

NWAC PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This publication highlights the various activities the President has undertaken throughout the month of August.



LORRAINE WHITMAN

Lorraine Whitman was elected as the President of the Native Women's Association of Canada on September 14, 2019. Prior to her presidency at NWAC, Ms. Whitman served as President of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association and has been advocating for Indigenous women's rights over the past 45 years.



August 2020 President's Report

Dear friends,

Resiliency—the ability to adapt well when facing tragedy, trauma, stress, or adversity; to handle the challenges in life quickly so we can bounce back much faster.

During this time of COVID-19, we are all feeling stressed and anxious. How do we prepare our children who are getting ready to go back to school? What will school look like for them, and how can we keep them safe and healthy? How do we as a family and community prepare?

What does resiliency look like for the thousands of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people who have experienced violence, both in the home and on the streets; for Indigenous families and communities across the country still dealing with the impact of colonialism, racism, and discrimination?

On a large scale, resiliency looks like the 174 billboards set up in 2018 on major highways and roads, in the heart of large cities, and in more rural, isolated communities. Appropriately named “Resilience,” the project was meant to prompt us to rethink and reshape the narrow dictionary definition of resilience. For the Indigenous women artists, “resilience is embodied as endurance, adaptability, and sovereignty in relation to customary cultural practices, contemporary identities, the land, and the impact of colonial practices and strategies.”



On August 9, International Day of Indigenous Peoples (whose theme was “COVID-19 and indigenous peoples’ resilience”), I shared a special message about resiliency: “Our people have so much adversity throughout history. It has become second nature for us to fight for our rights. This year’s theme reflects this ability to overcome challenges.... We have developed an incredible level of strength, wisdom, and knowledge as a result of adversity.... Today, I celebrate the wisdom and the fortitude of our people. It is my hope that the world will start turning to us as leaders.”

As your national Indigenous organization whose goal is to advance the well-being of all Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people, as well as their families and communities, the Native Women's Association of Canada continues to work hard on many fronts. That includes continuing to raise awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and keeping the pressure on the federal government to issue a national action plan on MMIWG. Regardless of the pandemic, NWAC is moving forward on the [10-point action plan in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#). To this end, we held our first staff meeting on August 5, where we reviewed the plan.

Our work nationally on gender-based violence and the need for policing reforms, as well as on the international front, where we are seeking UN support for MMIWG, also continues.

COVID-19 has hampered our ability to gather, honour, and celebrate in our communities. But we must continue to do what we can to be together in family and friendship. Our minds, souls, and spirituality demand it. Let us drum and sing, for drumming and singing bring balance, renewal, and resiliency.

Thank you, Wela'lin


President Lorraine Whitman
 [@LWhitman_NWAC](#)



Promoting Understanding, Pressing for Movement on MMIWG, and Advocating for Indigenous Women and Girls

Raising Awareness about MMIWG, Gender-Based Violence, and Safety

Once again, the safety of Indigenous women and girls hit close to home. On August 13, 14-year-old Molly Martin from We'koqma'q First Nation on Cape Breton Island, N.S., went missing. RCMP issued a localized emergency alert a week after Molly went missing with a man she knew. They did not issue an Amber Alert because they—mistakenly—thought she had gone willingly. It turns out she had been abducted. This runaway stereotype puts underage girls in danger and sets a serious precedent for the issuance of Amber Alerts. In a statement issued August 19, I said: “Too many of our young women go missing and, too many times, the police are late to respond. The circumstances of her disappearance suggest she could be in peril and her situation seems especially dire. It is wrong to use bureaucratic rules as an excuse for not issuing an Amber Alert in cases like this. It is wrong for police to be so unconcerned when an Indigenous girl is gone for a week and her community members are left to search for her by themselves.”

While this story has a happy ending, I also pointed out that “Molly is just one of at least five Indigenous teenage girls who went missing across Canada in the past week.”



