



Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

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OPEN LETTER TO INDIGENOUS WOMEN OF CANADA

Since 1974, the Native Women's Association of Canada has been actively involved in advocacy, delivering programs and positive change for Indigenous women of many Nations. As a national association, it is of paramount importance for us to work with grassroots women through our Provincial and Territorial Member Associations (PTMAs). For more than 44 years we have proudly worked with an active membership of the PTMAs that has grown and changed.

Today we announce that ONWA (Ontario Native Women's Association) is withdrawing its membership from NWAC. We thank them for their contributions, commitment and participation. NWAC will continue to work directly with grassroots Indigenous women and organizations in Ontario and in partnership with our PTMAs across the country.

The vision and mission of NWAC has always been and continues to be to help empower Indigenous women. During the last eighteen months, NWAC has increased opportunities for employment for Indigenous women and expanded program delivery. We have also enhanced our research, policy and legal advocacy work. The talented and passionate staff and Board of Directors of NWAC continue to focus on the needs of Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people.

NWAC would like to invite Indigenous women's organizations within Ontario to join our national association. Interested groups may submit a letter of interest to join NWAC and other PTMA partners as a conduit for change for Indigenous women of many Nations. The organization will be eligible to receive ongoing funding opportunities and add their voice to our Board of Directors.

NWAC was created to help empower women by being involved in developing and changing legislation, which affects them. The success of our work includes the involvement of Indigenous women at the grassroots level in the development and delivery of programs, policy change and legislative change. Most importantly, our collective of work for almost a half century has been to enhance the lives of First Nation, Métis and Inuit women. We are looking forward to welcoming a new voice to our organization.

Below are examples that highlight the ongoing work that NWAC and our PTMAs have delivered over these last several months.

Sincerely,

Francyne Joe
President, Native Women's Association of Canada

NWAC is proud of the accomplishments in partnership with our PTMAs that we have delivered over the last 18 months. Some of the highlights include:

PROJECTS

AWBEN

The Aboriginal Women Business and Entrepreneurship Network (AWBEN) project is in its sixth year and continues to engage Indigenous women and support entrepreneurs from across the country.

FINANCIAL HEALTH AND WEALTH

Development of training materials and course sessions to benefit financial health and independence of Indigenous women.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE (YANA)

This works to support Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people to live free from violence. This includes toolkits, workshops, resources, safety plans and more.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

Building capacity to engage with Public Safety and Federal Provincial and Territorial (FPT) partners on issues related to emergency management in Indigenous communities, from a culturally relevant, gender-specific perspective.

HONOURING INDIGENOUS WOMEN PROJECT

Focused on honouring the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Gender Diverse people.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES CANADA CULTURALLY RELEVANT GENDER BASED ANALYSIS AND REVISION OF THE NATIONAL EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS PROGRAM

NWAC conducted CRGBA on the existing women's NESP program, compiling a report detailing strengths, weaknesses, gaps, and needs for improvement within the program.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE, ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

National event organized and hosted by NWAC as a cultural exchange and conference celebrating Indigenous women's social and economic empowerment.

EMERGENCY MEETING TO REFORM INDIGENOUS CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

National event collaborating with the Department of Indigenous Services, organizing of a meeting on Indigenous child welfare and family services in Ottawa in January 2018.

BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS TRAINING (BEST)

Twenty Indigenous women from across the country trained to deliver the Canadian Centre for Aboriginal Entrepreneurship (CCAEE) Aboriginal Business & Entrepreneurship Skills Training program (Aboriginal BEST) to other Indigenous women in their regions.

ABORIGINAL SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT TRAINING STRATEGY (ASETS)

An integrated approach to Aboriginal labour market programming. ASETS links training to labour market demand and ensures that Canada's Aboriginal people can fully participate in economic opportunities. NWAC is one of two National Aboriginal Organizations who hold ASETS agreements and delivers the programs through NWAC's Provincial and Territorial Membership Associations (PTMAs).

WOMEN BUILDING FUTURES (WBF)

Pilot Project with Women Building Futures (WBF) that will address five recurring barriers that affect Indigenous women's access to training and employment.

