



Ontario Native Women's Association

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Reclaiming Indigenous Women's Leadership a Time for Action, Accountability and Healing

One year ago, the nation gathered for the release of "Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls". We must remember that the report was a result of years of advocacy from Indigenous Women in communities who bravely told their stories when it wasn't safe to do so. They spoke about sexual violence, family violence, police violence, state and systemic violence; and the lack of respect for Indigenous women who continue to be targeted for violence across our Nation as a result of their gender and race.

We also need to start by acknowledging the families and loved ones who chose to participate and those who chose not to participate in the National Inquiry, all of their voices are valuable, and we need to now work together to honour their voices and stories.

Today, Canada and the world are in the midst of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis that is dominating national and international dialogue and headlines. We have been reminded that the most vulnerable in our society can be made even more vulnerable. The United Nations has documented what we have seen in Ontario – violence has increased towards Indigenous women during this pandemic.

While it is too early for comprehensive data, there are already many deeply concerning reports of increased violence against women around the world, with surges being reported in many cases of upwards of 25% in countries with reporting systems in place.ⁱ

It is critical that during this unprecedented time, we understand the role isolation plays in increasing violence against Indigenous women. During the pandemic, women have faced an increased lack of privacy, reliance on technology that can be controlled by others or not accessible and a breakdown of social and community supports. Rural, remote, and isolated communities are being particularly challenged in terms of violence. Many communities are on lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The few resources that may be available for women within communities have closed their doors during the pandemic, due to lack of resources and the threat of the virus. As a result of this, many women are not able to reach out for help as it is not safe to do so.

Human trafficking has now gone even further underground. We may see less women accessing particular services, but the problem still very much exists.



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Head Office: P.O. Box15-684 City Road, Fort William First Nation, ON P7J1K3 •
Toll Free: 1-800-667-0816 • Phone: (807) 623-3442 • Fax: (807) 623-1104

We have recently completed our consultations to contribute to the National Action Plan on MMIWG. We heard consistent messages across Ontario. The time to invest in Indigenous Women is now – during the crisis and *one* year after the report was released.

We need stable and consistent funding devoted to addressing gender-based violence. Indigenous women have the solution to ending violence against them, and they need the funding to address it.

Indigenous women need to lead the National Action Plan to ensure accountability to addressing the issue. We need to be at the table making decisions about or for Indigenous women. Indigenous women have a right to safety and a right for services that meets their needs that are designed, developed and implemented by them.

Indigenous women’s lives depend on us acting today. The pandemic has only highlighted the need for a proactive response.

The Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA) is committed to breaking down silos and barriers in the ongoing challenge that is addressing the systems which created the foundations for the issue of MMIWG. We must not allow the current pandemic to negate the work done or lessen the resolve to make the lives of Indigenous women, girls and families safer in communities across Ontario.

For more information:

Andre Morriseau, Communications Manager
Ontario Native Women’s Association (ONWA)
Email: amorriseau@onwa.ca

-30-

ⁱ <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406>



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