

March 10, 2021

Honourable Carolyn Bennett
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations
Via email only: carolyn.bennett@canada.ca

RE: Inclusion in National Action Plan MMIWG Working Groups

Dear Minister Bennett,

We, members of the Coalition on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls in BC (the Coalition), are writing to express grave concerns about the lack of information sharing and our inability to meaningfully participate in the ongoing development of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) National Action Plan.

The Coalition is an alliance of organizations that came together in 2010 at the time of the Oppal Missing Women Commission of Inquiry. The Coalition includes the February 14th Memorial 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 were also parties with standing, and witnesses at the National Inquiry.

The Coalition has offered our knowledge, expertise, and experiences time and again to the development of the National Action Plan. In a Coalition meeting held on December 10, 2020, which was attended by the MMIWG Secretariat, the Coalition had requested to be invited to participate in the National Action Plan working groups, and for more transparent and meaningful information sharing. Despite our efforts, information sharing remained highly limited and opportunities to meaningfully engage and participate is virtually non-existent. Many organizations within the Coalition were parties with standing who gave expert testimony at the National Inquiry. It is unfathomable and deeply frustrating that every organization in the Coalition, including those who were parties with standing, were bypassed and otherwise not invited in the selection process for the working groups. This raises the question of how groups were selected for the committee and subcommittees of the working groups.

Having had no meaningful opportunities to engage or participate in the development process, it remains unclear to us what work is currently undertaken by the working groups. We were therefore surprised and concerned to hear the news that a draft National Action Plan will be released in March, and a final draft will be released in April of 2021, which is only in two month's time. With the diverse and deep knowledge and expertise from the Coalition missing entirely from this process, we are deeply concerned that B.C. does not have adequate or authentic representation in the development of an action plan that would have enormous impacts on communities, families and individual Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit people.

The province of B.C. is heavily impacted by MMIWG, and it is of utmost importance that B.C. is strongly represented at the table in the development of the National Action Plan. However, on the government website which shows the MMIWG National Action Plan Core Working Group Members, the role of “Provincial/Territorial Representative” is still indicated as “TBD.” This is deeply concerning, especially with the looming date of the draft action plan release.

We also have strong concerns that the schematics of the working groups membership indicate that there are critical voices missing, including a specific Indigenous women’s table, grassroots groups, women who are incarcerated and women in survival sex economies. The National Inquiry had failed to support and engage with these groups, yet these are critical voices of MMIWG who must be included in the development of the National Action plan. We therefore have many further questions and concerns about how these missing pieces, voices, and expertise will be addressed prior to the release of a draft National Action Plan.

In light of the diverse knowledge, experience and expertise of the Coalition, the importance for B.C. to have representation in the development of the National Action Plan, the lack of information sharing, the lack of meaningful opportunities to engage with and participate in the ongoing development of the National Action Plan, and the upcoming release of the draft National Action Plan, we, the Coalition, reiterate our request that the Coalition have representation at the National Working Group level. We are of the firm belief that an effective National Action Plan must include the voices who will be the most impacted by its recommendations. We also request transparent information on how the members of the working group are selected. Lastly, we believe that it is important that there is a specific Indigenous women’s table at the MMIWG National Action Plan working groups.

Sincerely,

Atira Women’s Resource Society
Battered Women’s Support Services
BC Assembly of First Nations
BC Civil Liberties Association
BC Federation of Labour
BC First Nations Justice Council
Butterflies In Spirit
Carrier Sekani Family Services
Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre
First Nations Summit
First United Church
Jenny Kwan, MP For Vancouver East
Myrna Cranmer, committee member of the February 14th Memorial March
PHS Community Services Society
Poverty and Human Rights Centre
Union of BC Indian Chiefs
Union Gospel Mission
Vancouver Council of Women
Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
West Coast LEAF

