

National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls

RECLAIMING POWER AND PLACE

THE FINAL REPORT
OF THE NATIONAL INQUIRY
INTO MISSING AND
MURDERED INDIGENOUS
WOMEN AND GIRLS

Volume 1a



Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Volume 1a



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Special thanks to the artists whose work appears on the cover of this report:

Dee-Jay Monika Rumbolt (Snowbird), for *Motherly Love*
The Saa-Ust Centre, for the star blanket community art piece
Christi Belcourt, for *This Painting is a Mirror*

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Acknowledgements

As Commissioners, we were mandated to investigate all forms of violence against Inuit, Métis and First Nations women and girls, including 2SLGBTQQIA people. We were given a sacred responsibility to hear from families and survivors of violence to make concrete and actionable recommendations for the safety of Indigenous individuals, families and communities. The legacies of those who no longer walk among us will not be forgotten as all Canadians have a moral obligation to share this sacred responsibility in breaking down systemic barriers, eliminating violence, and ultimately creating safer spaces for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

We honour the memory of all missing and murdered Métis, First Nations and Inuit women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people including the spirits of the missing or murdered whose families shared with us. You were taken, but you are not forgotten; your lives, dreams, hopes and losses are now forever a part of Canada's living history.

We want to thank the families who shared their painful truths, knowledge, wisdom, experiences and expertise with us. We honour your strength, courage and perseverance in seeking justice and healing for the loss of your grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunties, daughters, nieces, cousins and close friends.

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We acknowledge the survivors of violence who shared their experiences with us. You have illustrated pure strength, courage and resiliency in sharing your truth as many of you are still experiencing trauma and systemic violence. We are extremely touched you entrusted us with your experiences.

We cherish the submissions of artistic expressions, including, songs, poems and art, that have been shared with us. Thank you to the artists, family members, survivors and those across the nation who have been impacted or inspired to take action through their submission. Your art will continue to serve as powerful commemoration and legacy tools to share truth and knowledge and serve as a means to heal and inspire action in others.

We offer our sincerest gratitude to the Elders and Grandmothers Circle who worked alongside us, offering their support, wisdom, encouragement, advice, protection and love to us and all who worked with the National Inquiry. Our inspiration came from our Grandmothers who motivated us to always work to the highest standards. One of the ways we will be able to express our gratitude is to always live by the lessons and wisdom they shared.

We want to acknowledge and thank the families and survivors who guided and assisted us as members of the National Family Advisory Circle. For many years, you fought to be heard and acknowledged in seeking justice for your loved ones and your fellow Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. You fought for a national investigation into the injustices and violence experienced by Métis, Inuit and First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. We were not provided with the

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time, tools and powers to do all that we had hoped we could do, but you walked with us every step of the way, and we are beyond humbled to have walked alongside you, and to have received your truth and your trust.

We have been honoured with the support of Elders and Knowledge Keepers across the nation who offered their guidance, knowledge, wisdom, prayers, traditions, and ceremonies to the National Inquiry at our hearings, statement-gathering events and other community events. In sitting with us, tending to the *qulliq* and sacred fires, offering ceremonies, songs, prayers, and words of wisdom, you have helped us navigate through the very challenging task of engaging in a legal inquiry process, while incorporating distinctive First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures, languages, spirituality, and creating opportunities for healing. You remind us that every step in our process had to be with heartfelt intention and purpose and grounded in relationships and reciprocity.

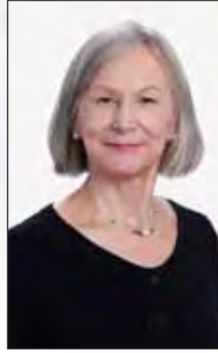
We want to acknowledge the communities across the country that welcomed us into their territories and homes. You helped us create safe spaces filled with culture, language, spirit and compassion at each hearing. In these safe spaces, difficult truths were brought to light, and for some, healing began.

We offer gratitude to the members of our Métis, Inuit, 2SLGBTQQIA and Quebec Advisory Committees, who offered their time to us in exploring issues and positive solutions. Your expertise, advice and guidance has contributed to the development of this report and recommendations for the elimination of violence against Inuit, Métis and First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

PREFACE



We are so thankful for all of the staff and the contractors who made up the National Inquiry. You have been fiercely driven and dedicated to ensuring we were able to fulfill as much of our mandate in the time we had available to us as we could. Time and time again you pulled off the impossible: 24 hearings across the country, almost 750 people's statements gathered, eight institutional visits to correctional facilities, four Guided Dialogues, eight validation meetings for the *Final Report* and numerous other gatherings which were required to fulfill this national mandate. You have truly brought to life our vision of finding the truth, honouring the truth and giving life to the truth.



Chief Commissioner Marion Buller

First, I acknowledge and welcome the spirits of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. I also acknowledge the courage of survivors. Their spirits and courage guided us in our work. This report is about these beautiful Indigenous people and the systemic factors that lead to their losses of dignity, humanity and, in too many cases, losses of life. This report is about deliberate race, identity and gender-based genocide.

The violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people is a national tragedy of epic proportion. Also part of this national tragedy is governments' refusals to grant the National Inquiry the full two-year extension requested. In doing so, governments chose to leave many truths unspoken and unknown. There has been and will be criticism of our work; it is vitally important. I hope that the criticism will be constructive and never end. I take the critics and their criticism as indications of the great passion that exists about the issue of violence against Indigenous women and girls.

As a nation, we face a crisis: regardless of which number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is cited, the number is too great. The continuing murders, disappearances and violence prove that this crisis has escalated to a national emergency that calls for timely and effective responses.

Within the National Inquiry, and in the short time we have had to do our work, families and survivors have provided important truths. These truths force us to reconsider where the roots of violence lie, and in doing so, to reconsider the solutions. I hope that knowing these truths will contribute to a better understanding of the real lives of Indigenous people and the violations of their human and Indigenous rights when they are targeted for violence. The truth is that we live in a country whose laws and institutions perpetuate violations of basic human and Indigenous rights. These violations amount to nothing less than the deliberate, often covert campaign of genocide against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. This is not what Canada is supposed to be about; it is not what it purports to stand for.

P R E F A C E

In this report, we use hard words to address hard truths like genocide, colonization, murder and rape. To deny these hard words is to deny the truths of the families and survivors, front-line workers, and grassroots organizers. We used hard words because the violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people is a difficult, critically important crisis to address and in which we all have a role.

This report is also about hope. I believe, especially after witnessing the resilience of Indigenous families, survivors and communities, that change will happen. An Elder said, “We all have to get past the guilt and shame.” This begins with recognizing the truth. For non-Indigenous Canadians, this means rethinking commonly held stereotypes, and confronting racism in every context. For Indigenous Peoples, this means using the truth to rebuild our lives, our families, our communities and Canada itself. And for governments, this means nothing less than a new and decolonized social order; it is an opportunity to transform and to rebuild in real partnership with Indigenous Peoples.

Skeptics will be fearful and will complain that the financial cost of rebuilding is too great, that enough has been done, that enough money has been spent. To them I say, we as a nation cannot afford *not* to rebuild. Otherwise, we all knowingly enable the continuation of genocide in our own country.

I thank the family members and survivors who shared their painful truths about their tragic experiences at our hearings and statement-gathering events. I am honoured to have shared your tears, hugs and hopes for a better future. I will always be inspired by your resilience.

I have special admiration for the grassroots people and activists who knew, first hand, about the depth of the violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. They knew – they have always known – that the violence has to stop. Through their sheer determination over generations, they have forced governments to pay attention, and to establish what we consider to be just the beginning of this work: a National Inquiry into the root causes of a crisis that has been generations in the making.

Canada can be a great country – the one many Canadians believe it is. Collectively, we must settle for nothing less. Achieving this greatness will take vision, courage and leadership. I have seen these qualities and more, in Indigenous people, from coast to coast to coast. I challenge them to be the new leaders who will create a new reality, a new social order – a safe and healthy country for all.



Commissioner Michèle Audette

Throughout the ages, all societies have taken care to ensure the safety of the members of their communities. And yet, still today, the World Health Organization reports that 35% of women worldwide will experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, this figure reflecting only violence that is reported.

In Canada, statistics show that Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or missing than any other women in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, between 2001 and 2015, homicide rates for Indigenous women were nearly six times higher than for non-Indigenous women. A risk of such magnitude requires us all to take responsibility, to clearly identify the issue and to take strong measures to address this situation, which is rooted in Canada's historical and political context.

That said, statistics cannot convey what families and communities really go through when they lose loved ones to such violence. The concept of family means so much more than biological lineage, with the strengths and diversity of a family being found in the sum of its parts. Each of them deserves to live in an environment where all of its members can develop their full potential safely and peacefully.

The National Inquiry has been an enriching learning experience, both personally and professionally, but it has also been trying. Fulfilling our mandate was a daunting task, and I often felt helpless when hearing the testimony of every person who generously contributed to the exercise we put before them.

Our mission was to shed light on a social crisis that affects Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA people every day of their lives. Although this crisis was identified long ago, we have been slow to examine it in depth. The commission that I have been part of inquired into a situation that has affected all of Canada's Indigenous communities, as well as all Canadians, throughout the 500 years of our common history.

P R E F A C E

This unprecedented inquiry addresses violence against some of this country's most vulnerable citizens and identifies its systemic causes. Never has there been such an opportunity for the truth about violence against Indigenous women and girls to be heard and acknowledged. Within the organization, we pushed and constantly stretched the limits of our teams to meet our goals.

Why go to such lengths? To bring about change. As my mandate comes to an end, I note, with great humility, that this National Inquiry will have honoured the struggles taken up by the families and survivors over the past 40 years. This Inquiry, which was sought by 3,000 families, will have shone light on facts that are all too often hidden.

Violence against Indigenous women and girls does not stem from one isolated event. Sadly, it is the daily reality of far too many human beings, many of whom are among this country's most vulnerable. Today, we have the opportunity to highlight the extraordinary resilience of Indigenous women and girls, who remain dedicated to advocating for their rights and charting a path forward – a path we must all take together. We wish to honourably acknowledge victims and give families the opportunity to finally be able to give their children a better future.

The present can only be understood in relation to the past: we must know our past, understand it and accept it, if the future is to have meaning. We now need to go further and put forward a true social blueprint that will enable the country to adequately address this major social issue and break through this impasse. All our efforts will have led to identifying the solutions, means and actions needed to bring about this movement. Every Canadian can and must become involved at their own level if things are to change. Together, we have a duty to take effective measures to prevent and put an end to violence against Indigenous women and girls and ensure their safety.

This commission of inquiry does not mark the end of a movement, but represents a step in a healthy process that is a source of hope, a social undertaking. Today is the first day of the Canada of tomorrow. We cannot change the past, but we can work together to shape a better future built on the strengths of each and every community that welcomes it, thereby committing to improving the safety of Indigenous women and girls together.

#EndViolence #WomenAndGirlsAreSacred #ThankYouLife



Commissioner Qajaq Robinson

As a non-Indigenous person, I must acknowledge the significance of the welcoming, respect and kindness I, like others, have graciously received from Indigenous communities throughout the National Inquiry. I acknowledge that for many Indigenous Peoples, however, welcome, respect and kindness is not what you receive when you encounter government agencies and the Canadian public. Through this process, I have come to more fully understand that the Canada I live in and enjoy is not the Canada that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples experience. In the eyes of the state, through law, policies and practice, we are not seen or treated as equals.

The continued actions of our governments to deny and infringe on human rights and Indigenous rights and the colonial, sexist and racist attitudes held by non-Indigenous peoples fails to reciprocate this welcome, respect and kindness you have shown me. Despite the numerous human rights laws and instruments the federal, provincial and territorial governments are bound by, and despite the recognition and affirmation of Indigenous rights in our Constitution, and the numerous court decisions calling for rights recognition and respect, this is not the reality for Indigenous Peoples, and especially Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in Canada.

There continues to be a widespread denial of rights and dehumanization of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples. This denial and dehumanization is the foundation Canada is built on, and upon which it continues to operate today. It is the cause of the violence we have been called upon to examine. It is a hard truth to accept for Canadians today, as we pride ourselves on being a just and principled society, bound by the rule of law and respectful of human rights and human dignity. However, we have been blind to the reality that our own place and privilege as Canadians is the result of gross human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples. These violations continue to persist in overt and in more subtle ways daily across Canada. This truth hurts us all, and grossly undermines our values and our potential as a country.

So what are we non-Indigenous Canadians to do now? We must acknowledge our role and we must become actors in the rebuilding of this nation. We must acknowledge that the crisis of violence against Indigenous women and girls has been centuries in the making, and its root cause is colonialism, which runs deep throughout the foundational fabric of this country. We are here

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now because of years and years of decisions and actions that built Canada, all while robbing Indigenous Peoples, and especially women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples, of their humanity, dignity and ultimately their lives. It is genocide.

We must be active participants in decolonizing Canada. We must challenge all institutions, governments and agencies to consciously and critically challenge the ideologies that govern them. We must critically examine our systems of laws and governance to identify how they exclude and oppress Indigenous Peoples. We must challenge and call on all leaders to protect and uphold the humanity and dignity of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples. And when they fail to do so, we must hold them accountable.

