

PRESS RELEASE – October 10, 2017

Families and Survivors of MMIWGT2S call for immediate action to reset the National Inquiry

A growing number of families and survivors of MMIWGT2S are asking the Prime Minister of Canada to administer a reorganization and reset of the National Inquiry into MMIWGT2S. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed to families last week that he will re-dedicate himself and the Government of Canada to ensuring families are at the heart of the National Inquiry process.

The Prime Minister issued this commitment while holding a hand-delivered letter from families, survivors, and supporters of MMIWGT2S that points the way forward by detailing a reset. The letter was first sent to the Prime Minister on August 8th and hand-delivered again with a growing list of signatories – primarily families of MMIWGT2S requesting a reset – at the October 4th vigil held by Families of Sisters in Spirit on Parliament Hill.

Now representing over 180 family members and over 80 supporters, the letter asks the Prime Minister to rebuild the Inquiry with families and communities at its center.

In the statement, one family member asks the Prime Minister: “when will you take this seriously instead of false promises toward the families? I totally lost faith in his words about the Inquiry ... I am heartbroken.” Family members, survivors, and many grassroots supporters worked tirelessly to support the existing National Inquiry processes, but have lost all faith in the existing Commissioners and continue to face unnecessary harms from poorly designed and implemented Inquiry processes.

The families and survivors have agreed with the Prime Minister and the Commissioners that this Inquiry was never going to be easy. Their letter states, “These are our stories, our loved ones. We know very well the traumas and difficulties of this work. We were prepared for the work of this Inquiry to be a challenge, one that would build on our strengths. However, difficulty and dysfunction are not the same.” The ongoing, dysfunctional struggles of the flailing National Inquiry – including continued high ranking resignations – have created unnecessary divisions among families and have derailed the momentum and needed supports of grassroots organizing and pre-existing networks of care. The letter asks the Prime Minister to reset the Inquiry and put it on a path that works alongside existing networks of support and care.

Asking for a reset, Danielle Ewenin, a family member, says “we’ve been delegated a passive role. Many of us come from low socio-economic realities and we need the Inquiry to stop causing more harm than good.” Ellen Gabriel from Kanehsatà:ke, Kanien'kehá:ka Nation, says “we need an Inquiry that understands our communities and our Indigenous laws.” Dr. Julie Kaye from the University of Saskatchewan echoes the need for community-driven processes: “this Inquiry cannot continue to take place on the backs of exploiting those living the Inquiry. As a country, the time has come for us to move beyond colonial models that impose harmful processes in the name of awareness-raising and top-down solutions. The time has come for us to take our relations seriously and build up the work and knowledge of families and

communities that know how to address systemic violence. The Inquiry must be run by, for, and with families, survivors, and communities directly affected.”

The time has come for change. Families, survivors, communities, and supporters are ready to do the difficult work required of this National Inquiry. It is time to include their wisdom, voices, and experience to bring healing and to stop the continuation of violence.

For more information, please contact:

Elwood Ashawasega, Family member: 705-207-8896

Diane Bigeagle, Family member: 306-569-9340

Danielle Ewenin, Family member: 306-450-3878

Maxine Goforth, Family member: 306-209-7919

Billy Joe Laboucan, Family member: 780-618-7667

Silas Blackned, Family member: 819-354-1932

Bridget Tolley: Family member; Families of Sisters in Spirit: 819-771-0454

Michelle Robinson, grassroots activist: 403-467-0856

Ellen Gabriel, Kanehsatà:ke Kanien'kehá:ka Nation: 450-479-1651 ext. 703

Beverley Jacobs, Kanienkehaka, Bear Clan, relation, Lawyer, Six Nations of the Grand River Territory: 519-445-0222; bevkJacobs@gmail.com

Julie Kaye, community-based researcher, Department of Sociology, University of Saskatchewan: 306-966-7463; julie.kaye@usask.ca

Natalie Clark, MSW, scholar, activist Indigenous girls group facilitator, and violence counsellor: 250-377-1736; nclark@tru.ca