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NEWS RELEASE
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BCAFN Recognizes Gender Equality Week and Announce New Initiatives to Advance Gender Equality

(Lheidli T'enneh Territory, Prince George, BC & Heiltsuk Territory, Bella Bella, BC – Sept. 22, 2021)

– This week (September 19 – 25) marks Gender Equality Week. This year's theme is “advancing gender equality for all”. Recognizing the contributions and achievements of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit (2S), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (LGBTQQIA+) people is especially crucial this year as our communities continue to grapple with the ongoing impact of multiple crises – the COVID-19 pandemic, opioid crisis, crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, 2S, and LGBTQQIA+ people, and the recent devastation caused by wildfires in our territories. In the midst of this extremely challenging time Indigenous women, 2S, and LGBTQQIA+ people have led and served their families, communities, and broader society in diverse and extraordinary ways. The British Columbia Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) holds up their hands in gratitude and honour your sacrifice and dedication.

Louisa Housty-Jones stated, “I send my prayers for strength and wellness to those in our community who are on the front lines, meeting the needs of our communities, and providing critical leadership. As a woman who is highly involved in organizing cultural healing ceremonies for my Nation, helping address our member's diverse needs on a grassroots level, and advocating for First Nations women and girls as the BCAFN Women's Representative, I know how much heart is involved in this work, and the toll it can take. I want to encourage you, “You are not alone. I see you, and the work you do is much appreciated. Ġiáxsiḵa!”

In addition to recognizing and lifting up women, girls, 2S, and LGBTQQIA+ people this week, BCAFN firmly believes that much more must be done to advance gender equality. All levels of government and all members of society have a crucial role to play.

Regional Chief Terry Teegee stated, “I cannot stress how important it is to prioritize concrete action that will uphold the leadership, rights, and well-being of Indigenous women, girls, 2S, and LGBTQQIA+ people. At lot is at stake as we work to roll back the tide of gender-based stigma and violence, and end the ongoing tragedy of Indigenous women, girls, 2S, and LGBTQQIA+ people going missing and being murdered. Swift action is needed now to implement the Calls for Justice, from the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG*, under the leadership of Indigenous women, 2S, and LGBTQQIA+ people. A sustainably-funded and well-coordinated response is imperative.”

Louisa Housty-Jones also stated, “It is critical that we support the healing and role of Indigenous men in our families and communities. As Indigenous people we take a holistic view of things, and we acknowledge that we are all part of the circle of healing and part of revitalizing governance structures that recognize the roles and responsibilities of each of our community members.”

This last year has been particularly challenging and rewarding, with many milestones and important shifts in how BCAFN approaches its mandate around gender justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

#honouringourancestors



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In April 2021 BCAFN hosted the 2021 Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People’s Dialogue Sessions, which brought people together for a series of virtual sessions that focused on gender identity, allyship, self-care, wellness, and reclaiming our distinct roles and responsibilities. The overarching theme was “Nourishing Hope and Belonging”. The summary report and recommendations are available on BCAFN’s website. BCAFN is in the midst of laying the groundwork required to carry the recommendations from this dialogue forward.

In May and June 2021 BCAFN hosted a four-phase engagement process on the implementation of the Calls for Justice in BC in collaboration with the AFN Women’s Council and co-facilitators Chastity Davis-Alphonse and Racelle Kooy. Based on the wisdom, lived experience, and recommendations that were shared as part of this process Racelle and Chastity led the development of a “What we Heard” report. This report emphasizes recommendations in priority areas that received the most input, including Human and Indigenous Rights and Governmental Obligations; Culture; Health and Wellness; Health and Wellness Service Providers; and Police Services. BCAFN is working to ensure that what we heard through this process is woven into work to implement the National Action Plan on MMIWG2S+. This report is available on BCAFN’s website.

To continue to advance work for gender equality, BCAFN is excited to announce several upcoming initiatives, which are supported through Women and Gender Equality Canada.

BCAFN is launching a process to develop a Strategic Action Plan for Women, 2S, and LGBTQQIA+ Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. This Strategic Action Plan will serve as a key accountability mechanism, providing a pathway for the implementation of BCAFN’s mandate and recommendations under the 2020 Indigenous Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People’s Declaration, BCAFN Resolution 11/2020 items a-i, the National Action Plan on MMIWG2SLGBTQQIA+ “What we Heard” report, and the 2021 Dialogue Session report “Nourishing Hope and Belonging”.

BCAFN is also building upon initial steps to support First Nations-specific Gender Based Analysis Plus (FN GBA+) within the BCAFN organization and membership. Taking a FN GBA+ approach can help ensure BCAFN and First Nations’ advocacy, policies, programs, legal mechanisms, and decision-making are intersectional, and therefore more effective and equity-seeking.

For more information on how BCAFN is working for gender-equality visit our website at www.bcafn.ca

Bill C-309, the [Gender Equality Week Act](#), was introduced by Sven Spengemann, Member of Parliament for Mississauga–Lakeshore. It received Royal Assent on June 21, 2018. This legislation designates the fourth week in September as Gender Equality Week.

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