

Native Women's Association of Canada

Chair:

Morgane Juliat

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Native Women's Association of Canada

Dear Delegates,

Let me begin by welcoming you to SSUNS 2017, and what is sure to be a highlight of your Model UN career. Whether this is your first, or possibly your last Model UN conference, whether your Model UN career is just beginning or coming to an end, the entire dais and myself would like to welcome you to SSUNS 2017, and specifically this UNGA Specialized Agency. My name Morgane Juliat and I am a 4th year Bachelor of Arts student in joint honours political science and international development, with a minor in environment. I have dedicated my life outside the classroom to the pursuit of helping and promoting rights of forgotten communities, such as indigenous people throughout the world. I, like you began my model UN journey in high school attending the Singapore Model UN, and through my interest in the work of the UN I found myself an active member of McGill's Model UN community, including being a staff at most of McGill's UN events. Through these experiences, I have had the privilege to meet your amazing vice-chairs. When brainstorming this topic with deep interest, their fervor and devotion for the topics at hand were evident and through their knowledge and experiences, I am positive that they will be taking over as your chairs and the weekend progresses.

The UN Specialized Agency of Native Women's Association of Canada Committee has been called to order this year at SSUNS 2017 to address Canadian issue regarding the treatment and underrepresentation of indigenous women across Canada. With an increasing development of Canada, it has become more and more apparent the increasing gap between women across Canada and the treatment of native women in the region. This committee is assembling to handle just that issue. It is time that the Canadian community turns its attention to provide respect and support for those communities. From within the hall of the general assembly, all members of the Native Women Association of Canada will gather to discuss and solve some of the most important indigenous issues of the modern era. With other significant national and environmental factors playing a role, it will be a challenging yet rewarding process.

Throughout this Committee, we will address topics such as native women access to health care, the influence of the environment and climate change over native women's lives and, last but not least, the cases of missing and murdered native women. These topics are crucial to the support and restoration of native women population in Canada because if unaddressed could lead to the further injustice against this significant cultural group.

My final piece of advice to all of you for this weekend is to make the most of it, both inside and outside committee. Model UN is all that you put into it so make sure to do your research, actively participate in committee and most importantly make friends and have fun. Take advantage of this amazing experience and all that it can bring to you. Best of luck and on behalf of the entire dais I look forward to meeting you in November.

Best wishes,

Morgane Juliat
Chair



Topic #1- *From Changing Northern Topography to Expanding Pipeline Projects: The Importance of Environmental Protection to Native Women of Canada*

I. Background of Topic

Climate change and environmental instability are phenomena that affect individuals and societies globally. However, some communities are more vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change. Indigenous populations of Canada are some of the most susceptible communities to negative impacts and danger from environmental impact. Over 1.4 million people in Canada identify as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit, and that population is growing at almost four times the rate of non-Indigenous Canadians.¹ While every citizen is affected by climate change, Indigenous communities are of the highest vulnerability. Canada's Indigenous population is affected by many environmental factors including the extraction and transportation of natural resources, water quality and accessibility, and changing climate of the Arctic. Arctic changes affect Indigenous communities' ability to rely on their traditional knowledge of the ice patterns and water currents due to changing sea levels and ice thickness. Arctic changes have also been proven to affect biodiversity of all types which limits Indigenous populations' ability to hunt and to harvest. Finally, rising sea levels and increasing temperatures are overall depleting land space available for arctic communities to inhabit safely.² The cultivation of resources in Canada vastly displaces Indigenous communities all over the country, including the building of pipelines such as the Elmbidge Northern Gateway or the Energy East, mining minerals in Ontario and Saskatchewan, and of course oil extraction in Alberta. Mineral resource mining, particularly of oil in the Northern Alberta oil sands, not only displaces Indigenous peoples off their land, but also endangers the biophysical, social, economic and cultural environments of both on and off Reserve communities.³ The past 40 years of cultivation have led to drastic changes in the topographical environment of Northern Alberta, changing the way Indigenous communities can access water, hunt and forage, and rely on infrastructure. However, it is important to keep in mind that all the aforementioned projects not only displace Indigenous communities from their land, but also drastically effect air and water quality that said communities rely on.

¹ Statistics Canada Census Bureau, *Indigenous People*, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm>, 2011.

² Ford, James D., Barry Smit, and Johanna Wandel. "Vulnerability to climate change in the Arctic: A case study from Arctic Bay, Canada." *Global Environmental Change* 16, no. 2 (2006): 145-60. doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2005.11.007.

³ Government of Canada, "Oil Sands: A strategic resource for Canada, North America and the global market", 2013.



While one could argue the impacts of climate change specific to Indigenous communities such as loss of land and resources or the inability to exercise traditional knowledge practices dates back to colonization itself, the conditions in which Canada's Indigenous population live have remained dismal as environmental impacts have increased thus causing them to be in a worse state as ever. Indigenous communities have had to fight for the right to live on their own land and use natural resources in a way respectful to the planet as they had for centuries before. Even when granted land, access to resources and services by the government over time, the infrastructure offered is sub- par at best, and blatantly discriminatory at worst. A recent report published by the NGO Human Rights Watch identified 89 First Nations Reserves across Canada in which the water was labeled unsafe to drink. While Canada has the largest supply of fresh water in the world, drinking water on these Reserves have been identified as “contaminated, hard to access, or toxic due to faulty treatment systems” and this has been called a “Third World Crisis”.⁴ The sheer neglect for Indigenous communities by the Federal government is just one example of the conditions they are subjugated to. While some isolated communities do have more freedom and control over their infrastructure and are not restricted to Reserve lifestyles, their resources and ways of life are still being threatened, even more drastically, by climate change. This lack of adequate living situation, control over their own land and basic necessities of life coupled with increasingly unstable and changing climate, put Indigenous communities at a terrifying point of vulnerability in which adaptation by the communities as well as increased policy initiatives, awareness, and involvement by the government is necessary to protect and preserve the health and safety of Indigenous populations and of the globe.

Indigenous communities have a unique connection with the environment that dates back long before the establishment of our nation-state. Living in harmony with the land, wildlife, and resources in a non-exploitative way has been their lifestyle for hundreds of years. While we, as a society, only truly began to uncover the causes and effects of climate change roughly 50 years ago, we have a definite understanding of it now. Our knowledge, coupled with the traditional ways of knowing of Indigenous communities as well as their intimate relationship with the environment itself allows us as a society to halt our harmful actions against the environment and its inhabitants. The problem, however, continues. Our society has been built to function on finite resources and dirty energy from which the transition is difficult. While some progress has been made towards cleaner energy production, better fishing and farming practices, and more environmentally friendly industry regulations, changes are not happening fast enough nor are they happening in a way that considers the status of Indigenous communities. 66% of

⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Make it Safe: Canada's Obligation to End the First Nations Water Crisis”, 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/07/make-it-safe/canadas-obligation-end-first-nations-water-crisis>



Canada's energy is produced by "renewables" instead of fossil fuels, however 60% of that is hydroelectricity which can interfere with water quality as well as wildlife and marine ecosystems, whereas only 6% is produced by wind and solar power.⁵ Furthermore, the sheer need to fuel our resource driven society requires the continual use of fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas. The recent approval of several destructive and invasive pipelines by the Federal Liberal government demonstrates not only a lack of urgency to correct and halt harm to the environment, but also a disregard for the Indigenous communities whom will be affected and even displaced by the projects, as well as those affected by the grander environmental damage. If these issues are not taken more seriously by the government of Canada and its citizens, if Indigenous knowledge and practices are not taken into consideration or respected, and if the desire of capitalist greed and stability are continually prioritized over the environment and its inhabitants, then the Indigenous communities of Canada are going to be faced with climate change more rapid than their ability to adapt and their communities and our natural world will be severely compromised.