Finally, ending the genocide and rebuilding Canada into a decolonized nation requires true and equal partnership with Indigenous Peoples. I hope that the *Final Report* of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls can be a tool to do just that.



Martha Kyak designed and sewed this amauti. Sewing this amauti was a healing process for her. Martha has dedicated this amauti in memory of her sister Lily.



Commissioner Brian Eyolfson

As I reflect on the work of the National Inquiry, I have tremendous gratitude for the family members and survivors of violence whose voices and contributions have carried this work forward. Over the course of the National Inquiry, we heard from many courageous grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunties, daughters, grandfathers, fathers, brothers, uncles, sons and other family members, including families of the heart, about their loved ones who have gone missing or been murdered, as well as survivors of violence. As one of the Commissioners of the National Inquiry, I have had the honoured privilege to be a part of this opportunity to change the way forward.

To witness the extraordinary strength and courage of the families and survivors who shared their truths with all of us has been an incredible experience. Those shared truths will always be in my heart, and observing such strength and resiliency also gives me hope for positive change on a stain that has covered this country for far too long. The release of this *Final Report* is also an important opportunity and step in honouring the gifts of the truths that families and survivors shared with the National Inquiry and everyone in Canada.

The mandate given to the National Inquiry, to inquire into and report on the systemic causes of all forms of violence – including sexual violence – against Indigenous women and girls, is far-reaching. In carrying out this mandate, it was important to the National Inquiry to create a process that put family members and survivors first, to help create a path towards healing, and to find, honour and give life to the truth, given the undeniable need to transform the conversation about Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in this country and in our Nations. Through this work, many beautiful relationships were also created across the land, relationships that will continue beyond the mandate of the National Inquiry. We also heard from local Elders who provided advice, such as keeping and carrying a sacred fire to each of our hearings. We have also strived to be inclusive of all Indigenous people, including 2SLGBTQQIA people, and respectful of local protocol.

Carrying out this important and necessary work from coast to coast to coast, in the allotted time, has not been without its challenges. However, the many voices and contributions of families, survivors, experts, Knowledge Keepers and other witnesses such as front-line workers, Parties

with Standing, and our Grandmothers and National Family Advisory Circle members are undeniable. The record created, the fires lit and the many connections made through the work of the National Inquiry, give strength and support for concrete and effective action that can be taken to remove systemic causes of violence and to increase the safety of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in Canada.

The fundamental rights, including human rights and Indigenous rights, of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in Canada must be upheld and respected on a substantive and equitable basis. Many Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are denied basic rights that others in Canada take for granted, such as access to safe housing and education. For far too long, colonial and discriminatory policies, practices and attitudes have subjected Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people to violence in this country – a violence that unfortunately for many Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit and transgender people has become normalized – and continues on an ongoing basis. The need for decisive action to address this crisis is urgent!

Not just governments, but everyone in Canada has a duty and responsibility to take action to address the issue of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. This also requires critically examining attitudes and behaviours that impact the lives of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit and transgender people in this country, such as negative portrayals of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in the media. It is also important that men “take action and stand up to end violence towards women and children,” as the Moose Hide Campaign encourages, through actions such as speaking out against violence, holding each other accountable, and healing and being healthy role models for youth. It is also vitally important that we listen to Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in addressing this pressing issue, as they are the experts and have the solutions and important roles to play in ending violence.

I firmly believe that the work of the National Inquiry, and the findings and recommendations set out in this *Final Report*, provide a strong basis for changing the way forward. We have the opportunity and the will of many to make the necessary changes to ensure the safety of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people for generations to come. Through our concrete actions, let’s honour and give life to the truth.

Our women and girls are sacred.

Chi-Meegwetch

Messages from the Directors

My continuing prayer is that this national tragedy will end. We have the roadmap drawn in this Final Report, guided by the heartbreak and hope of the many family members and survivors who testified, and the Knowledge Keepers, experts and institutional witnesses who took the time to appear before us. Now, we need the courage to face these truths and the collective will to make Canada the country it was meant to be.

- Jennifer Moore Rattray, Executive Director

I would like to thank my team for their hard work and dedication throughout the Inquiry. They ensured the Commissioners and the Legal, Research, and Outreach and Support Services teams were able to concentrate on the survivors and family members who have been impacted by this national tragedy, and that the witnesses were able to travel to and attend hearings across the country. Despite being largely behind the scenes, we bore witness to terrible truths shared by incredibly brave people, and we wholeheartedly believe that the recommendations from this report must be acted upon immediately.

- Alexandre Desharnais, Director, Logistics

I am honoured and humbled by the incredible trust placed in us to hear these truths and to share them within this report. To my incredible team - it has been a privilege to share this experience with you. I hope that the vision we have outlined reflects the needs of those who came forward to share their experiences, and that they ultimately contribute to a safer world for all Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. To my family - Craig, Anabelle, Claire and my mother Carolyn - thank you for your support throughout this work. To all: each and every one of us has a role; it is time to act.

- Dr. Karine Duhamel, Director, Research

Even though my role and responsibility was to provide enabling administrative services, I feel privileged to have supported such quick, forceful and meaningful change. I am beyond hopeful that the work instigated by the National Inquiry will be a catalyst towards repairing damage and altering a trajectory which will provide equality of opportunity if not equality of circumstance. With the advent of this Final Report and recommendations, what lies ahead is a great deal of hard work, sure to be filled with moments of despair as well as celebration. Onwards.

- Nicholas Obomsawin, Director, Operations

The Registry's responsibility was to hold all of the sacred truths and the evidence given to the Commission by the thousands of witnesses who stood up to denounce the ongoing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in this country. My team and I count ourselves lucky to have helped build a public record that resounds with the grace and strength of the witnesses and their advocates. Their perspectives can help Canadians heal from our country's past and they tell us we must stop the current, normalized forms of violence. We must begin to listen and to act.

- Bryan Zandberg, Registrar

The National Inquiry has a large public record accessible to anyone. The work was only accomplished with the bravery, courage, and resiliency of all who shared their truth. The evidence is compelling; it demonstrates how Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are treated and how indifference and discrimination are maintaining harm and violence. I encourage everyone to listen or read the record; it will not be easy – while the truth is heartbreaking it also provides solutions and calls for change that need to occur so that this country is safe for everyone.

- Christa Big Canoe, Lead Commission Counsel

It has been a great honour and privilege to be a part of this historic process. My sincere wish is for the voices of the families and loved ones who testified at the National Inquiry to be finally heard, and that their stories of loss and human rights abuses pave the way to a new future for Canada, one in which we all are respected and treated as equal citizens. The Final Report and its Calls for Justice speak to all Canadians; may we hear their truth and act.

- Catherine Kloczkowski, Director, Communications

I want to acknowledge all those who had the courage to forge this new path with us, the spirits of our stolen sisters who guided every step of my journey, and my grandmothers in the spirit world, who watched over me and my son throughout this journey and kept us safe. Now, more than ever, we must all have the courage to continue on this road. We cannot turn a blind eye nor remain comfortable with the status quo. My hope is that together with all Canadians, unified in empathy and compassion, we will undertake the responsibility of ensuring the dawn of a new reality for all those who have yet to be born.

- Terrellyn Fearn, Director, Outreach and Support Services



Reflections from the National Family Advisory Circle

The role of the National Family Advisory Circle (NFAC) is to help guide the work of the National Inquiry and to serve as the voice of truth for the families and communities of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. NFAC does this by providing advice during the planning and hearing processes to ensure that the lived experiences of families are heard by the Commissioners alongside the evidence that is presented by the Expert Witnesses, and to ensure that the concerns and experiences of families are taken into account by the Commissioners when they cross-examine the witnesses bringing evidence before them.

Members of the National Family Advisory Circle are volunteers who provide advice to the National Inquiry. The members are not involved in any operations. Members were invited by the Commissioners to participate based on three considerations:

- They are longtime leaders and advocates for their loved ones.
- They have indicated interest in providing their support to the National Inquiry.
- They are representative of a diversity of Nations, geographical regions, and urban and rural communities across the country.

FOREWORD

We asked members of NFAC, on a voluntary basis, to share some reflections about their own experiences within the National Inquiry and their hopes for the *Final Report* and the outcome of the National Inquiry. We emphasize their invaluable contribution to the process; words are not enough to thank them for their time, expertise, and commitment.



NFAC members in Vancouver discuss and provide feedback on the Final Report.

Vanish, by Gladys Radek

Tamara Lynn Chipman stole her Daddy's heart from the moment she was born. Even her Mom knew she would be a Daddy's girl forever. When Tamara lost her Grampa – her favourite person in the world – she clung to her Daddy and became his little shadow. Tamara loved fishing boats, fast cars, and dogs. She was an adventurer. She grew into a tall, lanky, charming, beautiful young lady with a smile that would brighten anybody's day – from Daddy's little tomboy to a young mother at age 19, forever bonded with her son. She was never afraid of anything and lived life to the fullest.

Then, one day, out of the blue, something out of the ordinary happened. There were no phone calls, no knock on the door, no cheery hello, no more, “Hey Daddy, what we going to do today?” All of a sudden, our world came crashing down. Tamara had vanished. Days turned into weeks, a month and then into years. She disappeared on September 21, 2005 from the northernmost tip of the Highway of Tears in British Columbia.

Our family conducted search parties through the mountains, along the railroad tracks, in ditches and culverts and tread through the back allies of communities where angels wouldn't dare tread. We searched local, provincial, national and international waters for our baby girl only to realize that there were so many more missing, like her.

The eternal flame will continue to burn in the hopes that someday soon she will bounce in that door and say, “Hey Daddy, what we going to do today?” We wonder, is she warm, is she safe, is she alive, and is she being held against her will, is she being raped or tortured, is she being bought or sold? What happened to her, is she dead? Somewhere out there someone knows something; we pray that someday they will come forward and tell us the truth. This thought runs through the minds of all the families of our missing loved ones, the thousands of us who wake up to this nightmare every single day.

Of all of the hurtful experiences associated with the vanishing of a loved one, one of the most is the racism displayed when our First Nations loved ones disappear. We hear things like “I heard she was just a party animal,” or, “Was she wanted by the cops?” Or, the worst of all, that she “lived a high-risk lifestyle.” These labels have taught mainstream society that all our women and girls are just that – prostitutes, addicts and hitchhikers, and therefore not worthy of care or effort.

This is not true: Tamara is loved, now and forever. The Government of Canada as a whole has the responsibility of ensuring every citizen is protected by the laws of the land; all people living in Canada have the responsibility to live in peace and with respect for basic human rights, including safety and justice. It is time for justice, closure, accountability, equality and true reconciliation.

It is time to *END VIOLENCE* against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. What do we want? JUSTICE! When do we want it? NOW!

Fallon Farinacci

When the opportunity arose to be part of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, I immediately knew I was being guided to share my family's story. I had to be the voice for those who no longer could speak for themselves. Being part of the National Inquiry as an NFAC member has been a stepping stone to a deeper level of healing. It has opened my eyes to the emotional wounds I was suppressing.

It has truly been an honour being part of NFAC. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is bigger than most Canadians understand. It's not only about bringing awareness to the lives that have been lost, but it's also about bringing attention to the deep historical wounds that Indigenous people have had to endure. It's about a movement for healing for all.

I'm overwhelmed with gratitude for being given the opportunity to be a member of NFAC and to have my voice heard for my mother (and father). Without NFAC, I don't feel we would have had the same level of respect laid out throughout the work for those who have gone. NFAC members have drawn from deep within themselves to share and fight for change for generations to come. My hope for the National Inquiry is that we the families, survivors and victims can all find healing, but it must start with change.

Jeremiah Bosse, widower of Daleen Bosse

At first, my thoughts about a National Inquiry were, "Will this actually work or help?" Doubt wandered around my brain, knowing how many First Nations issues have been swept under the rug.

I now hope this National Inquiry touches the hearts of the people of Canada, helping non-Indigenous people understand the need for reconciliation.

Today I feel hopeful for the first time that as victims of violence our words will be heard. The words of our lost ones are spoken! We will be there to represent them; they may be lost, but they are not forgotten!

Myrna LaPlante

Our LaPlante/Osmond family began our journey as family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in September 2007, and we have since been involved in a number of activities in Saskatchewan and nationally.

In February 2017, I was invited to a family members meeting in Acton, Ontario. There began my journey as a National Family Advisory Circle (NFAC) member. It was truly an honour to serve as a member on this committee alongside other family members who are seeking justice. My goal was to bring knowledge and expertise also from the volunteer MMIWG work that we do in Saskatchewan.

The National Inquiry has provided the opportunity for our family to tell our story about missing Aunt Emily to the Commissioners and a national and international audience. This also provided the opportunity to offer recommendations on the topic of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

The sudden and unexpected loss of loved ones in a family dramatically shifts family dynamics, and that presents a new way of interactions within family and with external entities – for example, with work and extended relationships, friends, and social and other activities. There is a lot of sadness; our family tends to be more subdued, and immediate family gatherings change. We learn to cope with this ambiguous loss rather than heal. The National Inquiry has provided me with an opportunity to learn new skills and to engage in true healing through the aftercare funding via an Edu-Therapy Grief Resolution certification.

We trust that the truth is reflected within the *Final Report*, that it is evaluated, and that it is compiled in a way that is respectful of families. We trust that the recommendations that will stem from all of the testimony and family stories, and that there will be swift implementation by governments. We also trust that there will be ongoing supports for families who have suffered great losses.

