

**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

**Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories
The Healing Drum Society
5004 50th Avenue
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories**

Saturday, November 12, 2011

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.”

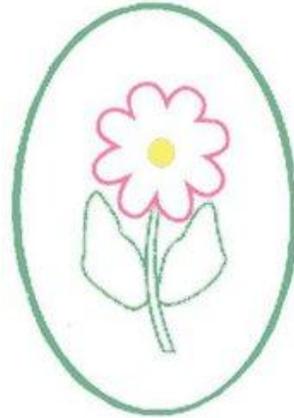
The women, men and Elders repeatedly reminded us that it is our right to determine our own membership according to traditional and historical practices, and which are affirmed in our Treaties, and is a fundamental right of every one of our Nations. Our citizenship and identity must be enforced and maintained 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.



NWAC Workshop on the Reclaiming Our Nations Initiative
Nation-Building and Rebuilding – Gathering Women's Wisdom

Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories
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Saturday, November 12, 2011

Make Your Voice Be Heard!!

Agenda

1. Opening Prayer by Elder
2. Introductions – Supper will be provided.
3. Presentation by the Native Women's Association of Canada –
Citizenship and Nation-Building
4. Discussion
5. Questionnaires Completed and submitted by Participants
6. Wrap-Up/Next Steps

Meeting Highlights

The Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories' Board, along with the Board of the Healing Drum Society, were present at the meeting along with the Native Women's Association of Canada making up a total of 15 participants at the session on Nation-Building.

Two Elders agreed to share the responsibility of doing the Opening Prayer and the Closing Prayer for the group to start and end us in a good way.

Ms. Marilyn Napier, President of NWA of the NT helped to coordinate the evening meeting for NWAC as the participants were coming together during the day for their individual Board meetings. The participants were from all over the NT, all were women with the exception of one man.

The NWAC Facilitator introduced herself and acknowledged the people of that territory and thanked the President and the Executive Director of the Healing Drum for having us in to facilitate the meeting. She also acknowledged and thanked the Elders who were helping to guide the meeting.

She then asked everyone to also introduce themselves so that we would all know with we Nation we associate ourselves, along with which community, if any, and where we each worked with Aboriginal women.

The Facilitator had sent materials in advance of the meeting and the participants were all quite active in working towards advancing native women's rights and were all quite familiar with the topics being discussed.

NWAC did a brief overview of the history in Indian Registration, the relevant caselaw, and the more recent Bill C-3 Gender Equity in Indian Registration. She then went on to explain why NWAC was in Yellowknife for the Exploratory Process on Citizenship and Nation-Building and how the President had asked NWAC to come to do the session as they did not have the human resources or time to carry out the initiative themselves at that time of the year, right before their annual general meeting.

NWAC explained that this was a project funded by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development of Canada (AANDC), the new name for INAC. The group discussed many of the same issues that have been highlighted in the previous section of this report and how they have been affected by issues of Indian Registration, membership (or lack thereof) and First Nation citizenship and the consequences they faced, particularly as it relates to the lack of rights faced by their grandchildren. They spoke about how the "Double Mother Rule" is too prescriptive and excludes more citizens, which they had hoped would have been corrected by the implementation of the reasoning behind the McIvor case.

The group spoke about historical aspects of Aboriginal peoples prior to first contact and spoke about prior ways that we governed ourselves, including many First Nations who had been Matrilineal or Matriarchal.

The group worked through the Questionnaire together and the next section of the Report contains the compilation of what participants had to say about each topic.

NWAC thanked the Elders, the President of the Native Women's Association of the NT and the Healing Drum for hosting them for the meeting and for sharing all their input into the topics being discussed.

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 need to be consulted first in a rebuilding planning sessions.
- Youth are starting to care about this and need to be included.
- People on the reserve and off should get together to understand what the problems are and then make a plan on how to solve them.
- Listening, sharing and practice the Seven Teachings as a way to re-build our Nations.
- Re-establishment of the traditional roles is necessary.
- Re-establish governance models such as consensus in decision-making where all members have a voice.
- Working collectively with input from everyone will ensure that our Nations are built from the bottom up.
- First Nations need to realize that Government plays that old divide and conquer game and this breaks down communities.

- Get rid of the nepotism within the community Band Halls and allow for people other than those who voted the leadership in to get jobs working for the Band.
- When people work for the Government, or in Band jobs they sometimes become the extension of the Government to keep their own people down. This needs to change.
- The Elders using traditional knowledge should be on an Advisory Board to the Chief and Council.
- All the groups should have forums and representative from each representative group and should be on Advisory Boards as well.
- There needs to be inclusion from all groups to ensure fair treatment by Chief and Council to all members of the community. This way all voices will be heard.
- Awareness and acknowledgement of the problems that exist within our structures is the first step to addressing them.
- We need to encourage more participation by including community members within the decision-making process.
- People need to feel like they have a say in how to change things so they have hope. Many of our people have lost hope for our future.
- We must ensure that we can reconnect with our members who have lost their identity and need to learn their culture. They should be encouraged and given every opportunity to belong.
- By working together to reclaim our culture teachings and our language, we will get stronger and unite.
- Have more workshops about what the government's agenda is for our communities because we need that knowledge, this is very important because we do not want to be assimilated.
- Arguing about status and property is just the government's way of chipping at us and dividing us. Remember the old saying "United we stand; divided we fall."
- We need to have a role specific to each group.
- It's very important to use the Talking Stick approach to communication so that we can hear the concerns of each person and try to find solutions.

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

- Community meeting to discuss topics and challenges.