II. Policy and Past Actions

Policies, treaties, and accords that dictate the behaviour towards and the relationship with Indigenous communities and the environment come from both the Canadian Government as well as the United Nations. We understand the UN as an international organization with agreed upon policy frameworks that dictate humane and necessary behaviour towards Indigenous communities and also towards the environment. Firstly, treaties between the Canadian Government and Indigenous communities established over many years inform relations between the Government and the land, as well as its resources. *The Numbered Treaties* are a set of individually negotiated treaties signed between 1871 and 1921 that legally allowed the Government to pursue, settle, and control formerly Indigenous land and its resources in exchange for certain stipulations and proper treatment of the Indigenous peoples of said land.⁶ These treaties are key in understanding the foundation of the relationship between Indigenous communities, the land or environment, and the Government. These treaties are viewed by most Indigenous communities as being a symbol of colonization and oppression and while a series of constitutional amendments have attempted to reinforce the original distribution of power to allow more Indigenous control as originally stipulated, many communities believe it is not enough and that they still have limited control over their way of life. This includes lack of control over the resources on their land, and access to the land itself. As we will

⁵ National Energy Board of Canada, "Annual Report to Parliament", 2015.

⁶ Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, "The Numbered Treaties (1871-1921)", 2013.



see later on, eminent domain, or who has legitimate control of the land, is a highly debated topic that impacts many sub-issues related to the environment.

Other crucial policies that inform the Canadian Government's behaviour towards Indigenous communities as well as to the environment come from the United Nations. Two policies in particular are critical for this committee: the Paris Accord (2016) and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2011). Canada signed and adopted both policies in an attempt to improve the status of its Indigenous people, its environment and climate, and also to merge the two and further embrace traditional Indigenous knowledge regarding the land and the environment. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples indicates that "Recognizing that respect for Indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment".⁷ It also stipulates that "control by Indigenous peoples over developments affecting them and their lands, territories and resources will enable them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions".⁸ These aspects of the declaration clearly outline the strong connection between Indigenous peoples and their development and well being, with the environment being a priority. Secondly, the Paris Accord, while focusing mostly on actions and initiatives needed to maintain, protect, and save our planet from climate change, it also stresses the importance and value of traditional Indigenous knowledge in relation to the environment. The Accord strives to utilize a "gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and should be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of Indigenous peoples".⁹ Not only does this document underscore the value of traditional knowledge, but it also focuses on particularly vulnerable groups which include Indigenous communities of the north, especially women and girls. The Accord, as well as the Declaration, offer many recommendations and affirmations that have been adopted by the Canadian government and embraced by NWAC and therefore should be taken into consideration but the committee when doing further research and making any decisions.

It is also important at this time to briefly mention papers and suggests policies written and published by NWAC for the public and the Government's consideration. NWAC has issued many studies on current states of the environment including air and water quality and ecological biodiversity. They have also created many resources

⁷ UN General Assembly, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples", resolution/ adopted by the General Assembly, 2 October 2007, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/471355a82.html>.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ UN General Assembly, "The Paris Agreement", resolution/adopted 5 October 2016, http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf



regarding the use and utilization of traditional knowledge and ways of research which should be considered by the committee as well for they can be seen as policy and directive frameworks.

See examples:

- 2014 NWAC Aboriginal Women and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Report
- 2010 Finding Your Voice: Environmental Toolkit for Aboriginal Women
- 2007 NWAC Aboriginal Women and the Convention on Biological Diversity Issue Paper
- 2007 NWAC Aboriginal Women and Climate Change Issue Paper

While there are many international, inter-governmental, and non-governmental organizations working around the topics of Indigenous rights and the environment, there is a limit to the involvement of the UN with a national organization of Canada. Two NGOs which are highly active within the framework of this topic will be discussed here, although further research is recommended to better understand inter-governmental and international organizations involvement. The first NGO is international and focuses on land access specifically related to pipeline construction and Oil Sands. The NGO called “The Treaty” was founded in Canada but is involved in many international actions including activism related to the Dakota Access Pipeline that began in 2015 in Quebec. They bring together many Indigenous grassroots movements and organizations all focusing on environmental activism. They are currently working on declarations and treaties to starkly limit the presence of pipelines on native land as well as limiting the expansion of the Alberta Tar Sands. This NGO has an intriguing model because it is an amalgam of many groups and Indigenous figures from across Canada, much like this committee, and it is working independently through treaties and directives to achieve concrete action related specifically to the sub-issues of this topic.

The second NGO is a drop called “RAVEN” which stands for Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs. RAVEN, formed in 2009, is an NGO that takes a more legal approach by focusing on increasing Indigenous representation in governance and improving outcomes of judiciary measures for communities. Through public education programs and legal representation and activism, this NGO aims to remedy an identified imbalance in the about of power Indigenous commutes have. This topic closely relates to the identified issue of eminent domain in which communities have little to no power over their land. This NGO can be utilized as a framework for more legal based decisions and research. Their annual reports discuss many specific issues Indigenous communities are currently embroiled with and the ways in which jurisprudence and representation are key factors in fighting for environmental protection



and Indigenous rights. The committee members can align with NGO's to work towards common goals and utilize private resources and actors they may not typically have access to. Non-governmental actors are sometimes more equipped to pursue the interest of Indigenous communities as their mandate is to prioritize their interests and wellbeing. NGO's like RAVEN have legal resources solely for the purpose of supporting Indigenous peoples that do not have to be allocated to other priorities as well. NGO policies can also be considered as a framework when creating community-centric action that is not compromised by outside interests.

While there are many policies, treaties, and groups in place to actively work to remedy issues that Indigenous communities are facing regarding the environment and their land, they are most certainly inadequate. Communities are still facing limited representation and contribution in what happens to their land and resources, regarding Tar Sands, pipeline construction, forestation and mining, and even fishing and hunting. Environmental protection measures are also inadequate as some of the most vulnerable Indigenous communities living in the northern parts of Canada are still watching their habitat disintegrate around them faster than they are able to adapt, and are unable to utilize their traditional knowledge or ways of life. The impending danger that is climate change is a threat to all of us, but especially those most vulnerable communities such as Indigenous people of Canada.

III. Possible Solutions

The NWAC exists to bring together Indigenous women from all the different Indigenous communities across the country to collaborate on ways to improve the status of First Nations people in Canada, its most vulnerable population, and take action to remedy past injustices as well as secure a safe and prosperous future. While the Commission works on a variety of topics and issues, one of the most important issue that affects people, especially women, now and will into the future is environmental damage and climate change. This committee is expected to discuss the impending dangers of climate change, specifically in relation to the sub-issues affecting specific communities, and collaborate with the Canadian Government, other NGOs, and take into consideration existing treaties and policies, with the goal of creating directives, recommendations, and policies' frameworks that support and empower Indigenous communities while utilizing traditional knowledge and to protect their land and the environment.

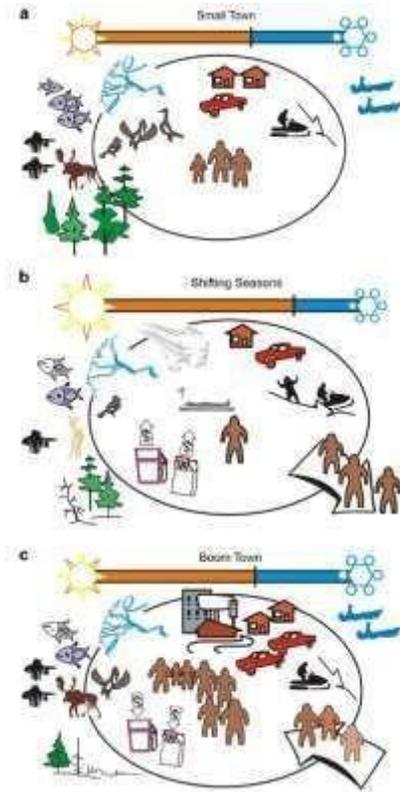


The committee is faced with many sub-issues related to the topic of environmental protection which should all be considered and researched in order to fully understand the scope of the problem. For reference, these sub-issues facing Indigenous communities include, but are not limited to: overfishing, expansion of the Tar and Oil Sands, air and light pollution, increased resource mining, construction of hydroelectric dams and decrease of water quality. However, for the purpose of this committee and the current state of affairs, this topic will focus on arguably the most important or most pressing sub-issues. Those issues are: changing northern topography including melting ice and rising sea levels, construction of cross country pipelines in Alberta/ British Columbia and Quebec, and declining ecological biodiversity caused by deforestation and other natural resource destruction as well as rising temperatures. ill be outlined more thoroughly, whereas the others are left for individual research.