PEKE

Helps facilitate a receptive environment for learning and collaboration across research teams and Indigenous communities. Partnering with Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health to host an engagement session on mental wellness and Two-Spirit & LGBTQ+ persons

WALKING THE RED PATH: RE-FORGING CONNECTIONS, EMPOWERING INDIGENOUS WOMEN TO HEAL, AND DRIVING CHANGE FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE

The project aims to develop a sustainable, evidence-based, and culturally relevant HIV and HCV intervention for Indigenous women in federal correctional institutions.

LEGAL

DESCHENEAUX AND BILL S3

NWAC conducted research and engaged with B.O.D. on Bill S3 and Sex Discrimination.

INDIAN ACT

Continuing Discrimination under the Registration Provisions of the Indian Act.

Testified at the Status of Women Standing Committee about Indigenous Women in Corrections.

Testified before the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women for their study on Indigenous Women in the Federal Justice and Correctional Systems.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT ON DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE LEGISLATION

NWAC and its PTMAs will engage with grassroots Indigenous women to inform the development of the Indigenous Languages Act.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS: ENGAGEMENT ON A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR FOOD POLICY

NWAC will engage with its Board of Directors, PTMAs and grassroots Indigenous women, to inform future widespread grassroots engagement on Agriculture and Agri-food Canada's Indigenous Food Policy.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION REVIEW

NWAC is hosting a grassroots-led engagement session on Post-Secondary Education with 20 Indigenous youth from the PTMA's and across the country to inform the development of the Post-Secondary Education Review

PTMA SITE VISITS

NWAC Executive Director and INAC Representative visited NWAC's PTMAs in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Summer of 2018 will see visits to the Northern Territories, Central Regions and the East Coast.

NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MMIWG, AND REPORT CARD

NWAC has been attending National Inquiry hearings, engaging with the National Inquiry and has published report cards on the work of the National Inquiry.

RISE GATHERING

Hosted the RISE Gathering (Restoring Indigenous Spirituality in the Environment), which brought together Two-Spirit youth and young Indigenous women and Elders. Topics Included: Biodiversity, Wildlife/Habitat, Conservation, Traditional Knowledge

POLICY

The Policy Department and Health Department attended the "Network for Sharing Indigenous Information and Research" conference with government and NIO partners to discuss improved statistical and research capabilities

DRUG POLICY

NWAC is developing a position on cannabis in anticipation of legalization later this year. We are currently in the process of submitting a brief to the Senate Committee on Indigenous peoples. This will examine the study on the impacts of cannabis on Indigenous communities.

HOUSING

NWAC participated in the Stakeholder Roundtable on the Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing put on by CMHC. These discussions largely revolved around the implementation and enforcement of the legislation that will govern this approach. This goes beyond a Housing First approach to ensure that all people have the right adequate housing and are able to pursue a remedy if this right is violated. Stakeholders included Indigenous housing providers, academics, government officials, and other non-profits and NGO's.

We also completed a First Nations housing project for INAC that included a research report and board engagement. NWAC is also pursuing additional housing projects and funding agreements through INAC.

CHILD WELFARE

NWAC advocates for Indigenous women, gender diverse people, children, and youth. In January 2018, NWAC partnered with INAC and ISC to host an Indigenous Child and Family Services conference. This conference brought together grassroots Indigenous women and leaders from across Canada to discuss the current state of child and family services and how positive and long lasting changes can be made. NWAC is seen as a leader on issues affecting the mothers, grandmothers, aunties and youth and will continue to advocate for change within the child welfare system.

LANGUAGES

NWAC advocates for Indigenous language rights. Indigenous women girls and gender diverse people are leading the way for language revitalization in their communities. NWAC is currently working with grassroots Indigenous and government on the co-creation of and Indigenous Languages Act. In March 2018, NWAC hosted a screening of “Keep Talking” the documentary to facilitate more discussion on language revitalization efforts in Indigenous communities.

