

May 3, 2019

Hon. Carolyn Bennett
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs
Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada
10 rue Wellington
Gatineau, QC K1A 0H4

CC: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau; Minister of Justice David Lametti; Minister of International Development and Minister for Women and Gender Equality; Minister of Indigenous Services
Seamus O'Regan

RE: Urgent need for comprehensive response to National Inquiry report

Dear Minister Bennett,

The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls will be submitted to the public on June 3, exactly one month from today.

Indigenous people who have experienced violence; family members and loved ones of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people; Indigenous organizations and notably Indigenous women's organizations; civil society organizations; and the thousands of people who shared their truths with the National Inquiry anxiously await release of this report, and expect swift action to fully implement its recommendations to concretely address what the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has determined are "grave violations" of the human rights of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people.

We are concerned that some of the recommendations in the National Inquiry's interim report published a year ago remain unimplemented, including the recommendation to launch a national task force to review and reopen cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people. This inaction cannot be repeated when the National Inquiry's final report is released next month.

Far too often, public inquiries initiated with the best of intentions fail to produce the transformative change that is needed because the recommendations are allowed to gather dust on the shelves of government. In fact, prior to the National Inquiry, a coalition of Indigenous women's organizations, human rights groups, individual legal experts, and the Legal Strategy Coalition on Violence Against Indigenous Women, identified more than 700 recommendations to prevent violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people from previous inquiries that have almost all gone unimplemented.

To address the scale and the severity of violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people, and recognizing the need for action in this session of Parliament, we call on you to:

1. Provide an official government response to the National Inquiry's final report before the House of Commons rises in June;
2. Identify a high-level federal focal point, who has the trust of family members and loved ones of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people, to coordinate the government response to the report and implementation of its recommendations;
3. Develop an implementation plan for the National Inquiry's recommendations across all jurisdictions in Canada that is effective, coordinated, transparent, and accountable, and that provides for full and proper engagement with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, girls, and two-spirit people in the design and implementation of measures;
4. To support and bolster cross-jurisdictional implementation of the National Inquiry's recommendations, immediately commit to building upon the Federal Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence by developing a National Plan to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence;
5. Demonstrate a commitment to implementation that includes full and proper engagement with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, girls, and two-spirit people; and
6. Provide clarity to family members and loved ones of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people on measures that will be taken to engage with law enforcement and address situations where individual cases have not been properly investigated.

For years you supported the call for a National Inquiry to address violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people, and we appreciate your commitment to undertaking the National Inquiry. We call on you to demonstrate your commitment to the National Inquiry and your responsibility to all the Métis, Inuit, and First Nations women, girls, and two-spirit people who have experienced violence, and to all those who shared their truth with the National Inquiry, by concretely, publicly, and promptly committing the government of Canada to implementing the solutions identified by the National Inquiry to end this human rights crisis.

Sincerely,

Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario
Aboriginal Women's Action Network
Amnesty International Canada (English)
Amnistie internationale Canada Francophone
Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies of Ontario
Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society (Alberta)
BC Government and Service Employees' Union of British Columbia
BC Assembly of First Nations
BC Federation of Labour
British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
Canada Without Poverty
Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action
Congress of Aboriginal Peoples
Downtown Eastside Women's Centre

Eastern Door Indigenous Women's Association
Ending Violence Association of BC
Families for Justice
Femmes Autochtones du Québec
First United Church Community Ministry Society
Independent First Nations
Iskwewuk Ewichiwitochik (Women Walking Together)
Liard Aboriginal Women's Society
Manitoba Moon Voices Inc
New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council
Pacific Association of First Nations Women
Union of BC Indian Chiefs
Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre
Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre
West Coast LEAF
Dr. Pamela Palmater, Chair in Indigenous Governance, Ryerson University