Sub-Issue One: Changing Northern Topography

Case Study: Changing Northern Topography and Adaptability Training

Arguably the groups most vulnerable to climate change are the Indigenous communities located in the northern regions of Canada. As discussed previously, their way of life depends on traditional knowledge of the landscapes, knowing which ice pathways are the safest and which are dangerous, relying on existing waterways for travel and for hunting, and of course, the stability of wildlife and natural resources. However, rising sea levels and melting ice caused by rising global temperatures are causing the northern topography and climate to change faster than communities are able to adapt their lifestyles. Researchers Wenche and Ermitage published an enlightening paper *Using qualitative scenarios to understand regional environmental change in the Canadian North* regarding regional environmental change in the Northwest Territories focusing on specific vulnerabilities and adaptive responses of Indigenous communities and documented their traditional knowledge and strategies to cope with changing topography in order to synthesize and replicate these strategies to propagate adaptability training for



Source: Community Adaptation and Vulnerability in Arctic Regions



more communities facing similar problems.¹⁰ This figure used in the study illustrates the changing landscape and environment Indigenous communities are facing. The scenario depicted was showed to community members as an illustration to “build a shared understanding of community vulnerability”¹¹ and to help strategize future ways of adapting to such issues. Adaptation strategies were recorded and synthesized. Adaptation strategies for environmental change and natural resource depletion were as follows: modifying harvesting and hunting practices, increase environmental health research and awareness building, increase environmental monitoring programs, and increase emergency planning. Overall, this qualitative case study provided insight into the degree of vulnerability of northern communities as well as their “adaptive capacity”. It also assessed the ways in which adaptive capacities need to be improved and increased in order to prepare said communities for impending environmental danger. The researchers suggest a “bottom up approach driven by local actors”¹² as the only true way to prepare communities. This means that more education and awareness regarding the specifics of the environmental changes faced by the communities and possible solutions, as well as reorganization of resources directed to emergency preparation and reeducation is the best approach.

Sub-Issue Two: Decreasing Ecological Biodiversity

While education and awareness training are key factors in improving the adaptability of northern communities, other sub-issues require different examination and solutions. The issue of ecological biodiversity encompasses many factors. The decrease in biodiversity is caused by increase in temperature, expansion of urban land, and destruction of habitats, among other factors.¹³ Decrease in both animal and plant biodiversity greatly affects Indigenous communities that rely on hunting, foresting, and agriculture for all aspects of living.¹⁴ The NWAC released a study and issue paper (see paper listed in Policy and Past Action section) of the problem of decreasing biodiversity in which they stress the value of traditional knowledge, and particularly the value of the specific knowledge of Indigenous women, which is being neglected and excluded from the discussion of biodiversity. The issue paper contains one major recommendation which is to facilitate better communication between the NWAC and the government

¹⁰ Wesche, Sonia D., and Derek R. Armitage. "Using qualitative scenarios to understand regional environmental change in the Canadian North." *Regional Environmental Change* 14, no. 3 (2013): 1095-108. doi:10.1007/s10113-013-0537-0.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Díaz, Sandra, Joseph Fargione, F. Stuart Chapin, and David Tilman. "Biodiversity Loss Threatens Human Well-Being." *PLoS Biology* 4, no. 8 (2006). doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.0040277.

¹⁴ UN General Assembly, “CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY”, 1992.



regarding policy development and implementation. This is a solution that applies to every single environmental issue; embracing the value of traditional knowledge and increasing communication and involvement of NWAC and its community members into the discussion regarding all environmental issues.

Sub-Issue Three: Pipeline Development

Increased lines of communication also serve to benefit the issue of increased pipeline construction. The construction of pipelines across native land is a more complex issue because it includes many actors such as numerous different Indigenous communities, the Government of Canada, and private organizations. Not only do members of the Canadian Government, but private organizations with economic interests want pipelines to be constructed, but some Indigenous communities have also agreed to have pipelines pass through their land in exchange for financial compensation.¹⁵ This dynamic between communities complicates the matter further not only for the government but also for the committee itself. In this situation, not only will increased communication improve the status of Indigenous peoples, but increased legal representation should also be stressed. Representation is focused mainly on wealthier communities which have more negotiating power and leverage within the discussion, which, unfortunately, often neglects smaller and poorer communities who have less power and resources to represent themselves. Indigenous representation is at its highest level in history with a record 10 MPs sitting in the current Federal House of Commons.¹⁶ As well, the former Liberal B.C government also set record breaking levels of Indigenous representation with four indigenous MLAs.¹⁷ This level of representation is intensely influential when it comes to decisions Pipeline construction as a large amount of the construction is taking place. The addition of Indigenous traditional knowledge into the discussion allows for more consideration of Indigenous ways of living and protection of communities as well as the environment. However, representation and lines of communication are still lacking within the Quebec, for example with zero Indigenous cabinet members, where the eastern pipeline construction is occurring.¹⁸ This means that

¹⁵ O'Neil, Peter. "Forty B.C. aboriginal 'groups' back pipeline megaprojects." Vancouver Sun. October 07, 2016. Accessed July 07, 2017. <http://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/forty-b-c-aboriginal-groups-back-pipeline-megaprojects>.

¹⁶ Fontaine, Tim. "Record number of indigenous candidates win seats." CBCnews. October 26, 2015. Accessed July 07, 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/indigenous-guide-to-house-of-commons-1.3278957>.

¹⁷ Paling, Emma. "B.C. Election 2017 Brings In Record Number Of Indigenous MLAs." HuffPost Canada. May 10, 2017. Accessed July 07, 2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/05/10/bc-indigenous-mlas-melanie-mark-carole-james-ellis-ross_n_16537802.html.

¹⁸ "Members of Cabinet." Members of Cabinet – Quebec Premier's Website. Accessed July 07, 2017. <http://www.premier.gouv.qc.ca/equipe/conseil-des-ministres-en.asp>.



while progress is being made, focusing on increased representation and consideration of traditional ways of knowing are actions that still need to be taken by the committee to increase focus on Indigenous and environmental protection.

IV. Conclusions

The diverse sub-issues and solutions that face the NWAC are a perfect example of the current division between the committee itself. It is not a division in terms of political beliefs or stance per say, but more of a geographical division that influences the concerns and priorities of different members. Environmental issues are geographically dispersed which effect certain communities differently which should be reflected in the way each committee member thinks about each issue. Representatives from the northern regions of Canada will be mainly focused on the changing topography and melting ice, whereas members from the western regions will be more concerned with pipeline construction, expanding Tar Sands, and deforestation. Members from the eastern region may be ambivalent towards northern community issues and primarily concerned with overfishing or increased air pollution. Cohesive and collaborative discussions will be one of the main challenges facing this committee as there are many different actors with different priorities and concerns. However, the overall goal of the committee remains unchanged: to take action to protect the environment while advancing the status of ingenious women and communities across Canada.

V. Guiding Questions

- How can the NWAC take to the forefront of deliberation and action regarding environmental protection during a time in which international organizations and global action seem to be the priority focus?
- What aspects of the Canadian environmental act can be utilized as a framework for further policies?
- How can the NWAC work collectively when so many different communities have diverse needs / are affected by differing aspects of climate change?
- Are there reasons to allow the pipelines to be built on native land? Why do some communities support/approve such projects?

VI. Further Research



Native Women's Association of Canada

- Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012 <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-15.21/> The current environmental policy in place, however, there has been pressure on Ottawa to repeal and replace this policy with a more modern and indigenous-focused policy.
- NWAC Environmental Publications <https://www.nwac.ca/policy-areas/environment/>
- RAVEN's main website with links to their publication and work <https://raventrust.com/>
- Anti- pipeline NGO working transnationally within Canada and the US <http://www.treatyalliance.org/>
- “LEVERAGING CO-BENEFITS BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY AND CLIMATE ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”, UN Women's Publication on the relationship between gender and climate change



Topic #2 – A Participatory Model: Increasing Inclusivity in Healthcare Policies and Programs for Aboriginal Women in Canada.

