keep our culture alive by meeting once a month at a Band meeting where group attends. Youth would have observer status.
- Believes that programs like Restorative Justice within our communities are excellent examples to show how our culture can help save souls from the harsh reality of jail.
- It's sad to say but I don't know much about my culture. I would like to learn more.
- Community should come together to find a solution and ultimately empower our people.
- The community itself will keep track of your progress if you are taking language classes and speaking it.
- More conferences to talk about our concerns and work out our problems need to be funded by the Government.
- Make Secondary schools aware of our culture and promote cultural awareness days.
- Elimination of bullying, racism, and swarming must be a priority.
- Elimination of stereotypes – educate, educate, educate!
- Our progress could be tracked by our children speaking the language and asking questions.
- We must be unified in any action we decide to take and stick with it.
- Reintroduce our ceremonies and our traditional ways. We would be much happier.
- Implementation of Restorative Justice and have the Council track the progress.
- Restorative Justice is working but has to be kept quiet because this Government is all about a crime and justice agenda and won't support these methods, even if they are successful and save the taxpayer money.

5. Do you know of any traditional roles that women and men held in relation to governance and decision-making within your nation? Could they be useful today?

- Clan Mother System: This is found in matrilineal societies. The whole idea is that there would be six Clan Mothers who are culturally aware, speak the language and know what's involved in practicing their culture. Each Clan Mother will meet every month and will speak to all her children, grandchildren, related female

cousins, sisters, nieces and aunts and ask if they have any issues they would like to discuss. After this meeting this Clan Mother will meet with the other five Clan Mothers to discuss with them what her issues are and then listen to the others and their problems. Maybe these problems need a group solution. These Clan Mothers take the problem before the Chief and offer a solution. The Chief must follow what the Clan Mothers suggest. If the Chief disobeys three times, then the Clan Mothers will remove him from office and then the Clan Mothers meet to find another Chief. Now that is what I call responsibility for your actions and listening to your people. Wouldn't that be nice if this could be applied to the all governments?

- Women and their connection to water must be remembered and practiced in our ceremonies.
- Women were the life givers and the caretakers, men were the providers, hunters, and warriors. I believe that this system could still work.
- Cooking traditional foods and sharing at a communal meal. Everyone chips in. This could be done once a month.
- Custom Band Membership could be inclusive of our women and children.
- Each community must have their own organizations for men, women, Elders and youth and an Elder's group that would meet and forward concerns to Chief and Council and then could be forwarded to the Assembly of First Nations and the Native Women's Association of Canada.
- I'm not traditional but my grandparents were and they had by all accounts a very happy marriage and a simple life.
- We need new ways of making decisions within our community.
- A council for all the concerned groups and workshops such as this one would be good for everyone to hear.
- Women were our caregivers and life givers; they must pass down traditional roles. Clan Mothers were positions of power:
- Ojibway Women need to acknowledge the place of the spirit of water in our lives and take back that responsibility. Pray and be thankful for the water and it is our responsibility to care for the water we drink and drink to cleanse our selves.

6. In the past, what resources were the most important in helping you achieve success in your challenge? Do you know of any best practices/ model that are being used by a Nation that may be useful to others?

- Social media
- Working together as a Nation
- Learning from our Elders for their wisdom , love, respect and experience
- Nations who work with and support their artists and cultural leaders have healthier communities.
- Using technology to quickly decimate information.
- Prayers, mediation, smudging
- Being in touch with nature
- A support system should include peers, family, educators, and mentors
- Praying to creator for guidance
- Making time for yourself
- Education is the best resource for success in any challenge.
- Getting in touch with your inner-self and finding ways to express how you feel artistically or through writing.
- The Portage Friendship Centre is great; they are great supports for students and people living in the area.
- Taking the time to be thankful for what we have instead of crabbing about what we don't have
- Take time for our Elders. You might learn something.
- My grandmother, she taught me how to cook, keep a house clean, cleaning fish, picking berries, speaking my language, and how to respect our Elders. My grandmother taught me how to bead, make clothes mukluks and quilt. I am blessed.
- Talk to Elders and learn to listen.
- Learn to reflect and to take care of my mind body and soul.
- Use the smudge and sweat lodges to help you clear your mind and find your answers.
- My grandmother, who believed that I could achieve anything if I remained motivated, determined and dedicated to the challenge. She also said I needed a dose of confidence and perseverance.
- Reading helps
- Spending time with my family

- Talking to Elders, going for walks, reconnecting with nature and the land. Listen to Elders.

7. What role do you deem appropriate for other governments (federal and provincial) and with the private industry in advancing your goals?

- The relationships must be close yet we should have our own ability to go through the transition.
- Assist Aboriginal entrepreneurs.
- More involvement with the private sector instead of reliance on government.
- Find a resource that will be wanted by everyone.
- Start an art and craft store that sells original art. This will support the community and its artists.
- They should not have a role in our community, if we are serious about change.
- Not enough cash for funding education and changing our lives.
- The federal and provincial governments need to listen to the grassroots voices and not only Aboriginal leaders.
- Self-government for all Nations.
- Do not believe in outside governments! All they want is to assimilate us and take our land and resources.
- Equal opportunity for equal Education. (Fair Education native versus non-native)
- Have Governments make and carry out deals with integrity. Rights and responsibilities, strength, be respected and respectful.
- Respect between all levels of government is eroding and this has to change.
- Have a relationship with private industry so that we too can benefit.
- Develop tourism along the lakes. Be entrepreneurial.
- Take control of the resources that exist in our community
- Make people aware of our conditions through the media and social media.
- We need financial supports for our people.

Thank you for your input; it will be included into a final report and posted on our website at www.nwac.ca