

Native Women's
Association of Canada



February 8, 2012

Madame Sylvia Pimentel, Chair
Members
United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
c/o CEDAW Secretariat
OHCHR - Palais Wilson, 8-14 Avenue de la Paix, CH-1211
Geneva 10, Switzerland

Dear Madame Pimentel and Members of the Committee,

We write to you today as Aboriginal women and girls in Canada, their representative organizations and their allies. We are extremely pleased to learn that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has initiated an inquiry under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. This inquiry is urgently needed. We hope that the Committee will request a visit and come to Canada to conduct the inquiry as soon as possible.

We know that the Committee has been in dialogue with Canada about missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls since 2008. We are aware of the Committee's priority recommendation on this subject in its 2008 Concluding Observations after its review of Canada, the request for a follow-up report by Canada in 2009, and the Committee's conclusion in 2010 that Canada has not implemented the Committee's recommendation. We know further that the Committee has been in communication with Canada since then asking for additional information, and for a report on outcomes of measures that Canada says it has put in place. We thank you for this consistent effort on behalf of Canada's most disadvantaged and threatened women and girls. However, given these efforts over four years and the unsatisfactory outcomes, an Article 8 inquiry is timely and necessary.

Many of the groups and individuals who are signatories to this letter have worked for more than a decade, to bring this issue to the attention of the Government of Canada, as well as provincial and territorial governments. We have tried to impress upon our governments the seriousness of the human rights violations involved, and the need for strategic, co-ordinated action to address the police and government failures that permit and condone the persistent sexualized and racialized violence. Many of us have provided support and services to Aboriginal women and girls who have experienced violence, and to members of the families of women and girls who have disappeared or been murdered. We have all worked in different ways and in different communities.

We have lobbied, written, spoken out, walked across the country, held hundreds of vigils for the disappeared and murdered women, intervened with police, appeared before Parliamentary Committees, and met with government officials, repeatedly.

Despite our years of effort, our goal has not been achieved. Canada does not yet have in place a co-ordinated national plan, with detailed and concrete measures, to address the root causes and remedy the consequences of the violence against Aboriginal women and girls. Some steps have been taken. But, when these steps are assessed against the long-standing and continuing pattern of violence and the harms that it causes to women, girls, families and communities, the response of the Government of Canada, and the provincial and territorial governments, remains weak, un-coordinated, and inadequate.

In addition, the voices of Aboriginal women and their organizations are still ignored and disrespected, and they are excluded from participation in deliberations about their lives and their deaths. Most recently, the Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Women released its final report on violence against Aboriginal women. The report ignores the testimony given by hundreds of Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women's organizations and it offers no real solutions.

Further, because the Government of British Columbia denied funding for legal counsel to the groups who were granted standing by Inquiry Commissioner, Wally Oppal, the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry in British Columbia is proceeding without the participation of the Native Women's Association of Canada, and other crucial organizations who work directly with, and defend the rights of women who are targets of violence. Neither analysis of the problems, nor solutions to them, can be formulated effectively if Aboriginal women, their organizations, and those with knowledge and expertise about their conditions, are not included and listened to.


As time goes by, and there are still no effective measures in place, there is an increasing sense of urgency and frustration. Aboriginal women and girls continue to disappear and be found murdered. We believe that external intervention and examination is necessary. The Committee's presence in Canada can instruct governments and the public of the gravity of the human rights violations. The Committee can also identify the measures that need to be put in place immediately to satisfy Canada's obligations to prevent, investigate, prosecute and remedy violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

As Aboriginal women and girls, and their representatives and allies in Canada, we believe it is crucial that the Committee move forward with its inquiry into the national tragedy of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls as expeditiously as possible. We request that the Committee seek permission for a visit to Canada in order that members undertaking the inquiry can speak directly with some Aboriginal women in Canada and visit some of our communities. We believe that a visit to Canada is essential for the Committee to be fully informed about the social, historical and geographical context in which the disappearances and murders of Aboriginal women and girls are taking place. We stand ready to assist the Committee in any way we can.