I. Background of Topic

While Canada prides itself as a developed nation committed to the framework of diversity, acceptance, and egalitarianism, the spectre of inequality remains. The disparity in the health status of Aboriginal peoples relative to the rest of Canadians illustrates this claim. While both Aboriginal men and women carry a disproportionate burden of ill health, women are significantly worse off than men. The situation of Canadian Aboriginal women illustrates the intersections of race, gender, and class – a triple disadvantage which presently contributes exponentially to negative life and work experience, the continuation of multiple forms of systemic discrimination, and the size of the gap in health to be closed for Aboriginal women in Canada.¹⁹ This background guide will address the latter gap. While recognizing that there are individuals who do not associate with any of the three principle demographic groups, the statistics cited include women who identify as First Nations, Metis, and Inuit.

In 2011, the female Aboriginal population was 718, 500 or 51.3% of the total Aboriginal population.²⁰ Partially due to intra-generational ethnic mobility and a higher fertility rate for Aboriginal women, this population grew by 20% between 2006 and 2011, compared with 5% for the non-Aboriginal female population.²¹ In 2036, the female Aboriginal population in Canada could increase to between 987,000 and 1,316,000.²² Thus, today's action in healthcare reform will have a substantial effect on existing women while simultaneously setting the standard for the growing future generation. Traditional health indicators, such as the prevalence of chronic conditions, psychological distress and depression; the infant mortality rate and birth weight; alcohol and tobacco consumption; and life expectancy illustrate the health disparities faced by Aboriginal women.

- Aboriginal women are more likely to develop gestational diabetes than non-Aboriginal women (in 2015, 4.8% of First Nations, 4.0% of Inuit, 2.2% of Metis populations, to 0.5% of non-Indigenous population).²³
- In 2015, 7.6% of First Nations women report feeling high psychological distress, compared to 4.6% of First Nations men.²⁴

¹⁹ Native Women's Association of Canada, 2007. *Social Determinants of Health and Canada's Aboriginal Women*. Native Women's Association of Canada.

²⁰ Arriagada, Paula. 2016. *First Nations, Metis and Inuit Women*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-503-X, p.4

²¹ Ibid.

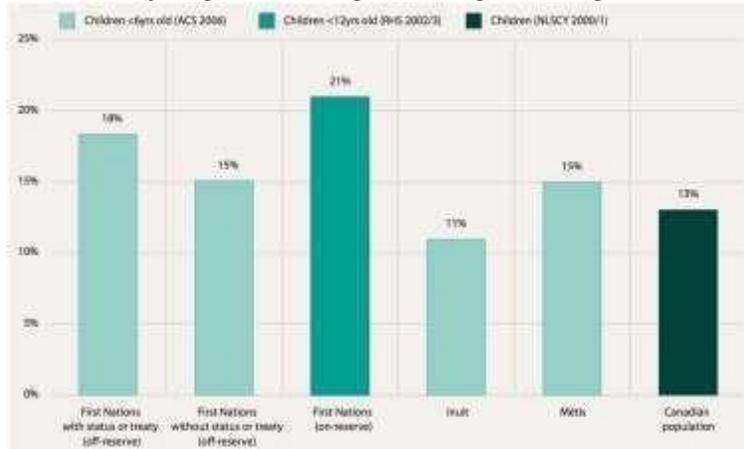
²² Ibid.

²³ Native Women's Association of Canada. 2015. *Diabetes Impact on Aboriginal Women*.



- In 2007, the infant mortality rate for children on reserves was twice that of non-natives while Inuit infants were four times more likely to die compared to the general Canadian population.²⁵
- There is a higher incidence of high birthweight babies for First Nations and Metis compared to general Canadian rates.²⁶
- In 2016, three-in-ten Aboriginal women aged 15 and over (excluding those living on reserves) were daily smokers compared with 16% of the non-Aboriginal female population.²⁷
- In 2016, one-in-four Aboriginal women aged 15 and over reported heavy drinking compared to 17% of non-Aboriginal women.²⁸
- In 2017, the life expectancy for the total Canadian population is projected to be 79 years for men and 83 years for women. Among the Aboriginal population, the Inuit have the lowest projected life expectancy of 64 years for men and 73 years for women while the Metis and First Nations populations have similar life expectancies, at 73-74 years for men and 78-80 years for women.²⁹

Incidence of High Birthweight Amongst Aboriginal Children



Smylie, Janet and Adomako, Paul. 2009. *Indigenous Children's Health Report: Health Assessment in Action*. Keenan Research Centre, p. 45.

1.1 Socio-Economic and Historical Determinants of Health

While illuminating, the above statistics demonstrate nothing about the underlying causes of this disparity, with many if not most sitting largely outside the typically

²⁴ Native Women's Association of Canada, 2015. *Mental Health and Wellness: Impact on Aboriginal Women*.

²⁵ Smylie, Janet and Adomako, Paul. 2009. *Indigenous Children's Health Report: Health Assessment in Action*. Keenan Research Centre, p.4

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Arrigada, p. 29

²⁸ Ibid, p. 30

²⁹ Statistics Canada. 2015. *Aboriginal Statistics at a Glance*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-645-X



constituted domain of “health”.³⁰ Indeed, the unique healthcare needs of Aboriginal women cannot be examined without addressing the history of relations between the Aboriginal peoples and the nation-state.³¹ The arrival of the Europeans and imposition of the patriarchal system led to a double marginalization of Aboriginal women, as they were considered inferior for being both Aboriginal and female. The residential school and reserve system continue to affect today’s Aboriginal communities through their legacy of eroding Aboriginal culture and values, socio-economic marginalization, and loss of self-esteem.³² Canada’s history of economic marginalization has left several communities impoverished, with women more likely to experience poverty, domestic violence/trauma, and be the sole caregiver for their children compared to both Aboriginal men and non- Aboriginal women.³³ This affects Aboriginal women’s health and well-being through cramped or unhygienic living conditions with inadequate facilities and poor mental health support system, which manifests in increased substance abuse and prevalence of chronic mental illness.³⁴ Additionally, the past treatment of the Aboriginal peoples by the Canadian government has left several communities distrustful of government healthcare institutions. During the 1950s, in an effort to provide healthcare services to Aboriginals in northern Canada, individuals diagnosed with tuberculosis were forcibly removed from their reserve or residential school and sent to far away sanatoriums with little attention given to the will or needs of the recipient population who had minimal control over the quantity or quality of their medical care.³⁵ The long history of marginalization and mistreatment of Aboriginal women pose a significant challenge to implementing healthcare solutions.

³⁰ Adelson, Naomi (2003) “The Embodiment of Inequity, Health Disparities in Aboriginal Canada.” *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, vol. 96, no. 2. p, 45

³¹ Ibid.

³² Halseth, Regine. 2013. *Aboriginal Women in Canada: Gender, Socio-Economic Determinants of Health and Initiatives to Close the Wellness Gap*. National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, p. 7

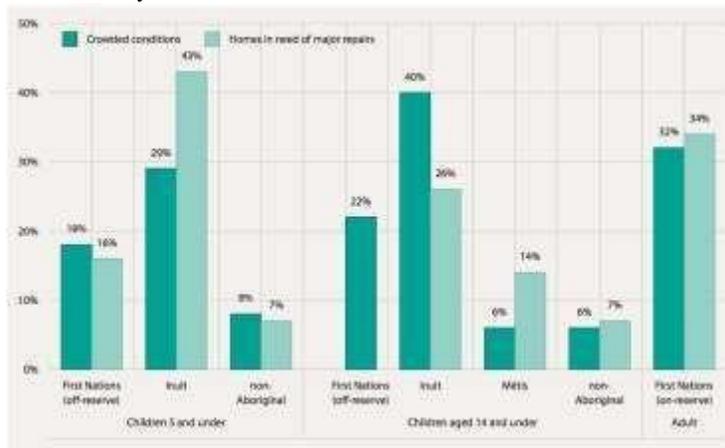
³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “The Embodiment of Inequity,” p. 52

³⁵ “Health Disparities,” p. 57



Incidence of Crowded Conditions and Homes in Need of Major Repairs in the Aboriginal Community



Smylie, Janet and Adomako, Paul. 2009. *Indigenous Children's Health Report: Health Assessment in Action*. Keenan Research Centre, p. 25

I.II Aboriginal and Biomedical Perspectives on Health and Healing

In order to reduce disparities in health for Aboriginal women, cultural differences in how “health” is defined must be considered and integrated with public healthcare priorities and initiatives.³⁶ The biomedical model presumes that individuals are passive and compliant with healthcare professionals issuing treatments to be unquestionably adopted by their patients while the Aboriginal wellness model draws from a more comprehensive understanding of the individual with “wellness” involving physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of a person in connection to his or her family and community.³⁷ This method of treatment is holistic, as it treats one’s mind, body, and spirit as one rather than focusing on specific parts of the body, as is the approach in the biomedical model.³⁸

Unfortunately, the Aboriginal model does not translate across the boundary of care in a typically biomedically-based healthcare system and for many years, healthcare providers and researchers considered this method of healing as outdated and of little use.³⁹ ⁴⁰ As a result, many Aboriginal women report that their communities are not healthy and that their health services are inappropriate and designed without the input of the recipients.⁴¹ This friction between the Aboriginal and biomedical perspective must be considered when taking action to reduce the disparities in health, as Aboriginal women

³⁶ Adelson, p. 46

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Native Women's Association of Canada. 2007. *Aboriginal Women and Traditional Healing*, p.

