



May 8, 2018

Honourable Dr. Carolyn Bennett
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs

Via email: carolyn.bennett@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Bennett:

We write to you today to express our deep concern about the time restrictions imposed on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (“the Inquiry”).

West Coast LEAF is a BC-based legal advocacy organization. Our mandate is to use the law to create an equal and just society for all women and people who experience gender based discrimination. In collaboration with community, we use litigation, law reform, and public legal education to make change. In particular, we aim to transform society by achieving: access to healthcare; access to justice; economic security; freedom from gender based violence; justice for those who are criminalized; and the right to parent. We are participants in the Inquiry with standing in Parts II and III.

As you know, the mandate of the Inquiry is focussed on identifying and examining systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls. Specifically, the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry:

- (a) direct the Commissioners to inquire into and report on the following:
 - i. systemic causes of all forms of violence – including sexual violence – against Indigenous women and girls in Canada, including underlying social, economic, cultural, institutional and historical causes contributing to the ongoing violence and particular vulnerabilities of Indigenous women and girls in Canada, and
 - ii. institutional policies and practices implemented in response to violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada, including the identification and examination of practices that have been effective in reducing violence and increasing safety.

We appreciate your acknowledgement March 6 of this year that: “the families of these women and girls need answers to the systemic and institutional failures that lead to the murder of so many Indigenous women.” Yet, without adequate time for the Inquiry process, these failures will go unanswered.

Over a year and a half into the Inquiry, Part II (institutional) and Part III (expert) hearings to identify and examine systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls are only now just getting underway. The systemic hearings planned in the remaining time fall far short of what is necessary for the Inquiry to meet its mandate, much less to do so meaningfully. For example, surely the functions,

practices and policies of both the prosecution service and corrections are key institutional responses referenced in subsections (a)i and ii of the Terms of Reference, and yet neither institution is included in the institutional hearings. How can we possibly understand or address the experience of women and their families in reporting violence and seeking redress without exploring these two key elements of the criminal justice system response?

Quite simply, the Inquiry will not be able to achieve its systemic mandate unless it is granted the **full** extension requested. In our view as participants in Parts II and III, denying the extension would result in an enormous waste of potential for change, do a disservice to those who have already provided their evidence to the Inquiry, and seriously undermine national momentum towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. We know that this is our only chance at an Inquiry examining violence against Indigenous women and girls; let's ensure that it is a meaningful opportunity to address this ongoing national tragedy.

Thank you for considering our perspective in this matter. There is considerable urgency to your answer: with incomplete and inadequate institutional and expert hearings already scheduled, the Inquiry and the participants need a prompt answer to the extension request. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,



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Executive Director



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