Respectfully,



Jeannette Corbiere Lavell
President
Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)



Sharon McIvor
Human Rights Committee
Canadian Feminist Alliance for International
Action (FAFIA)

Aboriginal Services Center for Addiction and Mental Health
Aboriginal Women's Action Network
Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes
Alberta Aboriginal Women's Society
Alternative pour Elles
Antigonish Women's Resource Centre & Sexual Assault Services Association
Asian Women Coalition Ending Prostitution (AWCEP)
Assistance aux femmes de Montréal
British Columbia Assembly of First Nations
British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
British Columbia Federation of Labour
British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union
British Columbia Government Employees' Union, Local 601
British Columbia Teachers' Federation
Business and Professional Women of Canada

Business and Professional Women (Montreal Chapter)
Centre d'aide and de lutte contre les agressions a caractère sexuel (CALACS)
CALACS Assaut sexuel secours
CALACS Chateauguay
Canadian Association of AIDS Care
Canadian Association of Social Workers
The Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres (CASAC)
Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies
CAW-TCA Canada - National Automobile, Aerospace, Transportation and General Workers Union of Canada
CAW-TCA Canada, Local 1106
Canadian Federation of University Women – Halifax
Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)
Canadian Labour Congress
Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women
Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
Canadian Union of Public Employees, Saskatchewan Division
Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 1281
Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice
Canadian Women's Foundation
Canadian Women's Health Network
Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation
Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children
Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of British Columbia
Comité d'action contre la traite humaine interne et international
Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP)
Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle (CLES)
The Council of Canadians
Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association
Dalhousie Women's Centre
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
Elementary Teachers of Toronto
EVE (formerly Exploited Voices now Educating)
Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec
Glenwood Women's Institute
Harmony House
Hospital Employees' Union
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW)
IAMAW, Local 16
IAMAW, Local 2323
Indigenous Bar Association
International Anglican Women's Network in Canada
International Indian Treaty Council
Justice for Girls
La Débrouille
La Maison d'Ariane
La Maison De Connivence

La Maison des-Femmes de Sept-Iles
La Maison Hina
L'R des centres de femmes du Québec
Labourers' International Union of North America
Les EssentiElles
Maison d'aide et d'hébergement pour femmes et enfants victimes de violence conjugale de L'islet
Maison d'aide et d'hébergement l'Accalmie
Maison de Lina
Maison Halte Secours
Maison Interlude House
Maison Mikana
Maison Unies-Vers-Femmes
Mattawa Women Resource Centre
Media Watch, U.S.A
Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women & Children
Multi-femmes Inc. pour les femmes victimes de violence conjugale
National Council of Women of Canada
National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE)
Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories
Newfoundland Native Women's Association
New Brunswick Aboriginal Women's Council Inc.
Noojmowin Teg Health Centre
Nova Scotia Association of Women's Centres
Ojibway Cree First Nation
Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses
Ontario Native Women's Association
Oxfam Canada
Project of Heart
Québec Native Women's Association
Public Service Alliance of Canada
Public Service Alliance of Canada North
Public Service Alliance of Canada, Aboriginal Action Circle
Public Service Alliance of Canada, Winnipeg Regional Women's Committee
Public Service Alliance of Canada, British Columbia Region
Public Service Alliance of Canada, Local 00392
Public Service Alliance of Canada, Dawson City Regional Women's Committee
Public Service Alliance of Canada, Whitehorse Regional Women's Committee
Public Service Alliance of Canada, Aboriginal People's Committee
Public Service Alliance of Canada, Prairies Region
Rainy River District Women's Shelter of Hope
The REDress Project
Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale
Regroupement Québécois des Centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions a caractère sexuel
Sagkeeng Health Center
Saskatchewan Aboriginal Women's Circle Corporation
Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa
Syndicat des employées et employés nationaux, Local 00392, (The River Local)
Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association, Status of Women Committee
Transition House Association of Nova Scotia

Tri County Women's Centre
Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs
Union of Northern Workers
Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
Walk 4 Justice
West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund
Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle
Women for a Just and Healthy Planet
Women of Diverse Origins
Women's Legal Education and Action Fund
Women's World 2011
YMCA Canada / A Turning Point for Women
YWCA Yellowknife
Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council
Yukon Status of Women Council

Individuals

Amy Bombay
Tina Bunnie
Monique Charlebois
Linda Christiansen-Ruffman
Elizabeth Dorion
Victoria Gibb-Carsley
Kimberley Henry
Carol Hughes, Member of Parliament, Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing
Shannon Kraska
Hélène LeBlanc, Member of Parliament, LaSalle—Émard
Brian Masse, Member of Parliament, Windsor West
Rebecca Megyesi
Kelly Megyesi
Jane Moseley
Jane Stinson
Ruth Newell
Lyanne Ruest
Daphne Young