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³⁹ Adelson, p. 46

⁴⁰ “Aboriginal Women,” p. 1

⁴¹ Ibid.



are often seen as “naughty patients” by non-Aboriginal healthcare workers, resulting in the attribution of blame for physical illness upon the behaviour of the patient.⁴²

II.III Reproductive Health

Access to reproductive healthcare services is especially important for Aboriginal women as they have a higher birth rate (1.5 times higher) than non-Aboriginal Canadian women with a higher incidence of prenatal, stillborn, and newborn deaths.⁴³ Historically, midwifery was an important part of Aboriginal tradition, as this method allowed women to stay within their communities during labour, reinforcing their relationship to the land and their family.⁴⁴ However, the scarcity of Aboriginal healthcare providers and the biomedical, male-dominated belief that doctor-supervised hospital birth is superior has resulted in a shift to birthing in hospitals, taking away the ability of Aboriginal women to be active participants in the labour, delivery and post-birth periods of child-bearing.⁴⁵ This shift and lack of Aboriginal healthcare providers has occurred due to past laws enacted in the 20th century that made midwifery illegal and even punishable by imprisonment.⁴⁶ Aboriginal women's reproductive health is an especially important topic because it is an issue pertaining exclusively women with poor maternal healthcare manifesting in a variety of separate conditions. For example, gestational diabetes is a temporary form of diabetes that can develop during pregnancy and leave a mother and her child at higher risk for the later development of Type 2 Diabetes.⁴⁷

II. Past Actions

II.I Policy

Today, healthcare services are provided to Aboriginal peoples living on reserve or in remote communities by the Canadian federal government despite their request for an autonomous locally accountable system of healthcare provision.⁴⁸ That is, the federal government does not admit that health is an Aboriginal or treaty right. In 1989, the federal government approved the Health Transfer Policy, allowing the Aboriginal peoples to assume control of the resources for community-based health programs at their own pace.⁴⁹ This means that most Aboriginal communities design and implement their programs and employ the majority of their health services staff.⁵⁰ While this policy has allowed for the increased autonomy of Aboriginal communities, proposals for these community health plans are subject to the approval of the federal government with regard

⁴² Adelson, p. 46

⁴³ Native Women's Association of Canada. 2007. *Aboriginal Women and Reproductive Health: Midwifery and Birthing Centres*, p. 2

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 3

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.4

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 5

⁴⁷ “Diabetes Impact”

⁴⁸ Adelson, p. 57

⁴⁹ Lavoie et. al., 2011. *The Aboriginal Health Legislation and Policy Framework in Canada*. National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, p. 3

⁵⁰ Ibid.



to funding and the Transfer Policy does not formally recognize the role of traditional healers nor does it fund the training of First Nations healthcare professionals.⁵¹ Thus, while the Transfer Policy transfers a range of services, it retains and reproduces the pre-existing dependent relationship the government and Aboriginal peoples and, in the absence of recognition of title and treaty rights, control over economic resources, political autonomy, improved standards of living, and changes in the attitudes of non-Aboriginal Canadians towards Aboriginals, healthcare services alone are unlikely to correct the current disparity in health status.⁵²

At territorial and provincial levels there exists some legislation with regard to Aboriginal health but provisions and responsibilities are limited and focused on jurisdiction.⁵³ Additionally, some provinces and territories have provisions related to healing and ceremonial practices. In the Yukon, legislation recognizes the need to respect traditional healing practices but does not formally define what should be included in this classification, while Ontario and Manitoba exempt Aboriginal midwives from control under the Code of Professions.⁵⁴ In 1990, Ontario developed the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy which seeks to combine traditional and mainstream programs and services to help improve Aboriginal health and reduce violence.⁵⁵ This policy is intended to assist the Ministry of Health in assessing inequities in Aboriginal health programming, responding to Aboriginal priorities, adjusting existing programs, and supporting the reallocations of resources to Aboriginal initiatives.⁵⁶

II.II Organizations

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) focuses on five salient sub-issues that disproportionately affect the health of Aboriginal women: diabetes/obesity, HIV/AIDS, maternal health, mental health, and senior's health.⁵⁷ They provide resources for Aboriginal women and policymakers and publish issue papers/action plans on their five main areas of health. Additionally, NWAC is working closely with the Indigenous Peoples Assembly of Canada (IPAC), the Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association (CINA), and the National Aboriginal Diabetes Association (NADA) in a national initiative called Pathways Partners for Engagement and Knowledge Exchange (Pathways PEKE), which is funded by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR)⁵⁸ The goal of Pathways PEKE is to promote health equity for Aboriginals in Canada by partnering with First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities in

⁵¹ Adelson, p. 58

⁵² Adelson, p. 58

⁵³ Lavoie et. al., p. 3

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Lavoie et. al., p. 3

⁵⁷ "Health," Native Women's Association of Canada. 2015.

<https://www.nwac.ca/policy-areas/health/>

⁵⁸ "NWAC Pathways PEKE," 2015. Native Women's Association of Canada.

<https://www.nwac.ca/policy-areas/health/pathways-to-health-equity-for-aboriginal-peoples-partners-for-engagement-and-knowledge-exchange-peke/>



developing, designing, and implementing programs and policies in four priority areas: suicide prevention, tuberculosis, diabetes/obesity, and oral health.⁵⁹

CINA is an association of nurses with Aboriginal ancestry who are dedicated to improving the health of Aboriginal people by supporting Aboriginal nurses and by promoting the development and practice of Aboriginal Health Nursing.⁶⁰ CINA consults with government, non-profit, and private institutions to develop programs for applied and scientific research with regard to improving the health and well being of Aboriginal peoples; to encourage the teaching of courses in the educational system on Canadian Aboriginal health, Indigenous knowledge, cultural safety in nursing and/or other educational resources and supports; to increase awareness of the health needs of the Aboriginal people; and to facilitate increased participation of Aboriginal peoples' involvement in decision-making in the healthcare field.⁶¹

NADA is an organization formed in response to the diabetes epidemic in Aboriginal communities. The organization provides Aboriginal communities with resources and information on diabetes awareness and prevention and organizes national conferences to raise awareness on diabetes among Aboriginal people.⁶²

NWAC is additionally partnered with the Canadian Aboriginal Aids Network (CAAN), which is a not-for-profit coalition of individuals and organizations providing leadership, support, and advocacy for Aboriginal people affected by HIV/AIDS.⁶³ CAAN provides up-to-date information about the prevalence and modes of transmission of HIV in the Aboriginal community; facilitates the creation of regional Aboriginal AIDS service; designs Aboriginal-specific educational and awareness material; and builds partnerships with Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal agencies which address issues of Aboriginal people across jurisdictions.⁶⁴ Most importantly, CAAN conducts their activities using the Aboriginal wellness model with a focus on wholistic healing.⁶⁵

III. Policies and Possible Solutions

The goal of this committee is to create a new resolution that will address the disparity in the health status of Aboriginal women. While existing organizations, including NWAC, have designed and implemented many local-community and nation-based initiatives, there is still a paucity of research that is engaged and empowering.⁶⁶ For example, current research continues to place a greater authority on statistics rather than

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "About C.I.N.A.," Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association. 2017.