EDUCATION

NWAC advocates for holistic, culturally relevant and accessible education for all Indigenous women, gender diverse people and youth. This includes early learning and childcare all the way to post-secondary education and adult basic education. In 2017, NWAC worked with grassroots women to elevate their voices and opinions on early learning and childcare. After hearing the overwhelming need for more culturally relevant childcare spaces for Indigenous children, NWAC has been working with the Government of Canada on the co-creation of an Indigenous Early Learning and Childcare Framework. NWAC is eagerly awaiting the release of the final framework on Early Learning and Childcare. NWAC is working with grassroots youth from across Canada to review the current federal supports for Indigenous students. NWAC will continue to advocate for accessible education for all Indigenous children and students.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

NWAC and Public Safety have a contribution agreement for a project to increase Indigenous Women’s Capacity in Emergency Management Planning. This is a two year project inclusive of an online survey, an emergency management inventory of risks and capabilities for individual communities, and engagement with other emergency management groups (National Search and Rescue Advisory Council, the Emergency Management Exemplary Service Award General Selection Committee, and the Indigenous EM Working Group). Through these activities, NWAC is helping to set government priorities for Indigenous emergency management and providing the necessary gender lens in this area.

NWAC helped to develop the document, “Emergency Management Strategy for Canada: Towards a Resilient 2030,” to better reflect the need for engagement with Indigenous women in the creation of significant policy documents. Many of NWAC’s comments were accepted and included in an updated version of the EM Strategy.

POLICING

NWAC participated on a panel at the Indigenous Policing Forum in Toronto this past April to discuss issues related to policing and the MMIWG Inquiry that were raised by family members at the hearings. These included the need to re-examine cold cases, improve engagement with the families of the missing and murdered, build trust with communities, and the lack of gender and cultural competency training.

CORRECTIONS

NWAC continues our advocacy to end solitary confinement. The official NWAC position states:

1. The practice of segregation must be abolished. It is a particularly cruel practice for Indigenous women with histories of trauma, abuse and mental health issues
2. When Indigenous women are segregated, they have no meaningful contact with their families and other prisoners. Segregation perpetuates the harms of colonial patriarchy and intergenerational trauma.
3. Segregation severely restricts Indigenous women’s access to programs and services. Imprisoned Indigenous women must be provided with access to culturally-appropriate, trauma-informed cultural and spiritual programs and services to ensure they successfully rehabilitate and re-integrate into their communities upon release. These programs and services must be developed through meaningful collaboration with Indigenous communities, Elders, national organizations and social justice/ human rights organizations.

NWAC provided a gender-based analysis for the Correctional Service of Canada’s National Employability Skills Program, a vocational program for women in prison. This program was not reflective of the gender-based, culturally-appropriate, trauma-informed approach that CSC promotes and the hope is that NWAC’s recommended changes will be reflected in future programming decisions.

NWAC also testified before the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women for their study on Indigenous Women in the Federal Justice and Correctional Systems and presented alongside the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. This was to highlight three key areas; the need to abolish the practice of segregation, the need for more S.81 Healing Lodges for Indigenous women, and the lack of gender-based, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed programs and services.

MÉTIS POLICY AND PROTOCOL

NWAC is responding to the expressed need of Métis communities for consideration of their unique needs, histories, and realities. In an advocacy context, this means additional resources dedicated to Métis-specific issues, supports in the way of research capacity and policy recommendations, and held space for Métis voices to contribute to national discussions of issues that are of concern to Indigenous women and gender diverse people in Canada. It is important to NWAC that its advocacy work is inclusive of Métis voices so as not to exclude Métis women and gender diverse people, as they have been in political, legal, and social contexts so many times before. NWAC is currently focusing on increasing its work to advance Métis policy priorities in a good way, acknowledging that reciprocal relationships are essential for supporting communities through advocacy.

2S AND LGBTQ+

Over the past year, NWAC has begun preliminary work to connect with Indigenous Two-Spirited, LGBTQ+, and gender-diverse members of our communities in order to better represent their needs and lived experiences in our advocacy work. This has included preliminary research and relationship building, the development of an engagement strategy, and an initial sharing circle on mental wellness for Indigenous Two-Spirited and LGBTQ+ individuals.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT GENDER BASED ANALYSIS

NWAC is in the process of updating its framework for CR GBA to be more intersectional, trauma-informed, and gender-diverse. This has included new research, networking, and preliminary talks with CIRNA and DISC on the co-development of a new toolkit, in collaboration with activists, academics, and community partners.

FOOD

NWAC advocates that all Indigenous women should have access to affordable, nutritious and culturally specific foods. Our organization has been working on a consultation project with Agriculture and Agri-food Canada on the development of a National Food Policy for Canada. As part of this project, NWAC released an online survey, created a social media campaign and competed engagement sessions with our grassroots organizations that represent Indigenous women from different provinces and territories.

