



February 13, 2020

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett
Minister of Crown- Indigenous
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The Honourable Marc Miller
Minister of Indigenous Services
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The Honourable Maryann Monsef
Minister for Women and Gender
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Ottawa, Ontario,
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Re: The Coalition on MMIWG in BC concerns about process to create the National Action Plan on Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People

Dear Minister Bennett, Minister Miller, and Minister Monsef,

We, members of the Coalition on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls in BC (the Coalition), are writing to express our serious concerns regarding the process to develop the National Action Plan on violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people, which was recommended in the National Inquiry's final report, which the Prime Minister committed to on June 3, 2020, and which was affirmed in mandate letters released last month. We are deeply troubled that the plan is not led by Indigenous-women, girls and two-spirited people.

As you know, the Coalition is an alliance of organizations that came together in 2010 at the time of the Oppal Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women in British Columbia. The Coalition includes the February 14th March Committee, one of the first organizations in Canada to bring the crisis of violence against Indigenous women to public attention, and a broad range of organizations representing Indigenous women and their allies in women's anti-violence, human rights, and labour organizations. Among the members of the Coalition there is deep knowledge and expertise. Members have lived experience of discrimination and violence; are family members and friends of murdered and disappeared women, girls, and two-spirit people; and have been engaged for years in front-line, grassroots anti-violence work on the streets and in shelters. Members of the Coalition also have expertise in policy development and analysis regarding Indigenous rights, child welfare, and policing, as well as knowledge and practice in human rights, civil liberties criminal, constitutional, and international human rights law. Members of the Coalition testified at the National Inquiry. We wish to utilize our knowledge and expertise to help in the development of a National Action Plan.

The Coalition was pleased to host Jennifer Cote of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Secretariat at our meeting on January 9, 2019. Ms. Cote informed us of the plans of your ministries, and the Missing and Murdered Women's Secretariat, regarding the "co-development" of a National Action Plan for implementation of the National Inquiry's Calls to Justice, as well as the recommendations of other expert bodies, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

We understand from Ms. Cote that she is working with a cross-country team to gather feedback for a National Action Plan, and in BC the team has connected with regional/provincial organizations, as well as

Nations. Ms. Cote shared that the Secretariat expects to have a plan developed by June 2020. We also understand that the two questions the Secretariat is asking those they contact are:

1. Do they have examples of best practices to put forward?
2. Are there groups of people who feel that they were never included who wish to hold additional meetings?

Ms. Cote indicated that the Secretariat is open to requests for funding. We appreciated Ms. Cote's attendance at our meeting, and her offers to provide more information and to stay engaged in discussion with us.

However, the Coalition does not accept the process, and timelines set out by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Secretariat. We stress that a government led process is not the appropriate way to move forward on the crucial matter of formulating national responses to a pattern and history of genocidal practices, that result in the human rights crisis of murders and disappearances of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people in Canada. We have several concerns.

First, the development of a National Action Plan must be led by Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people, and their voices and knowledge must be at the center of this initiative. The requirement for their leadership in the development of new policies, practices and services to address the violence against them was articulated repeatedly by the National Inquiry¹, by Parties with Standing at the National Inquiry,² as well as by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,³ and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in their reports.⁴ Without this, a National Action Plan will not have the credibility, trust, or grounding in life-knowledge that will be needed to make meaningful and transformative change.

Integrally related to the leadership issue is our concern that the government is undertaking what appears to be a consultation process with some Indigenous organizations and Nations. The Secretariat has begun this work, with decision-making that is not transparent, participatory or guaranteed to foster the changes that are needed. It appears that disparate comments and observations will be collected from various groups and fit into a template designed and imposed by the Secretariat.

There are key structural components needed for the establishment of a National Action Plan. These include establishing Indigenous methods and structures for participation of Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit people, and allies in design and implementation of family, community and national plans, federal-provincial-territorial agreement and cooperation, independent monitoring and reporting mechanisms, timelines, and funding supports for participation. Additionally, we are concerned that the type of consultation, or questions that are being asked are inadequate to inform the development of a national action plan. There are key substantive areas that must be included, including: poverty and economic inequality, housing, safe spaces, child welfare, data gathering, policing, administration of justice and courts, prisons, support services for victims and families, community services and healing, reparations. A general question about "best practices" cannot elicit the responses and expertise needed to shape an effective Plan.

¹For example: The Final Report of The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Reclaiming Power and Place, vol 1b, pg. 171

² See, for example, Final Written Submissions of: Downtown Eastside Women's Centre; Ontario Native Women's Association; Amnesty International Canada; Liard Aboriginal Women's Society; Union of BC Indian Chiefs; Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action etc.

³ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in British Columbia, Canada*, December 2013 at para 309.

⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Concluding observations on the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Canada*, CEDAW/C/CAN/CO/8-9, 18 November 2016, para 27(a).

Lastly, we are concerned about the timeline. Given that a National Action Plan is crucial to the well-being and future of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people, we do not envision that it can be designed effectively in four months through a government led informal and unstructured discussion.

Consequently, we appeal to you to do three things with great urgency:

- 1) engage in a genuine dialogue with Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit people and their allies about what genuine co-development of a National Action Plan will require;
- 2) provide funding promptly to support that dialogue so that the Coalition can organize a meeting/or meetings, as necessary, for Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit people and allies in British Columbia to develop concrete proposals about how the National Action Plan should be developed, and the elements and mechanisms it requires; and
- 3) provide funding promptly so that Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit people and their allies in the province can work with partners at a national level to integrate and collaborate on proposals.

The Coalition thanks you for your attention to this and requests the opportunity for representatives to meet with you in person, in BC, or in Ottawa.

Sincerely,

Aboriginal Women's Action Network
Amnesty International
Atira Women's Resource Society
BC Assembly of First Nations
BC Civil Liberties Association
BC Native Women's Association
Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action
Downtown Eastside Women's Centre
Ending Violence Association of BC
First United Church Community Ministry Society
First Nations Summit
Jenny Kwan
Myrna Cranmer
Poverty and Human Rights Centre
Soledad Ariana
Union of BC Indian Chiefs
Union Gospel Mission
Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre
Vancouver Council of Women
Viola Thomas
West Coast Leaf

CC:

The Honourable David Lametti