

# DECLARATION BY B.C. INDIGENOUS WOMEN



BRITISH COLUMBIA  
ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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## WOMEN'S DIALOGUE SESSIONS HELD ON MARCH 16-17 AND NOVEMBER 1-2, 2017

*Supported by the BC Chiefs-in-Assembly via Resolution 01/2018: Support for BC Indigenous Women's Declaration*

- 1. Development and Intent of the Declaration:** We, Indigenous women from the BC region, met at the Women's Dialogue Session hosted by the BC Assembly of First Nations on March 16-17, 2017 on the traditional territory of the Musqueam people, and on November 1-2, 2017 on the traditional territory of the Sts'ailes. The purpose for the Sessions was to bring together First Nations women in leadership to discuss challenges, successes, and strategies to support and enhance the wellbeing and development of ourselves and our communities.
- 2. Where We Come From/Our Cultures and Traditions:** We acknowledge that we are here because of the strength of our diverse cultures, traditions and teachings of our ancestors, which have sustained our people since time immemorial. As our teachings tie us to the land, we affirm our responsibility to protect, defend, and secure our rights to the environment that surrounds us, to our lands and waters, as they provide the essentials of life for our people. As women, we are the givers of life and bring future generations into being. We commit to raising and nurturing our children, especially our sons, to be respectful of and honour Indigenous women.
- 3. What We Have Lived Through:** Colonization and assimilation have existed since the time of contact and continue to this day. Indian Residential Schools, the reserve system, the 60s Scoop, the *Indian Act*, and countless pieces of genocidal legislation, policies and procedures have impacted the legal, social, health, financial and political contexts that women have had to navigate to survive.
- 4. Where We Are Today:** Indigenous women and girls are five times more likely to experience violence than any other population in Canada and three times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be victims of violence. Despite the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guaranteeing gender equality since 1982, the *Indian Act* continues to discriminate against Indigenous women because of their gender and has cut off women from their communities, entitlement to Status and the benefits that flow from that entitlement, and created familial tensions and separation that have resulted in exclusion and isolation. We support the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, in particular the articles that advance rights and interests of women and children.

Indigenous women continue to suffer from a multitude of traumas, which largely flow from the effects of colonization. The continued silence about these traumas impede healing and are killing our people. We commit to breaking the silence and working together to facilitate healing among our peoples, both those abused and those who are abusers. If we can only heal the people who are abused, we are further isolating the abusers and may be feeding into their cycles of abuse. When we are faced with or observe violence against Indigenous women and children, lateral violence, abuse, discrimination, sexism or racism, we commit to call it out and address it in a good way, which includes ensuring that adequate supports are in place for all impacted individuals.

Indigenous women are underrepresented in political processes at the local, regional and national levels. We commit to continue promoting the full and effective participation of Indigenous women in political processes, and will work

to have Indigenous women sitting at all levels of government. In our own communities, we will encourage our own Chief and Council members to support employment equity and ensure women are represented in the workforce. We commit to supporting one another to address the unique challenges that face Indigenous women leaders. We commit to creating space, encouraging and mentoring young Indigenous women to become involved in political processes and to flourish. We will encourage our young women to pursue their personal, educational, and social goals without judgment or reservation.

- 5. Where We Are Going and How We Will Get There:** We have the right to health and wellness, and a responsibility to ensure the health and wellness of our children and of our families. We commit to fostering healthy homes, communities, natural environments, and spaces to go where our children and families feel safe, secure and loved. We will support our community members to overcome their addictions to drugs and alcohol, as we recognize the damage that substance abuse has done, and continues to do, to our people across our territories. We commit to confronting drug dealers who support cycles of dysfunction in our communities. We will support and embrace our people who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and recognize it can come in many forms: physical, emotional, mental, and financial. We must make space and keep widening the circle to include our people who are returning from prisons and institutions, who are homeless, and we commit to finding community-based solutions to promote healing and forgiveness to bring them back to our traditional ways, ceremonies, family gatherings, and safe spaces. We acknowledge that the path to healing is often a long one, and we will forgive ourselves and others for our shortcomings as we continue on our paths.

Reconciliation and decolonization will not be achieved until our traditional way of life, our languages and cultures are revitalized and thriving; until our inherent rights to our lands and resources are recognized; until our rights to self-determination are recognized and implemented; and until the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being of our peoples are restored, not just in words, but in actions.

- 6. Resilience and Respect:** We acknowledge the tremendous strength and resilience of Indigenous women in overcoming challenges and reclaiming our distinct roles and responsibilities in our societies. We will support each other, and vow to connect with one another when we need support. We will continue to build our networks to ensure we have the support we need to achieve our goals, including finding effective strategies to ensure the safety and security of Indigenous women and girls through adequate transit and housing initiatives both for both on and off-reserve individuals. We commit to bringing each other into the circle, to be inclusive, because we know we are stronger together than apart. We are as strong and resilient as mighty cedar trees; we move with what is going on, but we are always rooted in our culture and will not get knocked over. We have a responsibility to share our knowledge and strength with women and girls who need mentors and support to bravely realize their potential. We agree that education and experience will come, but attitude is the most important.

We honour and respect ourselves and one another. We are one in love and prayer. We will teach the boys in our communities how to be men who respect and honour our women and girls. We will continue to honor the memory of those murdered and missing Indigenous people we have lost in our families and communities, and respect their memory by living each day with purpose and compassion.

We call upon our men to join us, as they are part of the balance in our families and communities. We need to have and restore balance in our communities, and we need the men to stand beside us as we step into a new chapter of healing, reconciliation and restoration.