<http://www.indigenousnurses.ca/About/AboutCINA>

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "History," National Aboriginal Diabetes Association. 2016. http://nada.ca/?page_id=287

⁶³ "About Us," Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network. 2017. <http://caan.ca/about/>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Adelson, p. 59



case studies and the voices of individual women.⁶⁷ While gathering accurate quantitative data is essential for research, it cannot identify the underlying cause of an issue. In order to make this identification, policy must be developed with the participation of Aboriginal women rather than viewing these individuals as passive recipients of healthcare programs. Resolutions that do not include an active role for the Aboriginal community fail to comprehend not only the past changes in health status and healthcare, but more importantly the future direction that should be taken in these areas.⁶⁸

Additionally, solutions that merely advocate for greater access to healthcare services without considering the context in which this disparity in health status occurs are unlikely to be sustainable courses of action. Solutions must consider the socio-economic determinants of health, the double marginalization challenges faced by Aboriginal women, and the historical relationship between the Canadian government and the Aboriginal peoples.

I.II Resolution Framework

The three most important elements to be considered when drafting working papers are the following:

1. Mitigating the friction between the Aboriginal wellness model and the biomedical model of health.
2. Increasing the number of Aboriginal healthcare workers, particularly in the area of reproductive health.
3. Addressing the specific health areas outlined by NWAC (diabetes/obesity, HIV/AIDS, maternal health, mental health, and senior's health) or Pathways PEKE (suicide prevention, tuberculosis, diabetes/obesity, and oral health).

I.III Case Studies and Possible Solutions: Birth Centres and the Nursing Academy Project (NAP)

Birth Centres

As previously noted, birth is a significant event for Aboriginal women as it is a time for sharing and reinforcing sacred knowledge and for strengthening social relationships and ties to the land.⁶⁹ The development of birth centres is an example of how the friction between the Aboriginal wellness model and the biomedical model of health can be mitigated. The Six Nations Birth Centre in southern Ontario, Tsi Non:we Ionnakeratstha Ona:grahsta', is a facility run by midwives who are members of the Six Nations community and who offer women a choice of birth place: at home or at the birth centre.⁷⁰ The midwives at the centre provide a variety of services including complete prenatal, labour and birth care; traditional family teachings; well-baby advice; pregnancy and pap tests; traditional medicine availability; as well as many programs like prenatal

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Aboriginal Women and Reproductive Health", p. 6

⁷⁰ Ibid.



classes, female traditional self-care, and traditional parenting workshops.⁷¹ Birthing centres are a viable alternative to removing Aboriginal women from their communities, as they allow women to give birth at home and in a traditional setting while ensuring that higher-risk individuals have complete access to healthcare professionals and equipment.

Nursing Academy Project

This program focused on the recruitment of Aboriginal youth into nursing and although it was implemented in Australia, NAP warrants discussion and consideration in other geographic settings.⁷² In 2007, the Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BHUDRH) introduced this program for remote secondary students to attend an interactive day of touring health facilities and speaking to health care professionals. NAP occurs annually and was created to allow further opportunities for the same group of students each year, providing them with continuous individual career development intervention.⁷³ NAP relies on strong local and regional partnerships between health, education, community and the BHUDRH to create their nursing career development model. By encouraging Canadian universities to make similar partnerships and adopt this model for Aboriginal recruitment into targeted programs, Aboriginal youth will gain exposure to careers in the healthcare industry from an early age.

IV. Further Research

IV.I Guiding Questions

When conducting their research, delegates should consider the following questions:

- How does Canada's history of colonization influence the disparity in health status of Aboriginal women today?
- How does this history affect the Aboriginal peoples' perception of governmental healthcare institutions?
- Why is it an important goal to increase the number of Aboriginal healthcare workers? What are the roles of educational institutions and the government in this goal?
- Can future research be conducted in a way that integrates the collection of quantitative data with the individual voices of the Aboriginal people?
- As both female and a racial minority, what are the separate challenges faced by Aboriginal women?

IV.II Helpful Research Sources

Native Women's Association of Canada Website

<https://www.nwac.ca/>

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Kulig et. al., *Rural and Remote Nursing Practices: An Updated Documentary Analysis*. University of Lethbridge, p. 8

⁷³ Ibid.



Native Women's Association of Canada

The Truth and
Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Health-Related Recommendations
http://www.healthcarecan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/IssueBrief_TRCC_small.pdf

The Six Nations Birthing Centre Website
<http://www.snhs.ca/BirthingCentre.htm>

Aboriginal History in Canada
<https://www.aadncaandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100013778/1100100013779>

The Embodiment of Inequity: Health Disparities in Aboriginal Canada
<http://journal.cpha.ca/index.php/cjph/article/view/1490/1679>



Topic #3- *Inquiry to Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women*

I. Background of Topic

As highlighted in the previous sections, there is a pattern of disparities between Aboriginal Canadian women and other Canadian women in various fields. Another example of such disparity is the overwhelming amount of missing and murdered Aboriginal women across Canada compared to non-Aboriginals. Indeed, homicide rate among Native women is 4.5 times higher than other women in Canada.⁷⁴ This, like many other problems Indigenous women face, fundamentally originates from colonialism and some may even argue that colonialism still plays an active role in our society today through the way the government is structured be it engrained institutionally or exhibited in western practices like capitalism.⁷⁵ Brief, the way society itself was built in Canada was built with the colonial mindset, consequentially, this mindset still continues on today. How exactly does colonialism play a role in the missing and murdered Indigenous women today? Colonialism itself inhabited the concept that Aboriginal women were lesser human beings than non-Aboriginals. For example, if Indigenous women resisted colonialism they were labeled as “squaws” which meant they were uncivilized, dirty, and sexually deviant”.⁷⁶ Aboriginal women were sexualized and used by settler men as mere objects. This mentality has continued throughout history and is still a major reality today. Indeed, there is a high proportion of Aboriginal women that are sex-workers with 48% identifying as Native.⁷⁷

Statistic Canada states that one in three (34%) of all female sex-workers who are murdered represent Aboriginals.⁷⁸ This is a ripple effect of extreme poverty for most Natives across Canada, also another by-product of colonialism. The fact that many Aboriginal women are sex-workers plays into the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women since many of the cases are disregarded or not given the proper attention. As sex-workers, these women are already committing an illegal crime and are exposing themselves to a higher probability to be subjected to violence. This is a flawed logic, however many police officers justify themselves with this reasoning to overlook criminal cases with victims whom are sex-workers. It is important to remember that Indian Affairs is listed in the Constitution in Section 91 under the jurisdiction of the federal government, which means the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is in charge of most police matters in Aboriginal communities. The RCMP faces ongoing distrust from Aboriginal communities due to their documented racisms within the force and lack of genuine attention to criminal cases of missing and murdered women in the

⁷⁴ "Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls: Understanding the numbers." Amnesty International Canada.

⁷⁵ Coulthard, Glen. "Red Skin White Masks Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition."

⁷⁶ Native Women's Association of Canada, Fact Sheet: Root Causes of Violence Against Aboriginal Women and the Impact of Colonization.

⁷⁷ "Prostitution in Canada: Facts and Figures." BridgeNorth.

⁷⁸ Canada, Government Of Canada Statistics. "Prostitution offences in Canada: Statistical trends Prostitution offences in Canada: Statistical trends."



past.⁷⁹ In addition, RCMP officers were also often the men taking Native children from the reserves and forcing them to the residential schools or were the men bringing back forcefully the children who had ran away from the school.⁸⁰ The resistance towards RCMP forces has a huge negative impact on solving cases of missing and murdered as many in the Native community do not trust them and hence do not cooperate. Efforts to reconcile the relationship between the police force and Aboriginal communities can be seen through local initiatives like in Sundbury whom police force committed to educational workshops to further protect Aboriginal women of the community.⁸¹ However, such initiatives should really be applied to the entire RCMP force in order to show a true commitment to reconciliation.