The love and support of our NFAC family has been tremendous for me. For that, I am thankful. We know that we are in the same boat as many families and we are not alone.

Melanie Morrison

I've been fighting for years to have change, and one of the focuses of Native Women's Association of Canada was to have an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

We wanted the concerns about our experiences and our files to be heard. It was important to our family that change happens. I saw it as an opportunity to expand our families' cry out for change to police protocols on Indigenous missing and murdered women's and girls' cases.

My sister went missing June 18, 2006. My mother did an initial search by talking to all of my sisters' friends and people who usually knew where she was. It was unlike my sister to not come home because she was a young mother. She told my mother she was coming home early that night. When my mom went to the police, she was met with the stereotype that because she was only 24, she was probably just out with friends and would show up. Unfortunately, my sister's remains were found four years later. It was devastating because where she was found was less than a kilometre from her home. Local police were in charge up to that point. Then, after follow-up with the case, it was handed over to the Sûreté du Québec and the file remains active. My niece was left to be raised without a mother. My daughter and I were very close to my sister, and my youngest never got to know her aunt. My mother hasn't recovered from the loss. My father passed in 2015. He passed without answers. She was very outspoken and a ball of energy. When her life was taken, the light fizzled and things are not the same.

Being part of the National Family Advisory Circle is healing in the prospect of having real change. It's another ray of light that I hope will burn. The way our women's files are treated is wrong, and my hope is that our reality won't be someone else's reality. These women and girls were important. They never got to fulfill their purpose because someone was able to take their life. I would love for all Canadians to think of our women as important because they were important to us. When this happened to my sister, she was in a good place. She had just finished an entrepreneurial course and she had a dream to build a house for her and her daughter. It was painful because she was doing all these great things and then this happens.

My hope would be that there is an immediate change of how the police handle Indigenous files on- or off-reserve so there's no delay in pursuing every possible option to find that missing or murdered loved one. There was such a divide in my personal experience. On-reserve, my sister's case wasn't considered important, and off-reserve, people didn't think they had to be responsive. If the local police and off-reserve police had communicated with each other, we could maybe have had closure.

Darlene Osborne

Tansi, Kitatamiskatinawow, I am a member of the National Family Advisory Circle and have attended five hearings across the country in Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, and Quebec City. My husband, John, often attended with me as my support.

For John and I, there was truth in the words and tears of the families who shared their stories and experiences about their loved ones. While this National Inquiry represents a start, there is so much more to do. The limitation of the process, and its structure, could not shine enough light on so many dimensions of truth we had hoped the Inquiry's noble mandate would illuminate. In the end, we as family members, because of the Inquiry, are able to stand strong together and united in the singular message that there cannot be any more violence against women and we must find a way as a nation to end these shameful and preventable deaths and murders.

There are many solutions that were offered by families and by survivors. While the National Inquiry's mandate was limited to Indigenous women and girls, we heard from many other families who lost Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women; families who felt their grief and loss but who did not have a voice or a way to contribute to the National Inquiry. Their stories need to be heard, too.

We also feel there is a need to further investigate policing in this country; we are concerned that the truth around how police departments treated the investigations of our loved ones at the time will be lacking. We need this information to truly tackle the problems; to make changes so that our women and children do not go missing or, if they do, these crimes no longer go unpunished.

We realize that as we seek the truth, we must also focus on healing. Healing needs to happen to address violence that still occurs today. Our community of Norway House Cree Nation has many members who have lost loved ones to senseless violence. We need true healing centres where there is long-term aftercare, particularly for the children of the murdered and missing women. Many of these children are now young teens and adults. They are lost and angry for what has been stolen from them. A healing centre would recognize the lasting legacy these crimes have had on our community; a healing centre would also allow our community to offer a place to heal that addresses each family member's needs.

We are honoured that we could be part of the National Family Advisory Circle. We hope our words and reflections are taken in the spirit with which we intend: a sincere desire for change, rooted in an honest reflection on the achievements and failings of this process, and on the difficult task of finding truths and answers that end the loss of our sisters', mothers', and daughters' lives. The losses of our loved ones have profoundly affected those of us who were there when our loved ones went missing – and who are still here now, looking for answers. We demand more from this nation called Canada.

Pamela Fillier

My daughter Hilary went missing on September 15, 2009. When I went to the police, they assumed she was out partying and did not look for her. My community ended up looking for her. We called the media and when the media got involved and it blew up on television, the police started looking for her. When my daughter was found, it was discovered that her first cousin had murdered her. He had previously been to jail for raping the mother of his children. He was let out of jail even though his file said he was at a high risk of reoffending, and now I don't have my little girl.

The National Inquiry has been a healing process for me. I felt very alone, but when I go to the hearings and to meetings with NFAC, I don't feel so alone. The person next to you knows how you feel because they've been there in a sense. No two stories are the same, but there is always something that is the same that you can identify with. I will stay in contact with these women because they really feel like my family.

My hope for the *Final Report* is that it will raise awareness about how much racism still exists in Canada. I also hope for tougher laws for rapists, pedophiles, and murderers. My daughter's murderer received a sentence of 25 years in prison, but after 13 years he will qualify for day passes. He was also previously charged in a number of violent cases. I fear for the safety of women and girls in his community because he showed no remorse for what he did to my daughter and I fear he will reoffend.

Something else I would like to see come of the *Final Report* would be more safe spaces for children. My dream would be to create Hilary House, a safe haven where children from the community could play or have a place to stay the night. I would like for it to include an arcade room and a dance floor. There are no existing houses of this kind on reserves and I believe that it would be a wonderful initiative to keep our kids safe.

Priscilla Simard

Verna Mae Simard-Shabaquay was born to Charles and Tina Simard in Red Lake, Ontario. Together they raised their children Cecil, Verna, and Mitchel. She was born into a warm and loving family. As a child, she was happy, kind, and full of spirit. Her father affectionately called her Fawn for her gentle nature. Her mother died when Verna was a very young age. Her father was grief-stricken. Children's Aid Society (CAS) took the children and placed them in a Mennonite home in Red Lake. They were placed in foster homes where physical and sexual abuse occurred.

Verna married, but it did not last long. She raised her children, but they were taken into CAS. To compound that loss, her oldest son died. Verna became a grandmother, and Verna doted, cared for, loved, and lived for her granddaughter. Verna's life was difficult and tragic, as she was unable to deal with her traumatic history, the grief and loss of her mother, the tragic death of her father, the loss of her brother, and the loss of her oldest son. We believe these factors contributed to her high-risk lifestyle: alcohol/drug addiction, multiple partners, and intimate partner violence, which resulted in her death.

Verna had allegedly fallen from a sixth-floor window of Vancouver's Regent Hotel on Hastings Street. The circumstances surrounding her death remain suspicious, unsolved but ruled "no foul play" by Vancouver City Police. This case can be reopened pending any new information brought forward by any person. We, as a family, believe the intimate partner violence contributed to her death. We believe she was thrown out of the window.

At the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls hearing in Thunder Bay, Ontario, December 2017, the family put forward several recommendations for change, including on issues such as the investigative process of the Vancouver City Police, police reports, coroners' reports, police response and protocols, credible witnesses, and a preponderance of evidence based on environment. As well, the family had specific recommendations on child welfare, domestic violence, intimate partner violence resulting in death, and the need for holistic healing strategies.

We honour the memory of Verna and seek justice. We look to the National Inquiry to advocate for and advance the recommendations for women like Verna. These recommendations cannot be downplayed, ignored, or shelved. When the recommendations are implemented, we avert suffering, justice can be served, and her spirit can rest!

Miigwech!

Sylvia Murphy

I am honoured to be part of this mission for justice. I have obtained so much knowledge and direction from the National Inquiry. The hard work and dedication of the Commissioners and National Inquiry staff, the strength and dedication of witnesses and survivors, who offered testimony – all have impacted my own journey in important ways.

Intergenerational trauma has been the outcome of my mother's life, my own life, my daughters' lives and my grandkids' lives. If things would be the way that they should be, our family would have not had to live through this. Our journey, filled with trauma, was caused by my father's death that left my mother, at 28 years of age, with eight children to support. My own journey in care, first in an orphanage and then in foster homes, left me with deep feelings of rejection, loss, and alienation within an often cruel world.

The struggles have not been without successes, though. My youngest daughter will soon celebrate two years of sobriety and of living clean from drugs and alcohol. During this time she has worked to complete grade 12 and has started college to be an Addiction Support Worker. She is working to heal, one day at a time.

I have lived my journey, which has not been an easy one. With the Creator's guidance, I have transformed into the person I am today. My grandchildren are living in this world with the help and love from their mothers and me. As their Grandma, I have tried with the best of my knowledge to direct my daughters with help from programs we will get on our journey of healing and love.

Respect, love and patience are very important for a better life for all. Key to these values include all the members of our communities, including Grandmothers, who are Knowledge Keepers full of wisdom and knowledge, who give guidance to all in need at any time. Men and boys are important as well; they need programs and support to be fathers of future generations. Improvements in programs to help men and boys recognize their importance in protecting the women and girls in this world.

While I have many hopes for the future, the most important thing, for me, is to make sure that a program is put in place so children in care receive direction and support, to ensure their survival and the survival of future generations.

The Creator is making us all strong. I pray every day that justice will come.

Barb Manitowabi

The support of my family (Shailla, Michael and Jacob) was what helped me participate in the Truth-Gathering Process and contribute as a National Family Advisory Circle member. For us, this was a step we took together in our healing from past traumas and abuse and to gain a sense of justice and validation; to gain a better understanding about the oppression facing our people.

My family's experience reflects many of the themes that other families shared, including the intergenerational trauma, racism, abuse; ongoing economic and social challenges; the issue of lateral violence; our deep mistrust in the institutions of Canada to protect and take care of us; and in large part, how systems have failed in protecting and helping my family when we needed it most. Retraumatizing, revictimizing and setting us up for more poverty and even more violence. This was an opportunity to give a voice to the grief, pain and rage that we, as a family, were unable to let go of otherwise.

After this journey we are closer and stronger as a family; for this, I am grateful.

This process has changed me forever. For two years we went to the darkest places where the pain and hurt still lives. The National Inquiry has uncovered failure after failure in protecting the lives and rights of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. It is a system that, at its core, aims to destroy and pull families apart. Our reality is that we are watching the slow, painful destruction of Indigenous Peoples. Canada has built a system of rules and laws stemming from greed, racism, and hate; this system continues to devour our families today. Canadians cannot deny the facts, as ugly as they may seem: this is genocide.

From my experience being in NFAC and working with the Commissioners, I am in absolute awe at the dignity, strength, beauty, courage, and perseverance our NFAC group has shown over the past two years. Through all the bad media, political posturing, on top of the stress of testifying and hearings, we stayed committed to our mission: ensuring that the truth be heard.

We all had moments of wanting to quit when things got too painful. In these moments of doubt we tried to stay focused and remind each other why we were doing this – and for whom. We are doing this for the sons and daughters of future generations, and it is only by sharing and knowing the truth that healing can begin. I'm proud to be standing with other survivors and family members knowing we did all we could to help the next generation of survivors and warriors.

I am grateful to NFAC and to the Commissioners for hearing and supporting my family. I would also like to say Gchi Miigwetch (big thank you) to family, friends and Elders who supported us through many storms along the way and helped me personally to stay focused on my commitment. Rebekka Ingram, Thohohente Kim Weaver, Maura Tynes, Gladys Radek, Lorna Brown, Ron Zink; I hold you in my heart always and forever. Shailla, Michael, Jacob, I love you.

Lesla Semmler

When the National Inquiry started and I was asked to be part of the National Family Advisory Circle, I had never been on MMIWG walks or been to rallies.

I had never identified with MMIWG even though my mother was murdered by her common-law partner when I was eight years old. I didn't think she fit the category because she had not gone missing first. When I attended the pre-inquiry meeting in Yellowknife in 2016, it lit a fire inside of me because I realized that I could use my voice to make change. During the first NFAC member meeting there was a lot of talk about the issues First Nations are facing and talk of chiefs and reserves. The other Inuit NFAC members and I explained that we are Inuit and that our issues are different, and we deal with them differently. We live in an isolated part of the world and our women are dealing with a lot of family violence. I wanted to ensure people in our region had a voice and that their concerns were represented in this national process.

It has been a healing journey to talk about what happened to my mother at the National Inquiry into MMIWG so I can deal with it. It has been healing for me to tell my mother's story. Other people who have identified with my experience decided to start talking about what happened to them, too. Sharing our Truth was important for me and for my grandmother who never talked about it before. After we shared, she felt relieved because she finally had the chance to say what she wanted to say. She also realized so many other people have had similar experiences.

My hope for the *Final Report* is that there will be good recommendations for the northern territories to ensure the safety of children, women and men in the North. We need programs and support for families that are culturally relevant. Western ways do not work for Inuit women because they are not heard the way they want to be heard. I hope that the recommendations are written in a way that will be easily adopted by the provinces and territories and that they will initiate action. I hope that all people in Canada will sit down and read everything that has been done to Indigenous people before they just say it's our own fault. Without a shift in that thinking, nothing is going to change.

