

Proposal 4

Proposal Name: Implementation of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report

Origin: Justice, Mission and Outreach Committee, Regional Council 15

Issue:

The proposed National Action Plan to implement the June 2019 Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) was promised for June 2020 and is now 5 months overdue with no federal government commitment to a new date for the Plan.

Our Judeo-Christian tradition calls us to do justice through a process of confession, lament and repentance. Hearing the heart-rending stories of indigenous families and survivors has brought the settler community in Canada to knowing and confessing the truth of how our biases and systems are complicit in this tragedy. In reflecting and relating to the trauma we have heard, we began the painful awareness and sorrow of lament in relating to the impact of these injustices on the indigenous community. Without a prompt, clear, and integrated practical plan to address the 231 Recommendations in the report, however, we will have made no progress in our repentance i.e., by changing our ways and our unjust systems. For the healing and trust of both settler and indigenous communities, we need urgently to have an action plan and to begin to follow through those actions, in order to move forward on this justice story with real repentance.

Background:

The Government of Canada held a nation-wide inquiry into ‘Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ beginning with Terms of reference announced in August 2016 and ending in publication of the full report in June 2019. This included three intensive Truth Gathering phases where voices of 1,484 family members and survivors, 83 expert Knowledge Keepers and Officials and 819 artists shared their story and insights.

The Report containing 231 recommendations, also referred to as ‘calls for justice’ falls into 18 themes that cover the need for public education and cross-jurisdictional action planning against violence but also a range of culturally-appropriate direct services to respond to underlying factors. These service recommendations include: relationships with- and accountability of- policing services; alternatives such as community and restorative judicial models; and a variety of programming dealing with root causes – e.g., related to safe housing, culturally appropriate health, mental health and child/family services, and bridging education to reduce the indigenous employment gap.

A National Action Plan which was promised by the Government of Canada for June 2020, the one-year anniversary of the Report, has been delayed with no extension date given. The reason for the delay given by Prime Minister Trudeau and Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett, is that while they have been working on the calls to justice over the past year, “the COVID-19 crisis has delayed the work by our partners and us on progress”.

The Native Women’s Association of Canada, in the absence of a plan, held roundtable discussions with Indigenous women to understand their priorities and in May 2020 sent the federal government

a list of eight measures as a basis for a plan. There is also concern that COVID restrictions may leave indigenous women even more exposed to violence at this time.

In June 2020 the death of Chantal Moore a Tla-o-qui-aht woman from BC living in New Brunswick who was killed by Edmundston police during a ‘wellness check’ and the video of abusive treatment of Joyce Echaquan by Hospital staff in Joliette Quebec at the time of her death, are shocking reminders of the urgent need for an Action Plan and for specific work to begin without delay to end the violence and death affecting members of the indigenous community in greater numbers and particularly affecting the women.

In the mean time, no progress on a plan is evident and questions in the House of Commons continue to elicit defensive responses with assurances that unspecified work is going on. At ceremonies in memory of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in October 2020, the lack of an Action Plan, or any evidence of addressing the 231 recommendations or of responding to the priorities set out by NWAC, was raised as a puzzling concern and a source of sadness and deep disappointment.

How the Regional Council might address the issue:

The JMO Committee proposes that the Region 15 Council seek to address this issue by writing a letter: to the Prime Minister as follows:

- a) To press Prime Minister Trudeau (copies to the Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister - Carolyn Bennett, Indigenous Services Minister - Mark Miller, the Premier of New Brunswick – Blaine Higgs, New Brunswick Minister of Aboriginal Affairs -Arlene Dunn, and MPs and Senators from the Region) for a public inquiry into the separate recent fatal shootings of indigenous persons, Chantal Moore and Rodney Levi in New Brunswick in June of 2020, during the provision of policing services by Edmundston and RCMP police forces. This could contribute to the National Action Plan by providing insights into how, in the New Brunswick context, such services could be remodelled by engaging the wisdom and experience of the indigenous community to avoid such devastating outcomes in future. This might also provide a model for other provinces.
- b) To press the government for urgent priority to be given immediately to the completion of a National Action Plan for the implementation of the 231 Recommendations in the report from the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls “Reclaiming Power and Place”.
- c) To commit to a date for completion of the National Action Plan before the end of 2020, making allowance for the challenges of operating in COVID conditions, but with a creative problem-solving spirit so as not to allow these challenges to become a barrier to Plan completion.
- d) To develop the Plan by drawing on the resources of Indigenous leaders such as the Native Women’s Association of Canada and other Indigenous experts, and working in partnership with them to establish priorities, set out practical actions, assign responsibilities to settler and indigenous agents for specific actions and fund the necessary work, communications and travel.

(Noting that the ‘urgent discussion on systemic racism in health care’ convened by the government on October 16th 2020, while appropriate in the short term, in no way relieves the need for a comprehensive, integrated Action Plan addressing the 231 recommendations, as all of the aspects of violence against indigenous women and girls are inter-related.)