The staunch difference of criminal cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women started accumulating in the 1980s. The issue gained traction in 2004 after Amnesty International published an investigative report called *Stolen Sisters: a Human Rights Response to Violence and Discrimination against Aboriginal Women in Canada*. Consequently, the first of two The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) reports aiming to establish a national overview of the problem of missing and murdered Aboriginal women was only accounted for in 2014 even though the numbers show that this is an issue dating back to the 1980s. It is disheartening that this problem has been persisting for so long but has only been accorded a national inquiry in 2016 by the current Liberal Government. The 2014 RCMP report brought to light the reality that Aboriginal women were indeed facing an injustice, in fact the report had even exceeded public estimates.

- Aboriginal women represents only 4.3% of the Canadian population, yet they have the highest level of missing and murdered cases.⁸² The total indicates that Aboriginal women are over-represented among Canada's murdered and missing women.
- Police recorded incidents of Aboriginal female homicides and unresolved missing Aboriginal females in this review total 1,181 – 164 missing and 1,017 homicide victims.
- There are 225 unsolved cases of either missing or murdered Aboriginal females: 105 missing for more than 30 days as of November 4, 2013, whose cause of disappearance was categorized at the time as "unknown" or "foul play suspected" and 120 unsolved homicides between 1980 and 2012.
- There are similarities across all female homicides. Most homicides were committed by men and most of the perpetrators knew their victims — whether as an acquaintance or a spouse.⁸³

⁷⁹ Vice, "Fixing the Seemingly Poisoned Relationship Between the RCMP and Aboriginal Women."

⁸⁰ CBC News. "RCMP 'herded' native kids to residential schools."

⁸¹ CBC News. "'We don't want anybody to go missing' says Indigenous coordinator about new police strategy."

⁸² 2011 National Household Survey

⁸³ 2014 RCMP Report on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview



These are the rough numbers that we are aware of henceforth. The current Minister of Indigenous affairs Caroline Bennett has claimed that currently there is more than 1,200 missing or murdered Aboriginal women.⁸⁴ What we know for certain is that whichever the figure, the number is outrageous and frightening thus a call for direct action is needed as soon as possible. This background guide will continue by highlighting some of the key components encompassing the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

1.1 Media Attention Accorded to Aboriginal Women

If missing and murdered Aboriginal women were such a significant problem since the 1980s, why is it only now in the 21st century that the media is covering this issue? Many Native advocates and scholars have argued that the media has failed in reporting cases about Aboriginal women hence playing a complicit role in the problem itself.⁸⁵ An enlightening case study titled *Newsworthy Victims?* conducted by Kristen Gilchrist looks at media coverage between Natives and non-Natives women to discover that disparity is quite striking. The case study highlights the reality in which Aboriginal women are given far less favourable news coverage than non-Native Canadians. The article explains that the media uses precise calculations to decide what to cover or not. In other words, this means the news are not random, but rather those in positions of power (typically heterosexual, white, older men) decide on the most compelling new stories to share based on the gain of ratings and viewers. The study compares three cases of Aboriginal disappearances and/or murders to those evolving non-Native Canadian women, finding that white women were mentioned by the media 511 times in total versus 82 times for Aboriginal women.⁸⁶

However, why does the media actually matter in solving cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women? The media plays a huge sharing with the public the current information that is of relevant discussion to the society. It is very crucial that when a crime is committed that it continues to remain in the eyes of the public in order to encourage people to discuss it and increase the odds of finding someone who might possess valuable information to solving the case. Hence, the more media coverage a case receives the likelihood of it being solved also increases. The way media depicts a crime is actually almost as important as whether the crime in itself was reported.⁸⁷ The media is clearly a huge factor that plays into solving the case. Therefore, the fact that Aboriginal women tend to receive less coverage is clearly a part of the overall problem. The media holds responsibility in perpetuating the problem of missing and murdered Aboriginal women since the 1980s. While an apology is owed, change is also needed in broadcasting and media networks in order to further increase the odds in solving the cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Delegates are encouraged to look into the various other

⁸⁴ Paling, Emma. "Carolyn Bennett Says There Are More Than 1,200 Missing Or Murdered Indigenous Women."

⁸⁵ Robert Harding, "Historical representations of Aboriginal people in the Canadian news media."

⁸⁶ Kristen Gilchrist, *Newsworthy Victims*.

⁸⁷ Kristen Gilchrist, *Newsworthy Victims*.



illustrating racial discrimination in news coverage mentioned at the end of this background guide.

II. Past Actions

II.I The UN Declaration of Human Rights and The UN Declaration of Indigenous People

The UN has played a pivotal role regarding the pursuit of human rights, including the rights of Aboriginal women in Canada. Committees working on the issue include United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and United Nations Human Rights Council. The UN committees such as the Elimination of Discrimination against Women have played an influential role in recommending that Canada launch a national inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women, which was finally made a reality in August 2016 under the Trudeau government.⁸⁸

One of the most well known documents from the UN is the Declaration of Human Rights drafted in 1948, signatory to 48 countries committing to the protection of basic human rights. Of importance in this section is the fact that Canada has committed to human rights treaties and should be assertive about guaranteeing that the right to life, right to be protected against torture and ill treatment, the right to security of the person, and the right to sexual and racial equality are ensured for all Canadians equally.⁸⁹

On September 13th 2007, the UN held a General Assembly with the purpose to draft a Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The most relevant articles are 21 and 22 which state the following:

Article 21

1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.
2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

Article 22

1. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration.

⁸⁸The Canadian Press. "UN calls on Canada for inquiry into missing, murdered Aboriginal women."

⁸⁹ Amnesty International, "Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Violence and Discrimination against Aboriginal Women in Canada."



2. States shall take measures, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, to ensure that Indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.

The Declaration was adopted by a majority with 143 states in favour, 11 abstentions, and 4 votes against. Australia, New Zealand, United-States, and Canada, countries who all share the common history of being a part of the British Empire alongside a similar pattern of unfair treatment towards Native population, represent the 4 votes against this Declaration. Canada's reasoning for voting against this Declaration was rooted in the division of powers stated in section 91 and 92 of the Constitution of 1867. It was argued that this declaration overstepped the federal and provincial division of powers.⁹⁰ The Canadian government further argued that the declaration created a power of veto for Aboriginals and hence could not be adopted in Canada. This worry was ultimately given no substance as it was clear that the declaration did not impose a veto be given to Aboriginals as this was written nowhere in the document. All four countries eventually signed the declaration, however it was done conditionally. Canada in particular stated that this was a "non-legally binding aspirational document."⁹¹ The Truth and Reconciliation Report on Residential Schools in Canada further crafted a response to this statement: "Despite this endorsement, we believe that the provisions and the vision of the *Declaration* do not currently enjoy government acceptance. However, because Canada has accepted the *Declaration*, we hold the federal government to its word that it will genuinely aspire to achieve its provisions".⁹² In 2014, there was another General Assembly oriented towards Indigenous people in hopes to produce direct actions to further guide the actual implementation of the declaration. The action document was titled **Alta Outcome Document** and highlight various actions called on government to act upon that are divided into four themes: (i) Indigenous Peoples' lands, territories, resources, oceans and waters (ii) UN system action for the implementation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples (iii) Implementation of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (iii) Indigenous Peoples' priorities for Development with free, prior and informed consent. Of particular importance regarding Aboriginal women, is the third theme, specifically point 5 and 6:

5. Recommend that States uphold and implement the rights of Indigenous women as sacred life givers and nurturers as well as strengthen – with the full and effective participation of Indigenous women – the protection of Indigenous women and girls through the formulation and implementation of national, regional and international plans of action developed in conjunction with Indigenous Peoples effective laws, policies and strategies;^[SEP]
6. Recommend States with the full, equal and effective participation of Indigenous women, youth and girls take immediate action to review, monitor and provide comprehensive reports on violence against Indigenous women, youth and girls, in particular sexual violence, domestic violence, trafficking and violence related to extractive industries as well as provide redress for victims;^[SEP]

⁹⁰ National Post. "Peter Raaymakers: Canada's government shamefully refuses to implement the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

⁹¹ Government of Canada; Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

⁹² TRC Report 2015.



