

Joint Statement on the movement of Sisters in Spirit Vigils

Aboriginal women and girls are facing the most pervasive human rights crisis in Canada today. The profound impact of violence experienced by Aboriginal women and girls in Canada has created a national tragedy. The disappearance and murder of our Aboriginal sisters is felt nationwide. Countless First Nations, Inuit and Métis families and communities are not only grappling with the loss of a loved one but are also questioning why more is not being done to address this serious human rights issue.

We are speaking out, as individuals and organizations, because we believe this violence is of urgent concern to everyone in Canada. More than that, this concern must lead to action—if left unchecked not only will this remain a human rights violation but it will heavily impact future generations of Canadians. Therefore, we are looking for a commitment from all Canadians that systemic forms of violence and indifference to the lives and wellbeing of Aboriginal women and girls must end. In particular the safety of Aboriginal sisters, daughters, mothers and grandmothers must be a priority.

October 4th is a day to honour the lives of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. The Sisters In Spirit Vigil movement for social change began with the courage, strength and love of families who suffered the loss of a sister, daughter, mother, grandmother or friend. As of March 31st 2010 NWAC has found 582 cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. As Canadians we should ask ourselves why so many of our Aboriginal sisters are treated as a statistic. 2010 is the fifth year of the Vigil movement; let's make 2010 the year Canadians finally take concrete action to defend the lives of Aboriginal women and girls.

While the Canadian government has taken a positive step by promising to invest ten million dollars over a period of two years, there is still more that needs to be done towards addressing violence against Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women face severe forms of violence no matter where they live in Canada. The fact is as of 2010 the Sisters In Spirit initiative has found that no charges have been laid in 40% of known homicide cases involving Aboriginal women. With this disproportionate reality upon us we call on all levels of government, (municipal, territorial, regional, provincial and federal), to take concrete actions by restoring the role of Aboriginal women and girls by acknowledging their value in society.

All levels of government need to work collaboratively with Aboriginal women, including the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and other key stakeholders, on issues of justice, safety, economic security and the well-being of Aboriginal women and girls. We call for a national action plan for Aboriginal women that:

- Understands that Aboriginal women face violence because they are Aboriginal and because they are women,
- Ensures effective and unbiased police response through mandatory culturally-based training, resources and coordination,
- Improves public awareness and accountability through the consistent collection and publication of comprehensive national statistics on rates of violent crime against Aboriginal women,
- Elevates Aboriginal women's social status by closing the economic and social gap

between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada; • Uses the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to inform policy and guide practices; and, • Eliminates inequalities in the services available to Aboriginal children, in particular, the child welfare system. Along with calling for action, we must give thanks to the families who are our inspiration and the reason we continue to demand action. Many of them are here with us today and we thank them for sharing their stories. There are more than 582 missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in this country. Each one of these women is loved and missed terribly by their family, friends and community. Their loss is our loss. Their grief is our grief.

Get informed, get involved and mobilize for change – the time is now to give voice to Aboriginal women.

This Joint Statement is supported by:

Native Women's Association of Canada

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