- Community members need time to think about the issues and attend the meetings and they need to be part of any decision on how to move forward.
- Use local television or radio to keep communities informed.
- Consider what you should do for the seventh generation.
- We need to focus on publicity about the issues preventing us from practicing our culture.
- The issues of poverty, abuse either sexual or physical, discrimination of any kind and loss of traditional cultural values and practices and language, can sometimes it seems overwhelming. We need to unite and find the resources we need to overcome these problems.
- Meetings and community teachings and gatherings should be key steps in gaining information or resources.
- Definitely need more awareness healing education, cultural awareness for Aboriginal Peoples. Having programs that encourage attendance and participation. We need persistent people that are determined to bring people together by planning activities that inspire and Motivate groups to create a sense of inclusion.
- It is important to have territorial input on the Advisory Council. The result is a well rounded perspective on issues, as well as possible solutions.
- We need to empower ourselves to be self sufficient. If we could get jobs we would not need to be on welfare.
- Asserting authority over territories to which Treaties are still in force.

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?

- The most important thing is to get an example of how to apply for Treaty rights.
- More workshops on this topic maybe even a video or APTN documentary.
- Human resources with skill sets that could accommodate a healthy community.
- All members in the community are responsible to be a contributing member regardless of status.

- Belief in ourselves.
 - Being treated fairly by governments.
 - Standing united as a group.
 - Networking or contacts with different regions or government agencies that can explain process and laws for everyone to understand.
 - It's important to have workshops like this one. We are in a territory without easy access, but we must not be forgotten. Accommodate all people including the disabled and the shut-ins.
 - Television, radio, internet and social media are an amazing outlet for information.
 - Youth Volunteers and Mentors are a huge resource; we need them.
 - We need Aboriginal care homes for our elderly, and for our disabled citizens.
 - We need youth Programs to prevent gang violence and substance abuse.
 - Use of technologies and mobile technology and social media, this has become a lifeline of communication from the north with the south.
- 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?**
- A holistic model of the Rules of Order that is based in the cultural and traditional philosophy.
 - The government decision to eliminate or assimilate Aboriginals by placing them in Residential Schools many years ago nearly destroyed many communities, now, many are returning to the old ways.
 - We need to have healthy communities to ensure that the government's decision to remove our children from their homes due to social problems doesn't work. Our communities must stand together to prevent this sort of action from happening as it has in the 1960s and with Indian Residential Schools.
 - It is important to use our culture, speak our language and get together to strategize on how to move forward as women, with our families, our communities and within our Nations.
 - Follow the seven teachings and all other sacred teachings.
 - Our family, friends and community will track our progress.

- Families often were forced to leave the reserves for a number of reasons - to find work, to flee their children being taken, because they had married someone who was not from their community, or had to attend Indian Residential Schools and as a result, many have no real sense of their culture; but we must keep working on it.
- Knowing our rights and implementing them to keep our rights from being chipped away.
- Culture is a reflection of our environment which then influences traditions and inherent rights. Our culture has evolved since colonization and we now have to adapt this culture to this current environment.
- If we use our culture and our Aboriginal name every time, we can teach our children what we know about our culture.

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?

- Any governance native culture worker can be very useful; but non-native people do not listen to us anyway.
- In traditional times women made the decisions in consultation with all members of each clan. Men had responsibilities as well. They had to ensure that women had what they needed to care for the family.
- Women had held a high or equal role to men, but not today. Today, respect is in the past, physical abuse is on the rise. If the traditional way of life would return, abuse could be eliminated.
- Some communities are mainly Christian and the women call the shots.
- If we could develop a committee of all the groups then maybe we will be heard.
- The government's decision to assimilate and eliminate Aboriginals by forcing them into residential schools where their language and their culture was taken from them. We must keep working to get that back.
- Women would let the man know what they need and the man would get it.
- Men would listen and figure a way to get what is needed and get it for the family. Everyone had roles that complemented one another.

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 is being used by a Nation that may be useful to others?

- Develop Share Circles
- Listen to the lessons from the Seven Teachings
- Develop a 4 council System like the one in Crosslake, Manitoba.
- Education in traditional classroom settings
- Our Elders are the key to our past and the youth are the key to the future; we need to bring them together
- My family and friends are the basis of every success I've had
- Every organization that supports the rights of our people
- Some Bands have always been there for their citizens to support them financially and emotionally. When they are supported this helps to motivate people to do well
- In walking a red road we can use prayer reverence for the environment. love of our family to help achieve our goals
- Knowing who I am as an Ojibwa/Anishnawbe/Mohawk/Mik'maq etc. and the traditions that go with that knowledge will always sustain us
- Native people who are successful are the best role-models.
- Having non-native people as allies is important too, we need to have good relationships with everyone

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

- Everyone should be equal but often native people see that it's the white people who get hired first, even if that is against the law.
- I haven't any confidence in the present Federal government. That government needs to start respecting our people in this country.
- This is our land and it is not a great feeling to have to beg for our existence.
- It's a crime to treat people badly that only want to be free to live their culture.
- Funding programs given directly to organizations for the long-term.
- Coming to the table in a respectful manner that is not condescending manner; they must be willing to assist in the

advancement of our goals and build a positive relationship without deceit.

- Understand that we know who belongs to a particular Band and that we have the right to determine our own citizens. Why is the government making that decision for us? We want our people back and the funding dollars to support their needs.
- Funding programs on a permanent basis will demonstrate that they are willing to assist and help in the achievement of our goals.
- If the government wants to assist in a real way; help provide First Nations with clean and accessible water.
- Why are we losing land entitlements? The governments need to return land and the benefits of the resources to our people.
- People need to be made aware of these issues through social media.
- Similar to social responsibility there has to be cultural responsibility.

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