Pauline Muskego

The day I received a call from Commissioner Michelle Audette to ask if I would consider sitting as a member of the National Family Advisory Circle (NFAC) for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) is a day I will never forget.

I recall the emotions I felt knowing that I would be honouring the memory of all MMIWG across this land. My late daughter, Daleen Kay Bosse (Muskego) was one of the thousands who had gone missing and was later found murdered. It was because of what we went through as a family and what all families have gone through and continue to go through that I said yes, that it would be an honour. My family was greatly impacted by our loss. Being able to tell our truth was a way for us to heal from the pain we went through; however, it is a life-long healing journey for a lot of the family members.

As a member of NFAC, these past few years have been challenging yet rewarding, knowing that a National Inquiry of this magnitude and scope was able to accomplish what it did in the short time it was given. The NIMMIWG is now in its final stages of completion and if it wasn't for the Commissioners and staff who stood strong and pushed forward despite all the opposition, challenges, and obstacles, this National Inquiry would not have happened. For this I am thankful.

I close by saying, thank you.... It was an honour to sit as a member of NFAC.

"My Loved One Is Forever In My Heart"

Toni Blanchard

I decided to become involved in NFAC to have a voice for our Northern area and help make sure something is done.

Being a part of the NFAC group helps with my healing and makes me stronger.

I want people to know that my sister, who was murdered in 2008 in Whitehorse, Yukon, had a face. She was a daughter, mother, sister, auntie, granddaughter, and was very loved. She left behind three beautiful children, who loved her very much. It is a hard journey to be able to talk openly about what happened. I always end up crying and hating, when I shouldn't be. All MMIWG2S have people who care and love them so very much.

I hope the National Inquiry leaves as its legacy a beginning of decolonization, and that all governments implement all Calls for Justice.

Norma Jacobs

Guyohkohnyo Cayuga Nation of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy

Haudenosaunee people, like other Indigenous Peoples, are so used to struggling. We are prisoners in our own lands, struggling with the traumas inflicted on us with the arrival of settler people in our homelands, this great continent of North America, or, as the Original Peoples call it, “Turtle Island.”

Through these struggles, we try to protect our “Mother, the Earth.” We do this to provide for and leave something great for future generations, or as we say, our “coming faces yet unborn.”

Long ago, the Onkwehón:we, or Original Peoples, were given a sacred bundle made up of our songs, languages, families, ceremonies, and everything else that supports our way of life. But our people were beaten, enslaved and punished for using our language, coerced into giving up land, ridiculed for our way of life and labelled negatively, violating our sacred boundaries of space and time.

Even after we became aware of our own history, we dared not talk about it for fear of further punishment, or even for fear of losing something we kept safe in our own minds. If we saw someone violating our values and principles, not being accountable, we still did not speak up. We learned to keep quiet and stick with the status quo, don’t talk, don’t feel.

Now! We are breaking that bond and speaking about our truths, even as we are surrounded by our abusers and violators of our sacredness. It is possible to rebuild and restructure and restore our ceremonies and languages. It is our blood memory.

Our Creation started with prayer and ceremony, guided by a sacred council. The Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy provided us with our bundles of values and principles so we may experience this human journey with dignity and integrity.

Over 400 years ago, the Original Peoples made the first Treaty with European settlers, called the Two Row Wampum Treaty. The Two Row Treaty was about each people respecting each other’s sacred boundaries. Every Treaty was made with good intentions, respect, compassion and love.

Today, all of our demands are about respecting our values and principles. Settlers should respect Turtle Island from our perspective, as visitors in our homes. We have to speak out and instill responsibility and accountability in each and every living person.

It takes so much time to heal our wounds and scars and transform oneself because of the status quo. We have to heal not only ourselves, but also the trauma of our ancestors over generations. But until we can move away from the status quo, break the cycle and gather our strength, we will continue to have negative and hurtful relationships in this world and in our lives. By transforming ourselves we can stop this cycle and instill within those coming faces yet unborn the values and beliefs that will enhance our attitudes and behaviours for a more balanced future.

Our Values and Principles

Adenidao shra:	Compassion and Kindness
Dewadadrihwa noh Kwa:k:	Respecting One Another
Degayenawako:ngye:	Working Together
Dewagagenawako:ngye:	Assisting One Another
Esadatgehs:	Self-Reflection on Actions
Gaihwaedagoh:	Taking Responsibility
Gasgya:nyok:	Encouragement
Gasasdenhshra:	Strength & Supporting One Another
Drihwawaihsyo:	Honest Moral Conduct
Oihwadogehsra:	Being Truthful and Consistent
Sgeno:	Peaceful Thoughts and Actions
Ongwadeni:deo:	“Taking Care of Our Own”

Rebecca Moore

I am an l’nu woman who was born and raised in the Kjipuktuk district of Mi’kma’ki (so-called Halifax, Nova Scotia).

As an l’nu woman, I have been taught by my Elders that it is our inherent duty, as l’nu women, to take care of the water and to protect the water for the future seven generations. I feel that this is imperative for Canadians to understand. I take my inherent duty very seriously, which requires much of my time, effort, care, and attention.

Our inherent duty and responsibilities as an l’nu woman places us as a direct target for violence, harassment, police violence, misinformation by mainstream Canadians, criminalization, and incarceration. You see, it is not only Indigenous women who are living “at-risk” lifestyles or are on the streets who are being targeted, it is Indigenous women as a whole. Because non-Indigenous society benefits from settler-colonialism.

Being an Indigenous woman means living under a society and “civilization” that benefits from your voicelessness, invisibility, disappearance, non-existence, and erasure. Because if we don’t exist, then Canadians – while claiming to live an earnest and honest living – are free to steal and exploit what is rightfully ours by loosening the “Rule of Law” for themselves and tightening it to extinguish our existence and resistance.

Indigenous matriarchs – being the life-givers, grandmothers, clan mothers, and steering decision makers – are not affirmed or recognized by the colonial courts and systems for their significant place in Indigenous societies.

The Canadian government strips Indigenous women of their rightful place within Indigenous societies and the outside world. By imposing their colonial structures, Canada removes the decision-making power from the women and displaces it to corrupt government departments, agencies, and service providers, etc.

Being l’nu in theory isn’t illegal, but in practice, living in action as one is. We have Treaty rights under the Peace and Friendship Treaty, but good luck asserting them because the government is going to tell you, “No, you can’t do that.” When it comes to hunting, fishing, or “earning a moderate livelihood” with our own initiatives, we, as individual inherent rights holders and descendants of the land itself, are treated by the state as criminals.

The Canadian government prevents Indigenous women and their families from having the autonomy to earn a moderate livelihood and achieve their own safety and security. Until Indigenous women are given the power and authority to self-determine what happens within their own territories, we will always be at risk under Canada’s “Rule of Law.”

Lorraine Clements

I woke this morning to a soft but inviting snow covered mountain,
 A mountain of my childhood
 A mountain I returned to this week to move forward speak my truth and
 continue the healing within
 A mountain of pain
 A mountain of learning
 A mountain of Hope.
 My mountain has been a hard one to climb,
 In my time have never reached the top.
 Now with this day, my day of truth telling,
 My mountain is not too high.
 My mountain seems easier to climb.
 My mountain now has hope.
 My climb is just the beginning as with
 many others this week.
 Our mountain will be conquered.
 With love, kindness and always together,
 fighting the systems for Justice.



Photo submitted by Lorraine Clements; no copyright infringement intended.



Our Women and Girls Are Sacred: Reflections from the National Inquiry Elders and Grandmothers Circle

Introduction

Early on in the National Inquiry process, the Commissioners' Elder Advisors, or "Grandmothers," gathered in a sweatlodge in Quebec. They went into this ceremony asking themselves, what should the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls look like? What is the best way to do this work?

The sweatlodge was part of the Missinak Community Home, a safe house in Quebec City co-founded by Elder Pénélope Guay, Commissioner Audette's spiritual grandmother. As Pénélope shares, "We all got together there. And we came up with a plan, in our own way. We came up with a plan to see how the National Inquiry would proceed. For the Grandmothers [and Elders], for the Commissioners. What will our work be? That's how it went. We decided on everything you see. Our role, our involvement. That was when we decided on how it would all be done."¹



Members of the Elders and Grandmothers Circle. Left to right: Leslie Spillett, Laureen “Blu” Waters, Audrey Siegl, Louise Hauilli, and Bernie Williams. Not pictured: Kathy Louis and Pénélope Guay.

Elder Laureen “Blu” Waters, Grandmother to Commissioner Brian Eyolfson, was there as well: “When we came out of that sweat, one of the most important and profound things that came to being was that we needed to have something that showed our Indigeneity and that blanket idea came out of that. Those blankets that are hung up around the rooms [at the hearings]. Those blankets that identify people, identify their Nations, their names, their land masses, the things that they used for their cultures.... That was one of the most important things that I remember, is doing that sweat and coming out with that idea. And, that helped shape us and to make sure that we never forget about ceremony, to incorporate ceremony into everything that we do.”²

Ceremony, whatever it looks like, is deeply rooted in a people’s cultural identity. Incorporating ceremony into such a legal structure as a public inquiry is a way of reminding Indigenous families and survivors that this National Inquiry is to honour the sacred in them and in their lost loved ones. As a National Inquiry, we have faced criticism for a seemingly rigid and legalistic structure. Yet, within the limitations of our mandate, these words from the Grandmothers who have led us through the process remind us of the National Inquiry’s guiding principle: that our women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are sacred.

To honour their work, the National Inquiry asked the National Inquiry Elders and Grandmothers to sit down with the Research team, to include their reflections of this journey in the *Final Report*.³ This is one small way to acknowledge their incredible contributions, which often happen behind the scenes, as well as the work of mothers, grandmothers, aunts and caregivers guiding similar work across this land.

The National Inquiry Elders and Grandmothers Circle

The idea for an Elders or Grandmothers Circle first started in the fall of 2016. The Commissioners decided to each seek an Elder from their community to provide them with advice. Blu recalls that when Commissioner Eyolfson first offered tobacco to Blu, he explained that “he needed

somebody to be there as support for him, to help him with this important work that's being done and to make sure that we incorporate spirituality."⁴

The Commissioners decided to use the term “Grandmother” to represent the closer, kinship relationship that was developing between themselves and their Elders. While not all the Elders are biological grandmothers, they fill those traditional roles.

The current members of the Elders and Grandmothers Circle are: Pénélope Guay, French-speaking Innu Grandmother to Commissioner Audette; Louise Haulli, Inuk Elder to Commissioner Robinson; Kathy Louis, Cree Elder to Chief Commissioner Buller; Laureen “Blu” Waters, Cree/Métis/Mi'kmaw Grandmother to Commissioner Eyolfson; and Bernie Williams, English-speaking Haida/Nuu-chah-nulth/Coast Salish Grandmother to Commissioner Audette. Leslie Spillett, Cree/Métis Grandmother to Executive Director Jennifer Rattray, joined the National Inquiry in the spring of 2018, and Audrey Siegl, Bernie's niece and a member of the National Inquiry's health support team, also supports the Elders and Grandmothers Circle.

As Indigenous women who are survivors and family members themselves, the Elders and Grandmothers are witnesses to the many ways Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA people have been devalued and dehumanized, making them prime targets for violence. Working with the National Inquiry has given the Grandmothers another way to do the same work they were already doing, but in a new way. Each of the Commissioners' Grandmothers bring deep community knowledge and practical expertise to their roles.

Grandmother Pénélope is a proud Innu woman from Mashteuiatsh in Quebec, who strongly believes in the power of reconnecting with your culture to heal the wounds of history. Her Innu mother was deprived of her First Nations status when she married a métis man, as stipulated by the *Indian Act*. As an adult, Pénélope has had to recover her culture through healing and reclaim her identity as an Indigenous woman.

Pénélope co-founded the Missinak Community Home (la Maison Communautaire Missinak), a safe house for Indigenous women in Quebec City, with her daughter 20 years ago. There she sees many young women who are deeply affected by the trauma of residential schools, as well as by substance use and homelessness, the consequences of residential schools today. With nowhere to go, many of them end up being exploited on the streets. However, Pénélope also gets to witness what she calls “miracles”⁵ – the extraordinary change that can happen when you give people time and space to heal.

Elder Louise lives in Igloolik, Nunavut, a small community of less than 2,000 people. Much of Louise's work in the past has been focused on strengthening Inuit traditional values and making Inuit knowledge and skills more accessible to the Nunavut government. She has worked as the Inuit Societal Value Project Coordinator for Igloolik, where she offered traditional Inuit counselling and did radio shows on Inuit family values. She worked on community wellness projects for Igloolik and Nunavut, and was a Nunavut Human Rights Tribunal member from 2004 to 2013. She was also an Inuktitut language specialist in elementary schools and visits Elders in Igloolik to make sure they get some help around the house.

Louise shares that violence is a significant issue in the Arctic, just as it is for so many First Nations and Métis communities, although the culture of silence is even stronger: “For those of us living in the Arctic, we have experienced this, but we are less vocal.... Indeed, Inuit too have gone through exactly the same experience of mistreatment.”⁶ She emphasizes how much she has learned from hearing the stories of so many other Indigenous women in Canada, and how important it is not to feel that we know it all, but to really pause, listen to the families and survivors, and learn from what they have to share.