WATER

NWAC has organized Water Walks to bring attention to the importance of clean water and the need to combat the pollution of local rivers and lakes. NWAC released the Report on Indigenous Women's Right to Water (2010) which focuses on a review of international agreements and Canadian laws and policies that outline Indigenous peoples right to water. Currently NWAC is monitoring the Canadian Government's progress on meeting its target of ending boil water advisories by 2021 and is relaying information regarding this initiative through our organization's social media.

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

This year, NWAC has attended various international events such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and the Commission on the Status of

Women (UNCSW). NWAC's participation at these types of events are intended to ensure that Indigenous women's voices are heard in all of the discussions and outcome documents produced, and also heard by international and governmental officials, to hold them accountable for their actions and make sure that they do not violate their international human rights obligations.

"United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women"

In 2018, NWAC met with the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women on two occasions to discuss the many challenges that Indigenous women and girls are facing in Canada. All of the issues brought forward to the Special Rapporteur by NWAC were noted in her initial response on her visit to Canada. She will later produce a final report on violence against women perpetrated by state governments, with specific recommendations to the state on addressing and stopping these issues from continuing to occur.

CANADA'S THIRD UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

NWAC received the opportunity to meet with European Union representatives this year to discuss Canada's third Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which is a mechanism by the United Nations to ensure that states are complying with their international human rights obligations domestically. NWAC's briefing to the European Union provided them with insight on the ongoing Indigenous and international human rights violations being perpetrated by the Canadian government, as outlined in the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With this information, the European Union can address the United Nations on these issues during Canada's third review.

DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGES

This year, NWAC has received invitations by embassies in Bolivia and Brazil to engage in cultural and knowledge exchanges with the Indigenous peoples in Latin America. These types of exchanges give NWAC an opportunity to address the realities of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. Additionally, these types of exchanges give NWAC an opportunity to build strong relationships and unity with grassroots Indigenous women in Latin America, which is a strong tool for advocating for Indigenous rights with international institutions.

LEGISLATIVE REVIEW – POLITICAL ADVOCACY

More than 100 women's organizations seek to create a national conversation on gender equality and women's rights in the lead up to the next federal election. The Up for Debate campaign calls on Canadian federal political parties to make meaningful commitments to change women's lives for the better, at home and around the world. NWAC is a participating member of Up for Debate and puts forth the voices of Indigenous women and gender diverse peoples and their issues and needs. We strive to make political parties priorities Indigenous issues as much as they prioritize other needs.

ELECTIONS CANADA

We worked together with Elections Canada to simulate what the federal elections process would be like and how they could make it as accessible as possible to people with disabilities and disadvantaged communities, especially Indigenous communities.

Bill C-262

Bill C-262 would require the laws of Canada in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and was introduced by the Honorable Romeo Saganash, Member of Parliament. NWAC testified before the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs to give recommendations based on Indigenous women and girls' needs to the bill itself and how UNDRIP should be incorporated into Canadian laws. To ensure that Bill C-262 leads to the full and effective harmonization of Canadian law with UNDRIP, the following are recommended:

- i. Commitment to ensure that language is inclusive and will reflect the rights, respect and cooperation of Indigenous women and LGBTWQ2S
- ii. Recognition of the specific implications for Indigenous women
- iii. Going beyond UNDRIP by including the specific needs and issues of the diverse Indigenous communities in Canada (First Nations, Inuit and Métis)
- iv. Development of a mechanism that will be used to ensure Canadian laws are consistent with UNDRIP.
- v. Commitment for clarity around Section 5 and 6 to identify a mechanism that will be used to ensure implementation is done in a collaborative, effective and timely way.

BILL C-45

In response to Bill C-45, NWAC put together a submission brief stating its recommendations and the impacts that the legalization of cannabis would have on Indigenous women and communities. Bill C-45 is an Act meant to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other Acts in relation to cannabis. NWAC supports legalization and believes it would have a positive financial impact on Indigenous communities and help them obtain more financial independence.

NATION-TO-NATION RELATIONSHIP

NWAC is in discussions with the Government of Canada on a "Canada-NWAC Accord" to ensure meaningful, equal and full representation of Indigenous women as a National Indigenous Organization.

