



June 23, 2021

Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations  
Government of Canada

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Yukon

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**RE: Inaction and Exclusion in National Action Plan on MMIWG**

Dear Minister Bennett, Minister Miller, Deputy Minister Wilson, and Deputy Minister Royle,

The Coalition on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in BC (“the Coalition”) is concerned that the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence is insufficient to end the crisis of ongoing racism, oppression, and genocide of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

The Coalition calls for accountability from the federal government for its role in perpetuating gender-based violence, a coordinated inter-governmental approach for full implementation of the National Action Plan across provinces and territories, swift action to address systemic barriers, and fulsome inclusion of Indigenous women with the knowledge and lived experience required to inform and guide a truly national action plan.

The Coalition includes a broad range of organizations representing Indigenous women and their allies in women's anti-violence, human rights, and labour organizations. Members have deep

knowledge, expertise, and lived experience of discrimination and violence; some are family members and friends of murdered and disappeared women, girls, and two-spirit people, and many have been engaged for decades 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.

The Plan released on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, is fraught with issues, most notably a lack of diverse representation of Indigenous women throughout its development, and no coordinated implementation framework to ensure nation-wide commitment to take action to end the crisis of MMIWG. Vision statements and aspirations are not enough while we wait for another Federal Pathway Plan; implementation and action are needed to stop the crisis now. The failure of this government to acknowledge its responsibility for genocide, whether towards stolen sisters, mothers, aunties, and grandmothers, or children murdered in Residential School, is in direct opposition to its commitment to reconciliation. If this government is committed to rectifying the harms it has caused through colonialism as it says it is, we must begin with truth and accountability.

The short-term priorities set in the National Action Plan for supporting victims and families, creating a National Task Force to re-investigate unresolved cases of MMIWG, conducting public education and training, guaranteeing a livable income, providing addictions and trauma supports, and establishing sustainable housing are welcome. However, they lack clarity with no concrete commitments, timelines, resources, or transparent plans for implementation, and they do not go far enough to spark systemic overhaul required to keep Indigenous women and girls safe. The approach of this document as 'evergreen' and 'ever-evolving' is a concerning response to a crisis that requires urgent action. Promises for the future are not enough and priorities must better reflect the severity of the crisis and respond imminently.

The development of the National Action Plan has been exclusive, lacked transparency and is not representative of the voices of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Despite repeated calls to the Core Working Group and MMIWG Secretariat for inclusion in the development process for over a year, the Coalition has had no avenue for meaningful participation. Members of the Coalition have been at the forefront of advocacy and organizing for decades and the Coalition has intimate knowledge of the realities faced by Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people in BC who continue to face disproportionate rates of gender-based violence.

While the involvement of Indigenous women in government and select family members and survivors is important, it does not represent the depth of knowledge and lived experience of women across the nation who have been at the forefront of the movement for gender-based violence prevention for decades. Notably absent from this Plan are the voices of Indigenous women in survival sex economies, women who have been subjected to forced sterilization, those with disabilities and those that can speak specifically to the murders on the Highway of Tears. The voices of Indigenous women from BC are crucial as BC is home to regions such as Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, the Highway of Tears and many rural communities that have been at the center of the crisis of MMIWG, as well as being at the heart of Indigenous women and family led activist movements. These women and individuals should have been consulted and included from the start of the engagement process.

The National Action Plan must address the effects of decades of sex-based discrimination in the Indian Act, which has exiled thousands of women and their descendants from their nations and communities, by denying them Indian status. Between 270,000 and 450,000 First Nations women and their descendants are newly entitled to Indian status since the Bill S-3 amendment to the Indian Act was brought into force on August 15, 2019. However no detailed concrete steps are set out in the National Action Plan for registering the thousands of newly entitled women and their descendants. Consequently, the discrimination continues - discrimination that has been found to be one of the root causes of the violence.

The sex discrimination in the Indian Act has been a tool of forced assimilation and a key component of the slow-moving, decades-long genocide that Canada is engaged in against Indigenous peoples. Canada used its law to strip away the culture and Indigenous identity of First Nations women and their descendants, tearing apart communities and weakening them in the process. Now we expect Canada to take all measures necessary to restore rights and political voice to First Nations women and their descendants, as well as their right to enjoyment of their cultures. Among these measures must be disseminating accessible, comprehensive information to the thousands of First Nations who have previously been denied registration in Canada, supporting applicants so that they can become registered, and ensuring that registration is carried out in a timely way for all those who have been discriminatorily denied status. Failing to include a swift plan with adequate resources for those entitled through Bill S-3 is part of a legacy of colonialism, discrimination and violence that continues to harm Indigenous women and girls.

Once again, we ask for transparency, inclusion, and regular correspondence pertaining to the development and implementation of the Federal Pathway. We demand accountability; meaningful inclusion of Indigenous women led organizations, women in survival sex economies, those with disabilities, survivors of forced sterilization, and those with experience from the Highway of Tears; support for those recently entitled to Indian status; and a robust action plan with concrete actions and a coordinated plan for implementation across the country so that we may end the genocide that has plagued Indigenous communities for centuries.

Sincerely,

Atira Women's Resource Society  
Battered Women's Support Services  
BC Assembly of First Nations  
BC Civil Liberties Association  
BC Federation of Labour  
Butterflies in Spirit  
Carrier Sekani Family Services  
Downtown Eastside Women's Centre  
First United Church  
Jenny Kwan, MP  
PHS Community Services Society  
The Poverty and Human Rights Centre  
Union of BC Indian Chiefs  
Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter  
West Coast LEAF  
WISH Drop-in Centre Society