II.II Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Violence and Discrimination against Aboriginal Women in Canada

In 2004, Amnesty International published *Stolen Sisters* to ultimately provide a summary of the human rights being violated among Aboriginal women in Canada. This report really pushed for public dialogue to begin within Canada and the government, and provides a first overview of the disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in Canada. The report explains the historical injustices Aboriginals have faced throughout history in Canada, highlighting colonization, Indian Act, the residential school system, and the displacement of Aboriginal women throughout the country as core factors influencing the poor status of Aboriginal women in Canada today. The *Stolen Sisters* report provides an overview of each of the issues listed above; however it is highly recommended that delegates do their own research to gain more information and understanding of the issues. In addition, the report dedicates a significant portion to illustrate the problem of violence against Indigenous women. According to the report, the unsettling reality that Aboriginal women are five times more likely to die as a result of violence compared to non-Aboriginal women were brought to light for the world to learn.⁹³ Moreover, a huge part of the report looks at nine different cases of Aboriginal women who were either murdered or have gone missing. These cases will not be summarized in the background guide, but rather they are highly encouraged for delegates read for further research. This background guide will further recommend specific cases to consult; however the reason why the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women is of discussion is because of the high percentage of cases, meaning that it would be in the delegates' best interests to be familiar with the most cases possible. A particular case that delegates should be very familiar with is the murder of Helen Osborne which took over 16 years to solve. This case played a crucial role in denouncing the scarcity of resources spent to solve cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women. All in all, the *Stolen Sisters* report was highly influential in creating public dialogue around the problem of missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

II.III Indian Act

The Indian Act was enacted in 1876 and was fundamentally a racist legislation aiming to restrict Aboriginal culture and rights. The Act has gone through various amendments, but ultimately still is in effect today. Although changes have been made to the legislation, one of the core criticisms of the legislation is the sexist component hindering women to claim their *Indian* status if they marry a non-Native which was only eliminated roughly 20 years ago in 1985 by Bill C-31. The Indian Act stated that one Native status is determined solely by the paternal lineage. If a man marries a non-Native, for example, their child still remains legally Aboriginal, however the same is not true for women. Bill C-31 has been heavily criticized in failing to actually address the core sexist component as the bill still stands with provisions such as second generation cut-off which states that women can pass on their Aboriginal status to their children, but their children then cannot. It is worth noting that this same cut off does not apply to men. In addition,

⁹³ Amnesty International, "Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Violence and Discrimination against Aboriginal Women in Canada."



the bill states that "bands can control their own membership based on their own membership rules"⁹⁴. This is also another problem because although, historically, Aboriginals lived by a set of rules that looked favorably upon female equality, policies like the Indian Act have engrained the mentality on reserves to outcast women who wed non-Natives. Changes to the Indian Act today would further establish true equality between Aboriginal men and women. As discussed above, violence against Aboriginal women is a real issue that requires the government to make pushes to solidify the concept that Aboriginal women are truly equal. Some advocates believe that the national inquiry to missing and murdered Aboriginal is a good first step, but that so much more needs to be done in a broader sense to assure that Aboriginal women are better protected. Eliminating the still sexist provisions the Indian Act would be a sign of good-faith between the relationships of the government and Aboriginal women, setting precedent Aboriginal men should follow. The current minister of Indigenous affairs was questioned on whether or not she believed the Indian Act should be repealed and she answered "absolutely".⁹⁵

III. Country Policies and Possible Solutions

III.I Purpose of the Committee

The committee is here to discuss the pressing issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. We are here to evaluate the current inquiry on missing and murdered Aboriginal women being conducted by the standing government. The committee has already expressed their dissatisfaction with the current inquiry process, twice; our next step is to provide clear recommendations of direct actions for the inquiry. Indeed, the current inquiry has been regarded as as "fortress of bureaucratic incompetence."⁹⁶ The inquiry seems to lack sufficient funding, proper staff, lack of communications with the families, lack of clarity on how to report a missing or murdered Aboriginal women, and so much more. The problems are endless and highly concerning. For years, we have advocated for a nationwide inquiry in order to finally address the problem. However, the inquiry is now failing and could possibly also lead to a failure of actually solving these cases and changing concrete policy to help Aboriginal women.

This committee may also discuss a broader call for actions demanded for Aboriginal women by the NWAC. Such actions, for example, can include a demand for an apology from news networks and their complicit role in the problem of missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

III.II Resolution Framework

The most important elements to be considered when drafting working papers are the following:

⁹⁴ Bill C-31 Amendment to the Indian Act, September 1995.

⁹⁵ Ling, Justin. "Canada Launches Inquiry Into Murdered Aboriginal Women and Opens the Door to Repealing 'Racist' Indian Act."

⁹⁶ Macdonald, Neil. "Commission on missing, murdered Indigenous women has become a fortress of bureaucratic incompetence: Opinion."



1. Like the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) process we are seeing errors in the beginning stages of the national inquiry. The decision was made that the commissioners leading the TRC needed to be replaced in order to renew faith in the process and start anew with a new strategy. The committee should consider whether or not it wants to push for a campaign to demands the resignation of the current commissioners. Recently, a commissioner and executive director have resigned.
2. Delegates should consider precise policies of direct action to benefit Aboriginal women, for example Sudbury Police has taken the initiative to launch a local strategy to protect Aboriginal women. Should the NWAC advocate for the government of Canada to provide proper police training in order to protect Aboriginal women? Consider this but also other policy recommendations.
3. How should the NWAC address the current disparity in media coverage for Aboriginal women? In order to better chances in solving the case it is necessary that the media begin to fairly cover Aboriginal women.
4. The committee should also discuss their overall fate in the inquiry. If we deem the inquiry henceforth to be inefficient and believe that the Canadian government is not taking their responsibility seriously, do we pursue legal action and sue the government for the lack of investigation for years based on racist and sexist prejudice against Aboriginal women?

III.III Case Studies

There are countless case studies that the committee can address throughout the discussion sessions. Delegates are reminded that these cases are on real people with families who still suffer from their lost today. These cases are not mere facts or statistics; they are tragedies against our Native sisters. Delegates are highly recommended to listen to the hit CBC podcast *Missing and Murdered: Who Killed Alberta Williams?* It unpacks the case of Alberta Williams and made strides in discovering new evidence in the case. It would be considered an excellent case to use during the committee as the podcast provides a vast amount of details. It also highlights the use of media in a contemporary form hosted by an Aboriginal woman. Indeed, this resources can be considered an excellent example of direct action in creating dialogue about the issue and broadening Canadians nationwide to care about the issue which can lead to change.

IV. Further Research

IV.I Guiding Questions

When conducting their research, delegates should consider the following questions:

- How does Canada's history of colonization influence the disparity missing and murdered cases among Aboriginal women?
- How does the media impact the disparity of missing and murdered among Aboriginal women?
- How will the federal government and provincial governments address the problem together?
- Does the committee have faith in the inquiry?
- With a higher number of Aboriginal women working as sex-workers, how is this a consequence of colonization?



- All major parties in the federal government now all support a nationwide inquiry, do we fear that we becoming a token of politics rather than a real issue?
- Police consider sex-workers as “high risk” cases meaning that women bring it upon themselves if something happens to them. How does this impact investigation in missing and murdered women who are sex workers?
- What changes to police training is needed in order to better cater to the needs of Aboriginal women?

IV.II Helpful Research Sources

- The *2015 Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Report on Residential Schools* plays a vital importance in the discussion of Aboriginal women as it sets out the dark history of residential schools in which many survivors are still alive today facing the negative impacts. The report sets out the current debate on what Aboriginal's demand, there is a list of call to actions showing exactly what Aboriginals are currently demanding of the government.
- *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Violence and Discrimination against Aboriginal Women in Canada*
- *UN Declaration of Indigenous People*
- *Indian Act & Bill C-31*
- Look at current articles on reliable new sources (e.g. CBC, National Post, HuffingtonPost, etc.) being released with updates regarding the current ongoing inquiry on missing and murdered Aboriginal women.
- Missing and Murdered: The Unsolved Cases of Indigenous Women and Girls: <http://www.cbc.ca/missingandmurdered/>
- Native Women's Association of Canada website has valuable information like fact sheets on violence against Aboriginal women: <https://www.nwac.ca/>
- Peace, Power, Righteousness An Indigenous Manifesto by Taiaiake Alfred provides a broad overview of the Aboriginal perspective in the the 21st century showing the impact colonialism and the residential school system.



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