NWAC testified before the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (APPA) with regards to their study on the new Nation-to-Nation relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples and its main principles. NWAC discussed the positive impact that Indigenous women's participation in discussions and negotiations would have on Indigenous women, girls and their communities and made the following recommendations:

Implementation of a decision-making framework inclusive of Indigenous women from coast to coast to coast to achieve policy changes that reflect full and fair participation by Indigenous women, reduce violence against Indigenous women, and support reconciliation.

Inclusion of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people in the decision-making process to ensure policy more accurately reflects their lives, allows for evidence-based policy decision-making and produces better socio-economic outcomes that increase safety will lead to stronger Indigenous communities and support the well-being and advancement of all Indigenous peoples including Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

BILL S-3

The Policy Unit worked closely with NWAC's PTMAs to provide informational resources, host engagement sessions, and inform amendments to the legislation. NWAC listened carefully to the opinions of Indigenous women and brought their perspectives to the forefront of Bill S-3 discussions. As advocates for gender equity, eliminating sex-based discrimination in the Indian Act is a goal that NWAC strives to achieve. NWAC continues to develop plain language information materials and advocate for the full implementation of Bill S-3 so that Indigenous women and their descendants can have their full rights as Indigenous peoples recognized.

ACCESSIBILITY LEGISLATION

The federal government is creating the first federal accessibility legislation which will work to ensure a safe, accessible, and inclusive society for all people. NWAC has engaged with Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people with disabilities and functional limitations over the course of a year to hear how the new legislation can best represent their rights. Through two national surveys, one webinar, and two reports, NWAC has developed key recommendations for the creation and implementation of new legislation which will be introduced in Spring 2018, and developed key partnerships with national and regional disability rights organizations and Indigenous service providers.

ENVIRONMENT

NWAC's environmental policies work from an understanding that Indigenous women and gender diverse people's bodies are intrinsically connected to the land and waters. There is a land-body-culture connection that demonstrates the linkages of environmental impacts on health and wellness of Indigenous people and how this impacts access to and transmission of culture. NWAC works to inform federal studies and legislation and international decisions that impacts all aspects of the environment. Over the past year NWAC's policy department has researched and produced informational resources on climate change and consulted and informed on the modernization of the National Energy Board process. Additionally, we have participated in various United Nations decisions on climate change and biodiversity conservation, advocated for Indigenous women sitting in decision-making roles at environment tables, and gender equity in free, prior, and informed consent consultations.

POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

Over the past year NWAC conducted an online survey, two in-person engagements, and produced a final report with Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people on causes, conditions, and impacts of poverty. NWAC believes that poverty is much more than lacking a steady or sufficient source of income. For Indigenous women it means being vulnerable: to violence, to the lack of autonomy and access to services, and experiencing social disconnection. This is why cultural identity and social inclusion are absolutely necessary to poverty reduction. NWAC evaluated community and individual access to

cultural supports and identity expression, and how this relates to conditions of poverty. Currently, NWAC continues to advocate for culturally safe and gender-based services and supports for Indigenous women and gender diverse people through economic, social, and political programs. NWAC is also working with several stakeholders and partners to inform pay equity legislation which will work to close the pay equity gap for women, especially Indigenous women who face the largest gap at 53 per cent.

INTERNATIONAL

BOLIVIA

Executive Director, Lynne Groulx delivered presentations on Indigenous Women, collective rights, and self-governance in Canada, Indigenous women and political impacts, and the road to equality.

SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

Executive Director Lynne Groulx and Treasurer Judy Hughes travel to Peru, South America and participated at numerous meetings with Indigenous groups; meetings were held with Embassy officials and Liberal MP Marc Serré.

BRAZIL

Executive Director Lynne Groulx and Director of Youth Advocacy and Development Carrington Christmas travelled to Sao Paulo and Brasilia on a diplomatic exchange with Indigenous groups and a presentation with the Canadian Embassy on the political voice of Indigenous women in Brazil.

UNITED NATIONS

NWAC President Francyne Joe, Executive Director Lynne Groulx and NWAC Board members travelled to the United Nations Permanent Forum. A side event was held and NWAC participated at numerous meetings including one at the Canadian Mission.

NWAC President Francyne Joe and NWAC Board Members travelled to the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Legal Counsel engaged in United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations to advocate for greater representation of Indigenous women in UNFCCC processes.