



July 05, 2022

Your Excellency,

**Re: National Council of Women Common Program 2019 – 2023**

Thank you for your interest in our work to bring the NCWC Common Program “Listening to, Learning from, Acting on the Recommendations of the Commission into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls” to life. It is a pleasure to share this with you.

**An Introduction to Our Organization**

Founded in 1893, the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) is a non-profit and non-partisan organization representing Canadian women of diverse occupations, languages, origins, and customs and reflecting a cross-section of public opinion.

We were incorporated by an Act of Parliament and have received our own Coat of Arms. The NCWC is a non-governmental organization (NGO) currently composed of Local Councils in cities from Halifax to Vancouver, Provincial Councils in Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia, complemented with the support of several Nationally Organized Societies.

The NCWC is a federate of the International Council of Women (ICW), which was founded in 1888 and composed of National Councils in seventy-four countries. The NCWC holds Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, enabling us to bring a Canadian perspective to the work of the Commission for the Status of Women. The NCWC also participates as an Observer Non-Governmental Organization with the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States.

**Our Work on the Common Program**

**Speakers**

Through the NCWC Education Fund, one of our charitable arms, we were able to secure the services of several well respected and knowledgeable persons who were very helpful in giving us the background information that would lay the foundation for our work. We learned a great deal from these persons:

- Qajaq Robinson, was a former Commissioner for the MMIWG Inquiry. Born in Iqaluit and raised in Igloolik; she is a strong Northern advocate, fluent in Inuktitut and English. Ms. Robinson’s topic was “The Way Forward”
- Pamela Palmater, is a Mi’kmaq lawyer and a member of the Eel River Bar First Nation in New Brunswick. She is a professor in the Department of Politics and

Public Administration at Ryerson University. Her topic was, “Moving Forward to End Genocide in Canada: Implementing the Recommendations of the Commission into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls”.

- Senator David Arnot, the former Chief Commissioner of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, federal Treaty Commissioner, Director General of Aboriginal Justice in the Department of Justice Canada, and Chair of the Canadian Judges Forum, was recognized by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on racism for his work on the “Teaching of Treaties in the Classroom Project”. His topic was, “Reconciliation, Respect, and Rights: We are All Treaty People”.
- We were also pleased to receive materials and information from the Women’s Commissions of the Assembly of First Nations and the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations that were complemented by dialogues with Tammy Cook-Searson, Chief of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, Heather Bear, Vice-Chief of the FSIN and member of the Ochapowace First Nation, and Ava Bear, Chief of Muskoday First Nation.
- Councils at the local and provincial levels followed up on these topics by inviting Indigenous women to address their memberships.
- PCW British Columbia nominated one of their members, Rosemary Mallory, to take part in BC’s provincial strategy, the Coalition on MMIWG, that is tasked to deal with the Commission’s recommendations,
- We have scheduled a meeting for November 26, 2022, where we will hear from another yet to confirmed speaker on the topic.

## **Policies**

The NCWC’s local, provincial, and national organizations are closely connected with issues at all levels while also having a firm grasp of international issues and Canada's commitment to them. For this reason, the NCWC is uniquely qualified to approach our government with suggestions and recommendations which are based on carefully researched and democratically approved policies for improving the quality of life of all Canadians. These are the policies we use to address specific issues within the Common Program theme:

- Call for Canadian Government Support for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people
- Eliminating Indian Act Discrimination
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (plus updates on the topic)
- Protection for Indigenous Women and Children from Family Violence
- Reconciling with Canada’s Indigenous Peoples
- Domestic/Personal Intimate Partner Violence: COVID-19 Implications
- Urgent and Critical Need to Provide Safe and Adequate Housing and Infrastructure for Aboriginal People
- Addressing Suicide of Indigenous People

- Aboriginal Youth Suicide and ‘Life Promotion’
- Eliminating Racism in Health Care
- Child Poverty and Poverty Reduction Strategies
- Restorative Justice
- Truth and Reconciliation: Historic Sites and Monuments
- Protection of Human Rights of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada
- Support for the Elderly in First Nations Communities
- Toward a New Relationship Between Aboriginal Peoples and Other Canadians
- Reform of Canadian Correctional System
- Clean Water for Every Human Settlement
- The Right to Potable Water on First Nations Reserves

## **United Nations**

The NCWC holds Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, enabling us to bring a Canadian perspective to the work of the Commission for the Status of Women.

It had been brought to our attention that, due to the diminishing civil society space and voice, we would be excluded from the UN process. The NCWC believed it was urgent to reach out to our UN Permanent Representative to the UN, the Honourable Ambassador Bob Rae. As Canada is a newly elected member of the Bureau (Commission), it was expected that Canada would support our call for action, thus ensuring the vital space for civil society in having informal engagement negotiating space with other member states.

The NCWC requested a meeting with Ambassador Rae, prior to the beginning of the session, to which he responded very positively. Our action was supported by the UN-NGO-CSW NY (Committee on the Status of Women NY), the organism that oversees all regional caucuses, and the Core Group European/North American caucus. Ambassador Rae thanked the NCWC for reaching out and for the initiative. He offered the support of Canada to establish a virtual informal space for interaction and engagement among member states and civil society during the session - the Vienna Café.

I offer this bit of background as there was a massive push from several states to delete any reference to the rights of Indigenous women and girls, and they were not included in the initial draft. The Vienna Café allowed the NCWC to gain the support of other NGOs. We initiated a letter writing campaign, urging the government to ensure the rights of Indigenous women and girls remained in the document. Due to the overwhelming number of NGOs that signed on, and despite the vehement objections of Russia, Canada was instrumental in ensuring the wording remained intact in the Final Agreed Upon Conclusions. Full credit to Daniela Chivu, our liaison to the United Nations!