Elder Kathy says: “My name is Kathy Louis. My views as an Elder from Samson Cree Nation are mine and those of my Ancestors who were Leaders and Healers. Growing up on the reserve was a lived experience throughout my life.” She was raised by parents and ancestors steeped in strong traditional values. She is a residential school survivor and has spent her life helping her people heal, especially men and women involved in the criminal justice system. Kathy was the Pacific Regional Vice-Chair of the National Parole Board, where she served for many years, and successfully helped introduce Elder-assisted parole hearings in Canada along with two male First Nations Elders. She has also been awarded Canada’s Meritorious Service Medal and the Order of British Columbia. In her work, Kathy saw many women who had acted violently in their lives, but: “I observed that as the way they may have been treated as children and young adults growing up, and this was their lived experience in adult relationships. All this stems from racism, oppression and colonization.”⁷

When she isn’t working with the National Inquiry, Kathy volunteers with several urban Aboriginal organizations in Vancouver. In particular, she is working on the development of an Aboriginal Family Healing Court Conference project. This is an Elder-driven project that focuses on helping families involved with the child welfare system develop healing plans, to re-connect with their own Indigenous cultural values and keep families together.

Grandmother Leslie (or Giizhigooweyaabikwe, Painted Sky Woman, White Bear Clan) is a Cree/Métis woman from northern Manitoba. She began her career as a journalist and photographer before dedicating herself to what some people call “community development,” but she calls Nation-building.

Leslie was one of the principle founders of Mother of Red Nations Women’s Council of Manitoba, sat on the Native Women’s Association of Canada Board of Directors, and is the founder of Ka Ni Kanichihk, a Winnipeg organization that provides Indigenous-led programming, including for family members of missing and murdered women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people. Leslie, who has been raising awareness on this issue since the early 2000s, says: “One of the most extreme forms of the colonial project has been about violence against Indigenous women and girls. So that includes all kinds of violence, including state violence and discrimination, which has caused so much trauma. And at its most extreme is, of course, the missing and murdered women who just have been murdered because they were Indigenous, or who have disappeared, again, because they were Indigenous.”⁸

Grandmother Blu (or Istchii Nikamoon, meaning Earth Song) is a Two-Spirit Cree, Mi'kmaw and Métis community Elder working in the Toronto area. She is Wolf Clan, and her family is from Big River Saskatchewan, Star Blanket Reserve and Bra'dor Lake, Eskasoni First Nations, Nova Scotia. She currently works at Seneca College as an Elder on campus providing traditional teachings and one-to-one counselling to the students and faculty.

Blu was first raised by her Kokum (grandmother), learning traditional medicines and hunting geese, rabbits, ducks and muskrats in Toronto's High Park. At age 10, she was adopted into a white family. While she later sought out those Indigenous connections again, it caused a lot of pain in her life. Blu sees many other people going through this, too: "For a lot of Indigenous Peoples, they lose those connections and they're lost. They're wandering around lost, but knowing that there's a big piece of them inside that's missing."⁹

Grandmother Bernie (or Gul Giit Jaad, Golden Spruce Woman, of Raven Clan), is a Haida master carver, artist and activist. She is also a survivor and family member who has spent her life advocating for Indigenous women, particularly in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES).

Bernie's first love was her art, and she apprenticed under world-renown Haida carver Bill Reid, the only female apprentice he has ever had. Bernie's work is recognized around the world, and one of her proudest achievements was creating a traditional Haida button blanket for the first Indigenous woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Through all the different kinds of violence she survived, art and music were the things that provided safety for her. Her art today is her biggest passion after her children and grandchildren.

However, she also answered her Elders' call to advocate for her people. She first joined the Red Power in 1974 and was mentored by other Indigenous Elders – "power house" women like Harriet Nahanee, Kitty Sparrow, Reta Blind, Viola Thomas, Carol Martin, Mary McCaskill, Noddy Bernice Brown, and Phillipa Ryan – who taught her who she really was and how she was connected to the land. She continues this work with other women on the front-lines of the Downtown Eastside, with no funding, simply going wherever she's called into the early hours of the morning. As Bernie says, "All I ever wanted to do was to bring the truth out – because I am a survivor of sexual abuse, domestic violence, Sixties Scoop, Indian day school, residential school, and all I wanted was, you know, the truth to come out. That women like me, you know, who have lost family members, like my mother and my three sisters... And then to hear, you know, the stories all across Canada, that we had, like, a common thread together in that, eh? And, it was the mismanaging of so many of our loved ones all across Canada."¹⁰

Audrey Siegl (or sɣtɛmtəna:t, St'agid Jaad) is "Musqueam all the way back to the first sunrise,"¹¹ with Haida connections through Bernie. She is one of the National Inquiry's traditional medicine carriers. In this role, she travels to almost all of the National Inquiry's public events to support people as they need it.

Audrey is also a survivor and family member, who came to this work through activism: “A lot of people say we ‘protest’ ... I protest nothing. *I protect*. Big difference. What I stand for is as important as ... what stands against me.”¹² Later on, she adds, “I do the work I do because of all the women who came before me who could not.”¹³

Leading with the Grandmothers’ Perspectives

The Grandmothers’ role at the National Inquiry has always been flexible, and has evolved over time.

Louise, Commissioner Robinson’s Grandmother, started her work with the National Inquiry with the intention of sitting by the Commissioner and being an Elder for her support.¹⁴

Pénélope similarly explains: “We have a role that is quite important, because we support the Commissioners in their work to ensure that the vision for each approach respects the spiritual values of our people. We’re always there from the start to the end ... if we’re needed for information, or for our thoughts, or to ask us questions. We’re always listening. We Grandmothers follow along during the National Inquiry, and we meet to talk about how it went. What can be improved? What can be done? We also meet over Skype to come together and prepare for the next event.”¹⁵

At the Grandmothers’ direction, the National Inquiry did its best to incorporate the local traditions and cultures into its hearings wherever possible. As Blu explains, “Each Nation has its own ceremonies that have sustained them over the beginning of time and they’re all valuable. None is greater than the other.”¹⁶ This included the way the rooms were arranged and the opportunity for families to access both Indigenous and Western healing supports.

One of the consistent reminders of Indigenous women’s power and place was the bundle of sacred objects that traveled with the National Inquiry from hearing to hearing. The National Inquiry’s bundle started with a red willow basket, a qulliq (an Inuit women’s oil lamp), a copper cup with water, a smudge bowl and various medicines. We added to this bundle with each hearing as people gifted us a Red River cart, a birch bark biting, sealskin, photos, songs, feathers, stones, and many more medicines. Pénélope explained that: “We bring our sacred objects, like our eagle feathers. All these objects, that’s our path, it’s our way of doing things.... It’s like our way of giving thanks. Thanking the Creator a bit for the work that we have done too.”¹⁷

As Pénélope points out, making spirituality so visible in the National Inquiry is one of the things that makes it unique: “That’s still important. It’s an inquiry, there are Commissioners. Witnesses, lawyers. Putting spirituality at the centre of this National Inquiry allows us to work in a calmer atmosphere, rooted in cultural values that are thousands of years old.”¹⁸

Incorporating Indigenous ways of doing things has been critical to making the process of the Inquiry, and not just the recommendations or the *Final Report*, as healing and as decolonizing as possible.

The Grandmothers also used their strengths differently within the National Inquiry.

Blu describes her role, particularly at the hearings, as one that encompassed many different aspects: “We can be sitting in the back talking with a family member who is having a hard time, or we can be sitting up at the front supporting the Commissioners and having them know that we’re standing there with them, we’re there to watch them, we’re there to pray for them, we’re there to make sure that the Creator is helping them, to hear the words that are being spoken and to understand what they’re hearing.... Or the next day, we may be, you know, sitting with a person who has just come in off the street and is having a breakdown because they hear their life story being told, right? The same thing has happened to them and they’ve had no supports.”¹⁹

Bernie is not an Elder – her role in life is as a land defender and peacekeeper – but she takes her role as a Grandmother at the National Inquiry very seriously. Her most important focus is on supporting the families and survivors. She says it comes down to being a humble servant, lending a hand, and making sure the families, the Commissioners, the staff and everyone else are okay.

The Grandmothers emphasized that while they were originally asked to guide the Commissioners, they worked with the entire National Inquiry community. Blu says, “We support the different members of the Commission itself, so the cameramen, the security teams, you know, the Parties with Standing, the health workers, the Registrar. You know, all the community members that make up this National Inquiry, we’re here for every one of them, none of them has a greater role than the other.”²⁰

As part of the health team, Audrey brought comfort and healing to people using traditional medicines. She says that the number one medicine she brings is love. Number two is patience, and number three is space: “My granny taught me that you have to be able to do what you do with only you. It’s good if you have the medicines, the actual medicines there, but if you can’t do – if you can’t work on someone, if you can’t work with someone with nothing, with just you, that’s not good.”²¹

Audrey explains some of the tools she uses: “I have an eagle fan, I have an owl fan. We have different kinds of sage, we have beautiful tobaccos, we have copal. We have medicines that have been gifted from all across Canada, north to south.... Everyone who comes in here and brings medicine, it is my job, and I am honoured and humbled to do it, to take care of them.”²²

The National Inquiry also makes use of the Grandmothers’ expertise in specific areas—for example, Elder Kathy’s expertise with the justice system, or Bernie’s expertise on the DTES, as well as their perspectives as Quebécoise, Inuit and Two-Spirit women. Their advice in crafting the *Final Report* has helped ensure that the report will help keep women and girls safe, and won’t simply collect dust on a shelf.

What Does it Mean to Be “Sacred”?

One of the most unique ways that the Grandmothers have guided the National Inquiry is by helping us understand what “sacred” looks like in everyday life and in the context of this work. What does “sacred” mean, and if women and girls are sacred, how does that affect what we do?

From the Grandmothers, we can see that the idea of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people being “sacred” is as multi-faceted as people themselves.

Elder Kathy, who is fluent in Cree (Y dialect), explains the literal meaning of “sacred”: “It’s Creator-gifting, Creator-power-gifting. You can say it in different ways and it will mean the same. It’s Creator-centred-thinking.... It’s a sacredness of life.”²³ After a bit more thought, she adds, “It’s ... you have the gifts that were given to you and you’re putting them to use for the good of humanity.”²⁴

Grandmother Blu echoes this idea: “For me, one of the lessons I learned was that in Creation, the Creator made us and we’re all gifts. We carry gifts within ourselves and each one of us has our own unique gifts. But, together as communities, when we share those gifts, we’re very rich. It’s more valuable than any monetary means can be, because we know, and we can understand, and we can help each other, and we can take care of each other, and support and know what the right things are to do.”²⁵

For Blu, one of her gifts is being Two-Spirited. She describes it: “As a Two-Spirited person, I encompass both that male masculinity side and that female side. It’s a delicate balance. Some days I feel more feminine, some days I feel more masculine. But, for me, it’s a blessing. For others, they look at it as you’re a freak. You should either be man or woman, you can’t be both. I don’t know how many times I’ve heard the saying, ‘God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve’ just out of ignorance. So, we have a lot of ignorances out there that we fight against every day.”²⁶

Blu explains that it was important to include 2SLGBTQQIA (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual) and gender-diverse people in the National Inquiry’s mandate, because they have always been part of Indigenous circles: “Our Two-Spirited people, our trans people, they’ve always been in community. They were ostracized through colonization. They were told that their lifestyles were not appropriate, that they couldn’t carry on the way they were. But, we’re still here. And, that we need to teach each other the valuable skills that we pick up along the way. We need to support each other in doing our cultural work to reclaim who we are.”²⁷

One of the most common ways Indigenous Peoples recognize women as sacred is by bringing new life into a community. Grandmother Blu explains: “Our women are so sacred. They control everything. They are the heart of our nations, right? ... Our women are the ones who are the caregivers, they’re the ones that can bring life forward, they create that new life. Yes, they need another partner to help them do that with, but they’re the ones that carry that life.”²⁸

However, women and 2SLGBTQQIA people are sacred in many other ways, as well, since they have many gifts to offer. As Leslie explains: “I do believe that ... we are kind of portals for life. But I don’t think that’s all we are, you know? I think we’re so much more than birthers. So I don’t want to dismiss the sacredness of women as life-givers, but ... that is so not our only role.”²⁹ She points out that everyone and every community is going to reclaim women’s responsibilities differently, and that culture evolves.

Audrey offers another way to look at it: “For our young women, for our grandmothers, for our women who travel with us, we are sacred because we exist. We are sacred because we have survived.”

In many ways, the journey to the National Inquiry started in places like Vancouver’s DTES. There isn’t anything that respects the idea that women and girls are sacred there – which is why Bernie and others working with Indigenous women in the Downtown Eastside always remind them that they are important, that they matter. Bernie says, “I walk up to them and tell them, I just want to let you know how much you are loved.... Contact your families and let them know you’re okay. That’s the message we tell them, because they feel judged a lot. That’s my front-line work, is to let them know that no matter what, we’re fighting for them. You try to give them that little ray of hope. No matter what, we’re fighting for them and we value them.”³⁰

Grandmother Blu sums it up: “Women are the life-givers, but women are not going to be life-givers without men. So, that’s a balance in life. Our Two-Spirited people bring that balance again, of masculine and femininity. Our lives are not about our sexuality or even our gender identity, it’s about us being a human being. It’s about us following those teachings that our ancestors put in place for us, those teachings of kindness and respect, truth, honesty, humility, love, wisdom, about living those ways of life. Trying to look at each other as a valuable portion of a community, what gifts does that person have to bring to the table, so that we can become a very rich table, right?”³¹

When we honour our own gifts and the gifts in others, we are recognizing the sacred in all of us.

