



**Hon. Mike Farnworth**

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**RE: B.C. Must Take Immediate Action to End Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls**

To Minister Farnworth and Minister Mark,

We write in follow-up to our meeting with you held on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

The Coalition on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in BC (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.

At the April 8th meeting, the Coalition met with you and members of Minister Farnworth's team to discuss B.C.'s current involvement and engagement with the federal government's efforts to develop a National Action Plan to implement the Calls to Justice identified in the National Inquiry's Final Report. Also present at the meeting was Elaine Alec, who shared with the Coalition the ongoing work and

community engagement that she is doing in B.C. through the Path Forward Sessions. We would like to recognize the importance of Elaine's ongoing work and to echo findings shared with us with regard to the vital importance of self-determination of Indigenous peoples in addressing violence against Indigenous women and girls.

At the same time, the Coalition feels that it is imperative that the B.C. government's Path Forward Sessions and engagement with the National Action Plan take place as a parallel process with proactive, coordinated, and comprehensive actions from the B.C. government to improve the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous women and girls, from the grassroots level to the national level.

During our meeting, we asked what the priority actions and timeline are for the B.C. government for the implementation of the National Inquiry's Calls for Justice. We were deeply concerned to learn that B.C. is waiting on the federal government to determine B.C.'s priority action items. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has been an ongoing humanitarian crisis in B.C. for decades, and there is no acceptable reason to further delay of provincial action especially in light of the fact that numerous calls for action are entirely within provincial jurisdiction. Furthermore, the Federal government has already failed to follow through on its promised deadline to have a National Action Plan one year after the final report. It is imperative that BC show initiative and provide leadership at both the national and provincial table. The B.C. government has enshrined the *UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People* through the *B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* in 2019 ahead of the federal government. This is the kind of leadership that is required if ending violence against Indigenous women and girls is truly a priority for the government.

We would also like to point out that over the years, a number of notable local to international initiatives have occurred including, the Highway of Tears Symposium, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the Red Woman Rising report, the Oppal Inquiry, and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice. These reports all speak to the dire and urgent need for action to address human rights violations against Indigenous peoples, particularly Indigenous women and girls. Collectively, they provide a multitude of valuable recommendations and calls for action that the B.C. Government can immediately act on.

There is simply no shortage of recommendations, frameworks, and action plans for the government to immediately implement; this begs the question of why the recently released B.C. budget makes no explicit mention of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. To remedy this critical oversight and the delay in provincial action, there are a number of Calls for Justice that the B.C. government can immediately move to implement through flexible and stable funding and without waiting for federal action. Many calls related to Indigenous human rights and governmental obligations, health, culture, human security, and justice can be actioned by the provincial government to create the immediate resources, supports, and relief Indigenous women, girls and community members need. In particular:

- The government can implement **Calls 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.7**, which collectively focus on providing Indigenous women, girls, and communities with the funding, resources, and supports needed to access culturally appropriate health and wellness services, including crisis response teams, healing programs, and “sustainable, permanent, no-barrier, preventative, accessible, holistic, wraparound services, including mobile trauma and addictions recovery teams.” As part

of this work, the Coalition highlights the importance of having funding for more community-based advocates to help families seeking missing relatives or dealing with children that have been abused, as well as providing funding for the training of Indigenous community-based advocates to provide crisis and trauma support to families.

- The government can implement **Calls 4.6, 4.7, and 4.8**, which collectively work to improve the security and safety of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people by ensuring there are safe and affordable transit and transportation services and infrastructure available, including Indigenous-led low-barrier shelters, safe spaces, transition homes, second stage housing, and services.
- The government can implement **Calls 5.10-5.16** which together form a strong framework of security and justice for Indigenous victims of crime and families and friends of Indigenous murdered or missing persons. Your government can move to close the gaps in services and supports by enacting missing persons legislation; establishing robust Indigenous civilian police oversight bodies; guaranteeing access to financial support and meaningful and appropriate trauma care for victims and family members; expanding restorative justice programs; guaranteeing access to independent legal services throughout court processes; and expanding and adequately resourcing legal aid programs to ensure Indigenous peoples can meaningfully and fairly participate in the justice system.

In addition to immediately prioritizing and implementing these Calls for Justice, the Coalition requires transparent and open lines of communication between us and your government. To aid this process, we are requesting that the Province appoint Minister Melanie Mark as the lead on this file. Minister Mark has not only sat at the Coalition table since becoming an MLA but has been a passionate and dedicated ally with years of advocacy and frontline experience representing and uplifting Indigenous women. As MLA for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant – which includes the Downtown Eastside, an area where a large number of Indigenous women have gone missing from – Minister Mark knows firsthand of the deeply complex social issues that impact and endanger Indigenous women. These issues are all cross-sectoral and impact areas related to children and families, health, justice, anti-racism, and gender-equity. As such, the work to address these issues cannot be the sole responsibility of the Public Safety and Solicitor General; it must be expanded to include intersectional perspectives and expertise. Minister Mark's lived experience as an Indigenous woman, daughter, granddaughter, and mother, alongside her years of advocacy and service to her community, positions her uniquely to take on a lead role on this file.

The Coalition thanks you again for meeting with us. We look forward to your responses to our requests and to working with you to establish a process that is just, equitable, and truly led by Indigenous women.

Sincerely,

Atira Women's Resource Society  
Battered Women's Support Services  
BC Assembly of First Nations

BC Civil Liberties Association  
Butterflies in Spirit  
Carrier Sekani Family Services  
Downtown Eastside Women's Centre  
First United Church  
PHS Community Services Society  
Union Gospel Mission  
Union of BC Indian Chiefs  
Vancouver Rape Relief  
WISH Drop-in Centre Society