



November 9, 2015

Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
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RE: Coalition on MMIWG Recommendations for National Inquiry

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Ministers:

We extend our sincere congratulations on your election and appointments to a new Cabinet. We thank you for your campaign commitments to advance justice and equality and to set a new relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples. We write today about your promise to establish a national public inquiry on murders and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls, which is a crucial step towards creating a just society for Indigenous women and girls, their families and communities.

The Coalition on Missing and Murdered Women formed when the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry was appointed in British Columbia in 2010, although many of the members of the Coalition, such as the February 14th Memorial March, have been working to bring public attention to the murders and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls for more than 25 years. The Coalition is comprised of front-line women's organizations, Indigenous organizations and human rights organizations, which all have established expertise and experience working with Indigenous women and their families on the issues surrounding the crisis of violence against Indigenous women and girls.

We write today with a specific request with respect to the implementation of your commitment to a national inquiry: a pre-inquiry consultation process must be established in order to ensure that the inquiry is designed, in advance, in a way that will allow it to successfully meet its goals and improve safety for Indigenous women and girls in Canada. In particular, this pre-inquiry consultation process should establish the mandate and parameters of the inquiry, criteria for appointments of Commissioners and staff, processes for participation, initial areas of research, and resource requirements and commitments.

We stress the importance of pre-inquiry consultation because we have learned from the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry in BC, which was a dismal failure. The mandate of the BC inquiry was too narrow to address the root causes of the problem before it. In addition, the BC inquiry process effectively excluded key organizations, such as the Native Women's Association of Canada, who could speak to the lives and deaths of the women it was ostensibly designed to consider, as well as Indigenous and civil society organizations with crucial expertise about the root causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls and its real effects on families and communities. The families of the women who were murdered by Robert William Pickton received only token representation and support, and many families felt left out of any meaningful participation in the process.

The failure of the BC inquiry and the necessity for meaningful pre-inquiry planning are well established. Some members of the Coalition wrote a report after this dismaying experience, entitled *Blueprint for an Inquiry: Learning from the Failures of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*,¹ which sets out a number of necessary considerations for future inquiries and states:

If there were only one recommendation to come from this report, it would be that commissions of inquiry that ...are called in response to the concerns of marginalized communities, must consult thoroughly at every stage with those communities and the organizations that work with those communities.

In addition, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued a report in January 2015 entitled *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in British Columbia, Canada*,² which reviewed the work of BC's Missing Women Commission of Inquiry. The report stressed the importance of consulting with Indigenous women and communities, noting "[t]heir consultation is crucial for the success of any initiative, especially given the context of historical and structural discrimination." The Inter-American Commission also supported a national public inquiry with the caveat that Indigenous women must be consulted "at all stages from conception, to establishing terms of reference, implementation and evaluation."

¹ Available online at: <http://www.westcoastleaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/2012-REPORT-Missing-Women-Commission-of-Inquiry.pdf>.

² Available online at: <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/indigenous-women-bc-canada-en.pdf>.

In summary, we request that your government immediately establish a pre-inquiry process that includes consultation with Indigenous women, families, Indigenous organizations and civil society organizations with knowledge and expertise regarding the elements and procedures that will be necessary to make a national public inquiry effective and meaningful. We enclose a copy of the *Blueprint for an Inquiry* report, which contains lessons from BC's inquiry process. Your commitment to a national inquiry is a crucial step towards improving the safety and security of Indigenous women and girls in Canada, and we urge you to take proactive steps to avoid repeating BC's past mistakes.

We would also like to be included in this pre-inquiry consultation process, and to offer you any and all assistance in this important endeavour. This issue is close to our hearts and is very important to our collective work in seeking justice for murdered and disappeared Indigenous women and girls. Please contact Andrea Glickman, Union of BC Indian Chiefs (andrea@ubcic.bc.ca) to set up a meeting.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International Canada
Atira Housing
Battered Women's Support Services
BC Assembly of First Nations
BC Civil Liberties Association
Butterflies in Spirit
Carrier Sekani Family Services
Carrier Sekani Tribal Council
Downtown Eastside Women's Centre
Ending Violence Association of BC
February 14th Women's Memorial March Committee
First Nations Summit
First United Church
Lookout Emergency Aid Society
Native Women's Association of Canada
Neskonlith Indian Band
PACE: Providing Alternatives Counselling & Education Society
PHS Community Services Society
Pivot Legal Society
Poverty and Human Rights Centre
RainCity Housing
Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs
Vancouver Council of Women
Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre Society
Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
Union Gospel Mission
West Coast LEAF
WISH Drop-in Centre Society
Women Against Violence Against Women
Ceejai Julien, family member
Beverley Jacobs, Jacobs Law