Understanding and Restoring Power and Place

Based on this idea of people’s gifts being respected and fulfilled, the National Inquiry’s vision is to help Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people “reclaim their power and place.” One of the best ways to do this is to recognize the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being. This often starts with learning, or re-learning, what those Indigenous ways are.

Grandmother Leslie shares that this approach is not often welcome when it comes to Indigenous people and organizations trying to suggest their own solutions: “Assimilation is still how the dominant culture approaches Indigenous Peoples. Somehow, we need to become them to be okay. We need to have their values. We need to have their world views. If we don’t, then there’s something psychologically wrong, deficient in us.”³²

Several Grandmothers spoke about how they themselves grew up separated from their culture. Grandmother Pénélope, whose mother had internalized a lot of shame for being Indigenous, had her “wake-up call” when she first started learning the true history of Indigenous Peoples: “Today, I teach this history wherever I’m invited. It takes me at least three hours from first contact to today: what happened? What happened in residential schools? What happened with the *Indian Act*, that made women like me lose their whole identity, their pride? No, as long as the Creator grants me life, I don’t think I’ll ever stop telling this history.”³³

Elder Kathy's most important Cree teachings are to love, respect, help and care for one another, and to be honest and kind with one another. She says, "The more centred you are in your life, the more you realize your true essence and purpose in life of being a strong Indigenous woman. Also I believe that, in order to live and be of help to anyone, we need to know and understand our own values. We need to know who we are. Then you can take risks to do things differently and contribute to society to bring about change. Because all of us can contribute that way. When we recognize our gifts from our Creator, anything is possible. You make it real as you continue to step forward."³⁴

Kathy is very aware that one of the greatest losses for Indigenous Peoples today is the loss of language, culture and a sense of belonging. She witnessed first-hand how powerful restoring this sense of belonging could be in Elder-assisted parole hearings for Indigenous offenders, where she said they were "very, very receptive."³⁵ Sweat ceremonies are also important to women's healing, as well as immersion-style training for all service providers who are part of the corrections system.

Kathy also shares that the inmates were functioning better than the staff because of the incredible impact Elder involvement and ceremony was having: "Men and women came to prison, admitted they came to prison to learn about their culture. To learn anything about having to do with traditions. And yet some of the men and women ... were brought up with the traditions, but had not lived and practiced any of that."³⁶ In doing this work, she has followed the teachings – of love, compassion and forgiveness for others.

Leslie sees her work at Ka Ni Kanichihk, where all of the programs are culturally-based and Indigenous-led, as an act of sovereignty: "It was us knowing that we had our solutions and learning about how to apply those solutions in a way that really has an impact in the community."³⁷ She said it was also explicitly about reclaiming women's power: "I'm not interested in, you know, taking over men. I think that we want to restore that balance ... within our culture groups, and to show our girls and our boys that there is a place that we hold them both up, and they are equally sacred and they're equally valuable, and they are equally needed to be a part of our Nations."³⁸

Leslie reminds us: "There is no nationhood without women and without not only women, without women playing a fundamental and equal role within that Nation. There is no nationhood without that."³⁹

Reclaiming power and place will look different across Canada, because of the diversity of Indigenous Peoples. As Elder Louise pointed out, many plans made in the south don't work when people try to implement them with Inuit, because they didn't come from Inuit.

However, Louise also sees many cultural similarities between Inuit and First Nations in how they have responded to the hurt and trauma of colonization: "Inuit in the Arctic, and the First Nations, are all one group and we have cultural values that we can recognize within each other."⁴⁰

One of the biggest challenges to reclaiming this power and place is how many women and 2SLGBTQIA people continue to be lost every day. Blu explained that "[We lose] all their

teachings. All their life lessons are lost. To learn – to be able to walk the same path that someone has already walked takes a long time. And, when those people are taken early from us or when there’s people who pass on into the spirit world, all their knowledge, their life experiences go with them.”⁴¹

Ultimately, it comes down to listening to Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. We have to value their voices, and fight against the stereotypes and centuries of colonization that have de-valued and dismissed the many gifts they have to offer. Leslie emphasizes this: “I do believe, and I believe to this day, that there has to be an independent Indigenous women’s voice. And that doesn’t mean that we don’t play a role within our Nations or within the community. But that’s, I think, a really necessary thing at this time.”⁴²

As Pénélope says, “It’s really important for Indigenous women to speak up. I tell myself the more they speak, the more they regain their strength. The more of us women who speak up, it’s strength. It also shows our place.”⁴³ She adds: “Taking our place also means moving forward in spite of pitfalls and prejudice. We must take our rightful place; this is the strength I wish for us. I really believe that.”⁴⁴

How the National Inquiry is Creating Change

The Grandmothers have seen some of the changes this National Inquiry is already making, for themselves and their communities, as well had to deal with its biggest challenges.

Louise reflects on how much work is still left to be done, especially with the National Inquiry’s short timeline: “There is still a lot of work. Those we hear from are sharing stories, these are stories they are finally sharing, of what they have been holding onto in their hearts, the pain that they have been carrying, the untold stories they have been holding onto for many years without any type of support. This is what we are seeing today... But this is their story and now they have been given an opportunity to be grounded and work towards the next stage.”⁴⁵

Another challenge is that incorporating Indigenous ways into the legal inquiry structure wasn’t always successful. The short time frame, bureaucratic rules and requirements and internal difficulties all contributed to make this work as challenging at times as it was rewarding.

Bernie, Blu and Audrey all spoke about how this work – both in the National Inquiry, and outside of it – can wear you down, to the point where it’s impossible to think what a “normal day” would look like. The violence goes on, even as the National Inquiry ends. Bernie sees this every day: “These are young kids that are just fighting for their own survival and that. Yet nothing – unless you have somebody that’s going to come down there and look for you, you’re done. It’s only two ways out. Either somebody is going to come in there that loves and cares about you enough, like your family or your relatives, or you’re going out in a body bag.”⁴⁶

Between January and September 2018, Bernie lost a staggering 88 friends or family members to violence in the Downtown Eastside. Children are experiencing terrible psychosis, she says, “and everyone just kind of turns a blind eye.”⁴⁷

Leslie sees these challenges in Winnipeg, as well – particularly how women are blamed for the violence they experience: “We know that they’ve been called prostitutes, drug addicts. And then there’s always the polite terminology, which is coded, racially coded, like ‘at-risk,’ or those kinds of things. There’s ways of people washing their hands as if to say, ‘Well... that has really nothing to do with us.’ They’ve caused their own disappearances. They’ve contributed to their own disappearances, and/or rapes, and/or murders, by their personal behaviours – by the way that they are dressed, by what they were doing, by being Indigenous, and by being women. Many people don’t see the system as violence. But in fact, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is the result of imposed poverty, legal and individual racism, discrimination and the patriarchy.”⁴⁸

However, the Grandmothers also recognized some of the changes already starting as a result of this National Inquiry. For Louise, one of the biggest impacts has been that more and more Inuit are speaking out: “Recently we have broken the silence, given the recent ability to tell our stories. Through the First Nations’ willingness to open their stories by sharing them, our stories are being heard. The Commissioners’ Inquiry is what opened this.”⁴⁹

Pénélope sees these commonalities between our stories, too: “It’s striking too, all their stories. They show how fragile we are, and at the same time, how strong we are. And it still continues today. That’s what strikes me, and how resilient we are.”⁵⁰

She sees that we are at a critical juncture: “With the National Inquiry, that’s what I say. We’re at a turning point here in Quebec just as we are in every community in Canada. Every Indigenous person in the country knows now that it’s not normal to be second-class citizens in your own country. This will make us stronger. That’s what the National Inquiry will produce.”⁵¹

Most important is the support, comfort and healing the National Inquiry has been able to provide to families and survivors – work the Grandmothers will carry on past the life of the National Inquiry. As Bernie says, “Being asked to be part of the National Inquiry has been one of the biggest responsibilities of my life, and one of the hardest. I’ve met amazing Elders, family members and survivors all across our beautiful nation and it’s given me the opportunity to walk shoulder to shoulder with families and be part of the change. I’m amazed at how resilient we all are – through our journey, we still have a sense of humour and we’re still standing together. This has been a healing journey for me.... It’s been tough sometimes, but that’s what made us stronger and closer through the process.”⁵²

Bernie also makes a point to single out the Commissioners. “I have never seen a group of four more incredible human beings, who have taken on so much starting with nothing. They are the true warriors. They have put in long hours, long days, time spent away from their families. The Creator doesn’t make mistakes, and he knew exactly who was fittest for this journey. Now, I’ve going to support them right to the very end.”

As Elder Kathy says, “Right from the start of the National Inquiry it appears to have been held to a different standard by the government and mainstream society. However, I strongly believe that our Spiritual ancestors have guided us in powerful ways to attain what our Creator and our

ancestors rightfully gifted us, with our lifeblood – they left us their DNA to continue to right the wrongs for our loved ones, the missing and murdered mothers, girls, sisters, aunts, great-grandmothers and great-great-aunts. I have observed a hopeful future for empowerment, for recognition, acknowledgement of survival and resilience, and in particular the Canadian society’s need to validate the strong Indigenous women that we are. Perhaps some of us have not yet fully realized that Indigenous women (people) come from a strong sacred essence, teachings and knowing of personal power.”

Violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people violates that understanding that each of us is sacred. This can create long-lasting trauma, but trauma is not the end of the story. As Audrey puts it: “Here I am, after a lifetime of hiding myself and shaming myself, proud, humbled and empowered. Empowered by truth, empowered by trauma and unspeakable atrocities, to travel and be bold enough to say and to work with medicines that have existed since the first sunrise, as long as we have.”⁵³

Next Steps: The National Inquiry as a Beginning, Not an End

As Louise points out, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is a beginning, not an end. Everyone has a part to play going forward.

For many non-Indigenous people, it’s important to be ready to “unlearn” some learned behaviours. Blu points out: “There’s still a lot of others out there that don’t really think this is that important. They don’t know the histories, they don’t know that. They think these things happened 300 years ago and why are we still talking about it.”⁵⁴ Bernie adds, “If you’re not outraged, you’re not paying attention. This is every Canadian’s responsibility not to turn a blind eye.”

For Leslie, getting individual people creating change is the most important step: “Individuals have a role in these things as well. They can either support the status quo or resist it.”⁵⁵ Later on, she adds: “I have faith in the community. I have faith in the power of the people. That’s where power truly is.”⁵⁶

Leslie continues: “We have to mourn our losses, but we can’t let it stop us. We have to just keep going. And that is the strength of the prayers of the grandmothers and the ancestors, that it’s our job now, it’s all of our jobs to have strong prayers, and to have strong love for everybody. That’s the medicine.”⁵⁷

Blu also emphasizes that governments have to do better: “It’s got to be the government communicating with the different communities on all the issues that surround those communities, whether it be water, whether it be land, whether it be suicides, whether it be missing persons, whether it be housing, whether it be lack of resources. The government has to start listening.”⁵⁸

Louise sees hope for the future in collaboration, or mutual understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples – for example, by using Inuit and First Nations cultural values in areas like family services and other programs, where bureaucratic and Indigenous values seem to clash.⁵⁹

Pénélope reminds us that reclaiming Indigenous values is also political: “I work with a group of Indigenous women and men, and we work on crafts, and one time we were making moccasins. I said, ‘Do you know that what you’re doing is political? Because if we no longer know how to make our moccasins, embroidered, it’s a part of us that we lose.’ Now, that’s what they say. Making our moccasins is political, yes, it’s true. Because it’s part of our culture.”⁶⁰ As we will discuss in more detail later in the report, culture is the foundation of nationhood. Teaching people how to make moccasins not only is an act of personal growth, but it strengthens the cultural identity of a Nation.

This journey may be a hard one, but Kathy encourages people to “trust yourself. Trust your heart.”⁶¹ She shares a quote from Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, a professor at the University of California, that has been very important to her in her healing work: “ ‘We do not serve the weak or the broken. What we serve is the wholeness in each other and the wholeness in life. The part in you that I serve is the same part that is strengthened in me when I serve. Unlike helping and fixing and rescuing, service is mutual. There are many ways to serve and strengthen the life around us: through friendship or parenthood or work, by kindness, by compassion, by generosity or acceptance. Through our philanthropy, our example, our encouragement, our active participation, our belief. No matter how we do this, our service will bless us.’ ”⁶²

Kathy reminds us, “We’re only given one life, and my gosh, we have to make the best of it when we’re walking on Mother Earth and do the best for all of humanity.”⁶³

In the meantime, the Grandmothers will carry on – through public policy, through women’s shelters, by educating others and in their home communities.