Lorraine dropping off food and supplies to members of the Molly Martin search team. Lorraine being interviewed by both Global News and CBC on the search for Molly and the need for government action on MMIWG.



Both the murder of Chantel Moore during a wellness check by police in Edmundston, New Brunswick, in June and the length of time it took to issue an emergency alert (one week) after Molly Martin disappeared from We'koqma'q First Nation in Nova Scotia in August are stark reminders that Indigenous women and girls are not safe in our communities.

Canada must take stronger action on combatting the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

International support on the MMIWG file is crucial to NWAC's ability to press for federal government action. To this end, I participated in an online meeting on August 14 with Antonia Urrejola Noguera, the Inter-American Commission Member and Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, where we focused on the absence of a national action plan. On August 17, a similar virtual meeting was held with E. Tandayi Achiume, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism. Various themes formed the focus of the exchange, including follow-up to the Final Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG and the tragic shooting of Chantel Moore. An online consultation on August 25, organized by the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network – Canada, was held to provide recommendations for the September 16 meeting, which is being co-chaired by Canada and Uruguay. Women around the world face intersecting forms of violence and discrimination, including in Canada, particularly among Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. The network aims to strengthen and support a global community dedicated to putting gender at the heart of peace and security efforts.



Gender-based violence was the topic of discussion of a virtual meeting on August 14 hosted by Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development. Initiatives under way in Canada include:

- 300 prevention activities for on- and off-reserve Indigenous populations, funding to the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, and four new shelters in First Nations communities under the Family Violence Prevention Program; and
- a \$10-million MMIWG Commemoration Fund to honour the lives and legacies of Indigenous women, girls, LGBTQ, and Two-Spirit people.

That same day, I was invited by the Public Safety Committee of the House of Commons Standing Committee to share NWAC's perspective on the issue of systemic racism in Canada's police services and the apparent lack of movement by governments to deal with the violence that is being directed at Indigenous women. I asked the parliamentarians this: "Do you finally see us or will you continue to ignore us and allow the violence to continue? I urge the committee to make it clear to the government that the purge of systemic racism from Canada's police forces cannot wait for further deaths to occur, or for other mothers like Martha Martin to be left with only grief and memories."

Connecting with PTMAs

Following my visit with Martha Martin, Chantel's mom, on August 4, where I offered my moral support, I dropped in to see Elder Agnes Potter, Bear River First Nation. We talked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and her spiritual health. I also paid my respects to loved ones who have passed on into the Spirit World with a prayer and drumming.





Lorraine honours the memory of Raymond Morine and Bernice Harlow.




Lorraine with Elder Agnes Potter.

It is always exciting to welcome new member associations to NWAC. On July 31, we did just that. Representing Alberta, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW) will bring the voices of Indigenous women in Alberta to the national level. The 25-year-old IAAW is the largest Indigenous women's group in Alberta, and values the work it does provincially with community, business, educational, and government partners. On August 6, I had an opportunity to officially welcome Interim President Lisa Weber and the IAAW to NWAC. I welcomed Lisa to NWAC, updated her on initiatives, and discussed areas to work together.



Marlene Thomas, President of the Aboriginal Women's Association of PEI

On August 24, I visited the office of the Aboriginal Women's Association of PEI to connect with President Marlene Thomas. In addition to discussing membership-related issues, we talked about the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous families living on the island.

A close-up photograph of a wooden basket overflowing with fresh vegetables. The basket is filled with several large, ripe red tomatoes, numerous yellow and orange cherry tomatoes, and several yellow and green squash. A single green cucumber is prominently placed in the center of the basket. The basket's wooden slats are visible, and the background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Since time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples have lived in their traditional territories, gathering and harvesting food in preparation for the winter ahead. Regardless of the impact of COVID-19 on our communities, we are able to harvest and reap the rewards of Mother Earth.



Native Women's
Association of Canada



L'Association des
femmes autochtones
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