The NCWC has hosted six virtual events during the last three CSWs. The one directly related to our Common Program was titled, “The Dual Pandemic: The Cost to

Marginalized Women and Girls” that outlined the issues and focussed on solutions. Our two Canadian panelists were:

- Roberta Jamieson QC, a Canadian lawyer and First nations activist who is a Canadian lawyer and First Nations activist. She was the first Indigenous woman to earn a law degree in Canada, the first non-Parliamentarian to be appointed as an ex officio member of a House of Commons Committee, and the first woman appointed as Ontario’s Ombudsman.
- Heather Bear is the Vice Chief of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) and a member of the Ochapowace First Nation. In 2014, Vice Chief Bear made history as being only the second woman to be elected to the FSIN in over 65 years.

Another event we hosted was titled “Economic Justice in a Post COVID Recovery” focussed on presenting solutions to the negative impact of the pandemic on the already existing economic and gender inequalities which have left women even more vulnerable to job and business losses and increased their unpaid care work. While COVID-19 is continuing to devastate lives around the world, violence against women continues to be the Shadow Pandemic. Our interactive international panel addressed proven ways of eliminating violence and harassment against women in the world of work and providing means of redress in the context of the drastic increase in violence against women and its effect on children.

Our Canadian panelists were:

- Leila Sarengi, the Director of Social Action at Family Service Toronto and the National Director of Campaign 2000. With over 20 years of front line, research and policy experience, Leila learned that the people experiencing systemic marginalization can be the furthest away from decision making. Her professional experience demonstrates commitment to connecting lived reality with public policy and advocating with and engaging people in a meaningful way to inform policy and legislative changes.
- Gwen Dueck, an independent consultant and Board Chair, Hope Restored Canada. Her career has included roles as a teacher, sessional lecturer and chief executive officer. Hope Restored Canada is a charitable organization guided and led by compassionate people who care deeply about the restoration and empowerment of all people, especially those who have been impacted by sexual exploitation and trafficking. Girls as young as 13 are recruited into the sex trade by human traffickers that exploit their vulnerability. Most are Indigenous. The pandemic has reduced their escape options; Hope Restored Canada provides support, hope and most importantly, that "safe place to go."

We also have representation on the European/North American Caucus and within the Core Group. It was our pleasure to be asked to have a Canadian Indigenous woman speak to the group on the specific issues facing their women and girls, and we chose:

- Chief Ava Bear, the first female Chief of the Muskoday First Nation. Chief Bear also served on the Muskoday Band Council and was elected as the Vice-Chief of the Saskatoon Band Councils in the 1990s. More recently, she acted as Muskoday's Director of Health Services. We are also pleased to have her as an Honourary member and advisor to LCW Prince Albert.

### **Advocacy in Action**

Our entire membership, including our affiliated Nationally Organized Societies, is invited to draft letters on specific topics for the President to review, sign, and send to the appropriate government officials and other interested parties. Over the past three years we have sent 50+ letters of advocacy based on our policies, and many of them had their impetus due to the work on our Common Program.

The NCWC is a participating member of a group of 40+ organizations called the 'Feminist Influencing Group'. Only a few of them are umbrella organization like the NCWC, so, if we have policy, we support their initiatives.

Many of our Councils have representation on University Senates, and they have taken the opportunity to speak to our Common Program with their fellow Senators, and also to interact with students enrolled in classes from Indigenous and Gender specific colleges and the First Nations University.

Each of our Councils has now adopted land acknowledgements that are made at the beginning of their meetings. PCW and LCW acknowledgements are very particular to their areas, while the NCWC acknowledgment is more general in nature. These acknowledgments were vetted through the Bands and/or and the Human Rights Commissions to ensure they were accurate and respectful.

The NCWC Development Organization is our second charitable arm. Through it, we have been able to support organizations working with women who are marginalized, trafficked, or those whose lives have been impacted due to intimate partner violence. Many of these women are Indigenous and our financial support ensures there are programs that will offer comfort, encouragement, and ultimately empowerment.

Our Councils all actively participated in 'Orange Shirt Day' and proudly displayed our pictures on our website. We truly embraced 'Every Child Matters' by participating in walks, memorials, and other events to show our personal support and that of our organization.

In May, my church hosted Linda Nicholls, the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, and Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, during their stops in Saskatchewan. It was a pleasure to join the Archbishop in his visit to the James Smith

First Nation where he acknowledged and apologized for the church's part in the tragic legacy of the residential schools and the horrific discovery of the unmarked graves of children who never returned home. Survivors shared their stories of the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse they endured and the subsequent trauma and lack of confidence that affects them to this day. Many said they didn't blame the church, but blamed those who were working on behalf of the church. The grace they showed in accepting the Archbishop's apology was truly humbling.

### **Concluding Comments**

In 2019, when the NCWC membership adopted the Common Program of "Listening to, Learning from, Acting on the Recommendations of the Commission into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls", it is doubtful we were truly prepared to deal with the pain, the hurt, the anger, and the frustration that accompanied this topic. We have heard the pain, we have seen the hurt, and we have agonized with them. Yet, we have also been witness to the resilient spirit of these women. We are honoured they have welcomed us to join them on this long overdue journey to truth and reconciliation.

Although this Common Program will come to an end next year, our advocacy on this file will continue for years to come as there is still much to be done to fully realize and implement the 'calls to action' that concluded the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports.

Thank you for your Interest and support in our work!

Sincerely

Patricia Leson, President  
National Council of Women of Canada

***The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Canada is the traditional territory of Indigenous and Metis People. We are grateful to join with others in peace and hope, advocating for an improved quality of life for women, children, families, and society.***