Pénélope says she will continue to walk on this journey, no matter how difficult: “I will always continue to walk despite the pitfalls that there may be or the learning experiences that are difficult. I’ll never lose hope. Because there’s always someone put on our path to help us understand things.... It’s important to believe that we can change things even if we’re alone. When we believe, we can change something. We can change the course of history.”⁶⁴

Kathy is an example of someone who has survived a lot of colonial oppression, and has given back so much to her community in spite of that. She says, “You can carry on, you can become something that your parents and ancestors knew you could make happen of your life. You can carry the lifeblood in a way that you don’t understand when you’re a kid. Much like a flower blossoming, it doesn’t blossom fast. It takes years.... But those are the times we grow, because we’re pushed to the limit of having to grow.”⁶⁵ She adds: “And it’s not just for Aboriginal people. Canadian society’s going to learn from what we write and what we do and what we say. They may not like some of the stuff they hear. That’s part of healing process.”⁶⁶

Audrey encourages Indigenous women to “make yourself strong, make yourself smart, make yourself invincible, connect to women around you, support women around you, honour women around you, guide women around you to places of healing.”⁶⁷ She adds: “Yes, we have a shit ton left in front of us to do, but look at how far we’ve come and look at whose shoulders we’re

standing on to keep carrying ourselves with dignity and respect, and to keep knocking down those walls, to keep shining the light, to keep leading with love, to keep leading with medicine, to keep reconnecting to ourselves while we’re surviving a genocide and being accountable to the Canadian government for legalities that they’re using against us to carry on that genocide.”⁶⁸

Bernie will never take “no” for an answer: “As long as our women and our children are still going missing and being murdered at a high rate, I’m still going to be on those front-lines.”⁶⁹

Bernie said she’s been asked many times, why do you do this work? “And, I’m always reminded, well, of Mother Teresa, she was coddling this beautiful brown baby. She was in Calcutta and she was asked the question. And, she said, where else can you see the face of God?... And, that resonated.... It hit me like a ton of bricks. I could not stop crying. Because every human being that you see, at the end of the day, we all belong on that big hoop of life together. And, these women, why? I can only say what’s in my own heart. But, if I was ever asked to, you know – I have no regrets and I would do this over and over again for the women, because they matter.”⁷⁰

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| <p>1 Interview with Pénélope Guay, September 18, 2018, by Annie Bergeron, p. 6.</p> <p>2 Interview with Laureen “Blu” Waters, October 4, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 12.</p> <p>3 Some quotes have been edited for clarity in collaboration with the Grandmothers.</p> <p>4 Interview with Laureen “Blu” Waters, October 4, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 7.</p> <p>5 Interview with Pénélope Guay, September 18, 2018, by Annie Bergeron, p. 22.</p> <p>6 Interview with Louise Haulli, September 14, 2018, by Lisa Koperqualuk, p. 3 and 9.</p> <p>7 Interview with Kathy Louis, September 26, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 42.</p> <p>8 Interview with Leslie Spillett, December 4, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, pp. 3-4.</p> <p>9 Interview with Laureen “Blu” Waters, October 4, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 5.</p> <p>10 Interview with Bernie Williams and Audrey Siegl, September 30, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 6.</p> <p>11 Interview with Bernie Williams and Audrey Siegl, September 30, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 2.</p> <p>12 Interview with Bernie Williams and Audrey Siegl, September 30, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, pp. 12-13.</p> <p>13 Interview with Bernie Williams and Audrey Siegl, September 30, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 63.</p> | <p>14 Interview with Louise Haulli, September 14, 2018, by Lisa Koperqualuk, pp. 1-2.</p> <p>15 Interview with Pénélope Guay, September 18, 2018, by Annie Bergeron, pp. 2-3.</p> <p>16 Interview with Laureen “Blu” Waters, October 4, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 26.</p> <p>17 Interview with Pénélope Guay, September 18, 2018, by Annie Bergeron, pp. 7-8.</p> <p>18 Interview with Pénélope Guay, September 18, 2018, by Annie Bergeron, p. 8.</p> <p>19 Interview with Laureen “Blu” Waters, October 4, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 14.</p> <p>20 Interview with Laureen “Blu” Waters, October 4, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 15.</p> <p>21 Interview with Bernie Williams and Audrey Siegl, September 30, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 22.</p> <p>22 Interview with Bernie Williams and Audrey Siegl, September 30, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, pp. 22-23.</p> <p>23 Interview with Kathy Louis, September 26, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 114.</p> <p>24 Interview with Kathy Louis, September 26, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, pp. 115-116.</p> <p>25 Interview with Laureen “Blu” Waters, October 4, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, pp. 13-14.</p> <p>26 Interview with Laureen “Blu” Waters, October 4, 2018, by Kelsey Hutton, p. 19.</p> |
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Introduction to the Final Report: Understanding Violence against Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA People

Introduction: Listening Deeply

Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in Canada have been the targets of violence for far too long. This truth is undeniable. The fact that this National Inquiry is happening now doesn't mean that Indigenous Peoples waited this long to speak up; it means it took this long for Canada to listen.

More than 2,380 people participated in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, some in more ways than one. Four hundred and sixty-eight family members and survivors of violence shared their experiences and recommendations at 15 Community Hearings. Over 270 family members and survivors shared their stories with us in 147 private, or in-camera, sessions. Almost 750 people shared through statement gathering, and 819 people created artistic expressions to become part of the National Inquiry's Legacy Archive. Another 84 Expert Witnesses, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, front-line workers, and officials provided testimony in nine Institutional and Expert and Knowledge Keeper Hearings.

The truths shared in these National Inquiry hearings tell the story – or, more accurately, thousands of stories – of acts of genocide against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. The violence the National Inquiry heard amounts to a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. This genocide has been empowered by colonial structures evidenced notably by the *Indian Act*, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights, leading directly to the current increased rates of violence, death, and suicide in Indigenous populations.

Defining Genocide

The term “genocide” was first used by the Polish-Jewish legal scholar Raphael Lemkin at a conference in Madrid in 1933. Lemkin later elaborated his ideas in a book, published in 1944, dealing with German actions within the context of the buildup to the Second World War. The term “genocide,” as coined by Lemkin, is a hybrid between the Greek root *genos* (“family,” “tribe,” or “race”) and the Latin suffix *-cide* (“killing”).

“Genocide,” in its original construction, is defined as coordinated actions aimed at the destruction of a group, committed against individual members belonging to that group. In Lemkin’s construction of the idea, genocide would have two phases that could contribute to establishing the political domination of the oppressor group. The first included the destruction of the “national pattern of the group,” and the second phase included what he called the “imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor,” which could be imposed on the population that remained in the territory, or on the territory itself within the context of colonization of the land by a new group.

Writing in the context of the German state’s actions in the Second World War, Lemkin defined “genocide” as occurring across several different fields:

- political, including the attack on, and subsequent disintegration of, political institutions
- social, including the abolition of existing laws and the imposition of new justice systems
- cultural, including forbidding the use of languages in schools and in the press
- economic, including the destruction of the financial base of the group, and including actions aimed to cripple or to reverse its development
- biological, including measures aimed at decreasing the birthrate among groups of people
- physical, including the endangering of health, and mass killings
- religious, including the disruption of existing systems of religion and spirituality, and the imposition of new systems
- moral, including “attempts to create an atmosphere of moral debasement within this group”¹

Lemkin’s definition of genocide included an important principle, which didn’t restrict the definition to physical destruction of a nation or ethnic group. As he explained:

Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves.²

The objectives of a plan of genocide would include actions aimed at the “disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.”³

A legal definition of genocide wasn’t incorporated into international law until 1948, following the programs of mass murder carried out by the Nazis during the Second World War. In its articulation in this forum, though, it became more restrictive. Drafters argued over whether the definition of genocide should be universal, as in other criminal categories, or restricted to certain groups, as well as whether leaving some groups out might actually serve to target them.⁴ Lemkin, who participated in the drafting, argued that social and political groups shouldn’t be included, because they didn’t have the permanence of non-political groups. States in the negotiations – among them the Soviet Union, Poland, Great Britain, and South Africa – worried that enforcement of such a convention could violate the principles of state sovereignty.⁵ In the end, the convention was a compromise: an agreement among states and the result of difficult negotiations.

The United Nations adopted the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (PPCG) on December 9, 1948. Article II of that convention holds that

genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁶

Canada signed the Convention in 1949 and formally ratified it in 1952.

There is much agreement when it comes to the fact that genocide can be committed both within and outside the context of an armed conflict.⁷ However, outstanding disagreements remain concerning the question of “intent,” the nature of the groups included in its definition, and the importance of physical or biological destruction in whole or in part as an essential part of defining genocide.⁸

To some extent, these differences are part of a more social versus legalistic interpretation of the term. As historian and political scientist Jacques Semelin explains, those scholars relying on a legalistic concept of genocide are facing new challenges from those who question the extent to which an international legal norm based on a political agreement by the international community in 1948 should be the operational basis for how we examine and evaluate actions that may fall under one or more parts of its definition today.⁹ Today, fields other than law also examine genocide in different terms.

Conceived as a social practice, as Daniel Feierstein, director of the Centre of Genocide Studies at the National University of Tres de Febrero in Argentina, argues, genocide involves “shared beliefs and understandings as well as shared actions” that may contribute to genocide or to attempted genocide, and which include “symbolic representations and discourses promoting or justifying genocide.”¹⁰ Feierstein asserts that genocide as a social practice is a “technology of power.” It aims, first, “to destroy social relationships based on autonomy and cooperation by annihilating a significant part of the population,” in numbers or in practice, and, second, “to use the terror of annihilation to establish new models of identity and social relationships among the survivors.”¹¹

As Canadian writer and filmmaker Larry Krotz explains, applying the term “genocide” to what happened in North America has a decades-long history, including in the 1973 book *The Genocide Machine in Canada: The Pacification of the North*, by Robert Davis and Mark Zannis; and 1993’s *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*, by David E. Stannard. A more recent work, *Accounting for Genocide: Canada’s Bureaucratic Assault on Aboriginal People*, by Dean Neu and Richard Therrien, was published in 2003.¹²

In recent years, and in light of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (TRC) *Final Report*, many Indigenous thinkers have turned to evaluating how the term “genocide” applies in Canada. As genocide scholar Andrew Woolford has noted, Canadian scholars have not given colonial genocide in Canada enough attention, due in part, perhaps, to the fact that the spatial and temporal boundaries of the case of genocide in Canada are not obvious. As he notes, “If Canadian settler colonialism was genocidal, where exactly did it occur and when did it begin? And considering the intergenerational effects at stake, as well as the perpetuation of settler colonial practices, can we say for sure whether genocide has even ended?”¹³ Usually, and as he notes, “Much nuance is lost by force fitting it into a traditional comparative genocide studies paradigm that defines cases on national rather than regional or international levels of analysis.”¹⁴

Officially, the Government of Canada currently recognizes five genocides: the Holocaust, the Holodomor genocide, the Armenian genocide in 1915, the Rwandan genocide of 1994, and the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995. As Krotz maintains, “In our world, genocide is absolutely the worst thing you can say about an action undertaken by individuals or groups. So atrocious, in fact, that many historic events that carry the characteristics of genocide struggle to – or fail to – get named as such.”¹⁵ But as Woolford argues, and as the testimonies heard by the National Inquiry make clear, we must consider the application of genocide in both legal and in social terms, and as it persists today.

As Pamela Palmater, chair in Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University, explains:

If you speak to Indigenous women today, they will tell you that the crisis is far from over. The Indian Act still discriminates against Indigenous women and their descendants in the transmission of Indian status and membership in First Nations. Indigenous women suffer far greater rates of heart disease and stroke; they have higher rates of suicide attempts; they disproportionately live in poverty as single parents; their over-incarceration rates have increased by 90% in the last decade; and 48% of all children in foster care in Canada are Indigenous. With this list of harrowing statistics, is it any wonder that thousands of our sisters are missing or murdered?¹⁶

Considering the application of genocide on both legal and social fronts also means examining the historical record in light of the particular ways in which the programs aimed at subjugating and eliminating Indigenous Peoples were enacted, and the contemporary effect of these structures in the ways that many programs and pieces of legislation continue to be administered. In the Canadian context, and in reference to Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, some examples include: deaths of women in police custody; the failure to protect Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people from exploitation and trafficking, as well as from known killers; the crisis of child welfare; physical, sexual, and mental abuse inflicted on Indigenous women and girls in state institutions; the denial of Status and membership for First Nations; the removal of children; forced relocation and its impacts; purposeful, chronic underfunding of essential human services; coerced sterilizations; and more.

As Palmater notes:

So why is it so important to understand the history of genocide in Canada? Because it’s not history. Today’s racist government laws, policies and actions have proven to be just as deadly for Indigenous peoples as the genocidal acts of the past. What used to be the theft of children into residential schools is now the theft of children into provincial foster care. What used to be scalping bounties are now Starlight tours (deaths in police custody)... Racism for Indigenous peoples in Canada is not just about enduring stereotypical insults and name-calling, being turned away for employment, or being vilified in the media by government officials – racism is killing our people.¹⁷

As former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Phil Fontaine and Bernie Farber, executive director of the Mosaic Institute, commented in a 2013 opinion piece, “Genocides rarely emerge fully formed from the womb of evil. They typically evolve in a stepwise fashion over time, as one crime leads to another.... Our conviction is that Canadian policy over more than 100 years can be defined as a genocide of First Nations.”¹⁸ As they point out, the fact that Indigenous Peoples are still here and that the population is growing should not discount the charge; the resilience and continued growth of these populations don’t discount the many actions detailed within this report, both historical and contemporary, that have contributed to endemic violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

Settler colonialist structures enabled this genocide, and “the intergenerational effects of genocide, whereby the progeny of survivors also endure the sufferings caused by mass violence which they did not directly experience,” need to be understood in the Canadian context.¹⁹ Genocide is the sum of the social practices, assumptions, and actions detailed within this report. As Danny P. shared in his testimony, “Is it any different today than it was 300 years ago when this was socially acceptable and is it still socially acceptable to be going around killing our people off? ... That to me is a form of systemic genocide, which is still perpetrated today.”²⁰

The National Inquiry’s findings support characterizing these acts, including violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, as genocide. Throughout this report, and as witnesses shared, we convey truths about state actions and inactions rooted in colonialism and colonial ideologies, built on the presumption of superiority, and utilized to maintain power and control over the land and the people by oppression and, in many cases, by eliminating them. Due to the gravity of this issue, the National Inquiry is preparing a supplementary report on the Canadian genocide of Indigenous Peoples according to the legal definition of “genocide,” which will be publicly available on our website.

Speaking Up ... Again

As we discuss in the *Interim Report*, Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people have been speaking out about this violence for decades. While some people spoke out about their loved ones for the first time at the National Inquiry, others had also shared their testimony with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, Amnesty International for their 2004 *Stolen Sisters* report, and the Native Women’s Association of Canada’s “Sisters in Spirit” research, education, and policy initiative.

In 2010, the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) confirmed 582 cases over 20 years of missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls.²¹ In 2013, Maryanne Pearce, writing about missing and murdered women for her doctorate in law, identified 824 who were Indigenous.²² The mounting evidence spurred the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to do their own review, which confirmed 1,181 cases of “police-recorded incidents of Aboriginal female homicides and unresolved missing Aboriginal females” between 1980 and 2012.²³

The RCMP report also stated that Indigenous women made up roughly 16% of all female homicides between 1980 and 2012, despite making up only 4% of the female population.²⁴ Statistics, however, can be misleading: this number represents an average over a long time span, which obscures the increasing severity of the problem – namely, that Indigenous women and girls now make up 24% of female homicide victims.²⁵

Lisa Meeches, an acclaimed Anishinaabe filmmaker from Long Plain First Nation in Manitoba, co-created the true crime documentary series *TAKEN* a few years ago to help resolve the tragic reality of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.²⁶ As part of their advocacy, Meeches’s production company, Eagle Vision, partnered with Maryanne Pearce and Tracey Peter, an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba, to transform an updated (2016) version of Pearce’s data into an odds ratio. They found that the odds were much higher than previously imagined.

According to their calculations, Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or missing than any other women in Canada, and *16 times* more likely than Caucasian women.²⁷ Sharing these statistics – as well as the truths of families and survivors behind them – has been another of their advocacy tools.

As more and more studies show, Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are being targeted from all sides, from partners and family members, acquaintances, and serial killers. Rates of domestic and family violence are extremely high,²⁸ but so is stranger violence. Indigenous women are also more likely to be killed by acquaintances than non-Indigenous women,²⁹ and are seven times as likely to be targeted by serial killers.³⁰ In the words of James Anaya, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls are “epidemic.”³¹

Other than murder, statistics also reveal how Indigenous women consistently experience higher rates and more severe forms of physical assault and robbery than other groups in Canada.³² Sexual violence is a huge problem in all its forms: Indigenous women are sexually assaulted three times more often than non-Indigenous women,³³ and most of the women and children trafficked in Canada are Indigenous.³⁴ According to researchers Cherry Kingsley and Melanie Mark, in some communities, sexually exploited Indigenous children and youth make up more than 90% of the visible sex trade, even where Indigenous people make up less than 10% of the population.³⁵ The majority of Indigenous women who are later sexually exploited or trafficked were sexually abused at an early age, making them easy targets for traffickers who prey on this vulnerability and count on society’s turning a blind eye.³⁶

The rates of violence are equally alarming for members of the 2SLGBTQQIA community, who are often erased or left out of national statistics. For example, Égale Canada reports:

Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LBT) women, as well as gender-diverse and Two Spirit people encounter discrimination, stigmatization, and traumatic experiences of violence at disproportionately higher rates than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. These experiences are motivated by intolerance, fear or hatred of the person's diversity in attraction, gender identity, and/or gender expression in every social context: homes, schools, communities, religious and spiritual centres, public spaces, and health institutions.³⁷

In particular, one Ontario study of gender-diverse and Two-Spirit Indigenous people found that 73% had experienced some form of violence due to transphobia, with 43% having experienced physical and/or sexual violence.³⁸

Even when faced with the depth and breadth of this violence, many people still believe that Indigenous Peoples are to blame, due to their so-called “high-risk” lifestyles. However, Statistics Canada has found that *even when all other differentiating factors are accounted for*, Indigenous women are still at a significantly higher risk of violence than non-Indigenous women. This validates what many Indigenous women and girls already know: just being Indigenous and female makes you a target.³⁹

The common thread weaving these statistics together is the fact that violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people is not an individual problem, or an issue only for certain communities. This violence is rooted in systemic factors, like economic, social and political marginalization, as well as racism, discrimination, and misogyny, woven into the fabric of Canadian society. As [Kohkom] explained, “I’ve been in survival mode since I was a little girl, watching my back, watching goings on. Because I’ve seen my aunties, my cousins, my female cousins brutalized by police. And, growing up as a First Nation woman in this city, in this province, in this country – we’re walking with targets on our backs.”⁴⁰

In talking of the loss of her daughter, Jennifer, Bernice C. spoke eloquently about what it means to deny her daughter’s right to life: “Somebody stole her, had no right to her, had no right to take her. She could have had a baby. She could have got married, but that was taken from her. Somebody decided she didn’t have a right to live, but she had every right to live.”⁴¹

Jennifer’s sister, Tamara S., went on to add that Jennifer’s death and experiences of violence cannot be seen in isolation from the many other stories of relationships in which the safety and security of Indigenous women were denied.

It’s really heartbreaking to see that this is happening over and over. It’s not just our family. After Jen, you hear of so many other stories of ... other women. It’s just ... it’s becoming more and more of an evident problem that’s out there. This is not just a random act. This is an actual epidemic. This is an actual genocide. Another form of genocide against women.⁴²

Tamara’s observation that Jennifer’s death – and the violence, disappearances, and deaths of many other Indigenous women – was not a “random act” points to another important part of the story that Indigenous families, friends, and loved ones told about the relationships and encounters that violated the safety and security of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. In her testimony, Danielle E. described how even in their daily lives when physical or sexual violence may not be immediately present, Indigenous women and girls experience a constant threat of violence and the fear that accompanies this.

I have hope that something good will come out of this, that as an Indigenous woman, I don’t have to walk on the street and be afraid because, today, when I go somewhere, I’m afraid, and it’s a fear that we all carry every day and you get so used to it that it’s like it’s part of you, and it shouldn’t have to be because not everybody in society today has to walk around and be afraid the way Indigenous women are and girls. I have seven daughters and lots of granddaughters that I worry about constantly all day. I don’t want them to become a statistic.⁴³

As these testimonies demonstrate, the normalization of violence – or, put another way, the normalization of the loss of safety and security – becomes another way in which Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are targeted for further violence. The fact that there is little, if any, response when Indigenous women experience violence makes it easier for those who choose to commit violence to do so, without fear of detection, prosecution or penalty.

Interpreting the Mandate

As these testimonies suggest, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls heard about a huge range of issues that impact the safety and wellness of Indigenous women and girls. The National Inquiry itself is the result of mounting pressure from grassroots family members and survivors, community organizations and national Indigenous organizations, international human rights organizations, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to launch a public inquiry into the disproportionate levels of violence against Indigenous women and girls. After pointed resistance from the previous federal government, a new federal government announced a public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women in 2015, and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls formally began its work in September 2016.

The terms of the National Inquiry’s mandate (what we are meant to accomplish) is set out in our Terms of Reference. Specifically, the National Inquiry is mandated to report on:

- i. Systemic causes of all forms of violence – including sexual violence – against Indigenous women and girls in Canada, including underlying social, economic, cultural, institutional and historical causes contributing to the ongoing violence and particular vulnerabilities of Indigenous women and girls in Canada, and

- ii. Institutional policies and practices implemented in response to violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada, including the identification and examination of practices that have been effective in reducing violence and increasing safety.

The Commissioners are to make recommendations on:

- i. Concrete and effective action that can be taken to remove systemic causes of violence and to increase the safety of Indigenous women and girls in Canada, and
- ii. Ways to honour and commemorate the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada.⁴⁴

Simply put, the National Inquiry’s mandate is to (1) report on all forms of violence against (2) Indigenous women and girls. We will now take a closer look at each of these two parts of the mandate, and at how the National Inquiry has used its judgment to interpret it.

This mandate hasn’t been without its challenges. For instance, reporting on “all forms of violence” significantly broadened the mandate of the National Inquiry to include issues such as family violence, institutional racism in health care, child welfare, policing and the justice system, and other forms of violence that stem from the same structures of colonization. Reporting on “all forms of violence” also allowed the National Inquiry to hear from family members of loved ones who died due to negligence, accidents, or suicide, or whose cause of death is unknown or disputed. This is why the National Inquiry will often use the more inclusive term “lost loved ones” instead of referring only to the missing and murdered. We do not use the term “victim” of violence unless it is necessary in the context of the criminal justice system, in response to those families and survivors who expressed how the language of victimization can be disempowering.

While this mandate allowed us to look at interrelated issues in a more holistic way, meaningfully reporting on all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls is also an extraordinarily broad mandate to cover in the span of two and a half years – the broadest mandate a Canadian public inquiry has ever received.

Even our name, the “National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls,” created a barrier to clearly communicating that our mandate went beyond gathering evidence only on the specific, limited issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. As this report will show, we consider violence broadly and across time and space, understanding that the circumstances that lead to the targeting of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people, while a combination of factors, are rooted in deeper truths.

While many survivors of other forms of violence did come forward to share their truths, and nearly every family member who came to share about their lost loved one was also a survivor of violence themselves, this continued to be a difficult misunderstanding to dispel. We deeply regret that this may have kept some Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA people from registering with the National Inquiry to share about other experiences of violence because they did not feel

they “qualified,” or that the National Inquiry was meant for them. We strongly urge all family members and survivors to continue to speak out about their experiences if they wish to do so, to continue to raise awareness about these experiences.

In addition, the second part of the mandate, to report on all forms of violence “against Indigenous women and girls,” is also extremely broad. In the context of the National Inquiry, the term “Indigenous” can be understood as a collective noun for First Nations,⁴⁵ Inuit,⁴⁶ and Métis⁴⁷ people in Canada. This encompasses hundreds of distinct Indigenous Peoples, or Nations, who have their own political organizations, economies, cultures, languages, and territories.

Throughout the report, we use the term “Indigenous” to identify experiences that may be held in common by First Nations, Métis and Inuit; at the same time, we recognize that all peoples have names for themselves, many of which are shared in the endnotes to each chapter, as well as in stories and truths specific to each context. In doing so, we recognize and assert these distinctions and specific contexts.

Another important part of the National Inquiry’s work in interpreting its mandate has been to include 2SLGBTQQIA people (people who are Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual). This is particularly important for people who don’t fit the gender binary of “male” or “female,” since their gender isn’t reflected in a simple statement of “Indigenous women and girls.” We also recognize that Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA women and girls experience violence differently, since, in these cases, discrimination based on race and gender is combined with homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of gender discrimination. For these reasons, we have broadly interpreted this aspect of our mandate. We have chosen to use the phrase “Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people,” both to include non-binary people and people with diverse sexualities, and as an explicit reminder that gender-diverse people’s needs must equally be taken into account.

The Powers and Limitations of the National Inquiry

Public inquiries as a rule investigate issues of national (or provincial/territorial) importance. They can take the form of Royal Commissions, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, or Commissions of Inquiry. The length, budget, and basic format are determined by the government that created the inquiry, although inquiries also have reasonable flexibility, as we have discussed, in how that mandate is carried out.⁴⁸

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ mandate does not come only from the federal government, but each province and territory. The National Inquiry is not just a federal public inquiry, but 14 joint “inquiries” taking place simultaneously in every federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdiction in Canada. Although there have been inquiries in multiple jurisdictions, there has never been a joint National Inquiry of every jurisdiction. This means that the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is the first truly “national” inquiry Canada has ever had.

While our mandate is similar in each province and territory, the rules and requirements for this National Inquiry differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. These rules, which delineate the National Inquiry’s powers and limitations, are set out in an Order-in-Council (or Administrative Decree) for each of the provinces and territories as well as in legislation applicable to public inquiries in each jurisdiction.

Being able to operate in every province and territory is critical because it gives the National Inquiry the authority to subpoena documents, compel witnesses, and investigate the systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls anywhere deemed necessary, not just in areas that fall under federal jurisdiction. This includes investigating root causes as well as government policies, laws, and practices. However, this also makes our legal requirements significantly more complicated, as there are also different laws and rules for public inquiries in general across the jurisdictions.

As in other public inquiries, the National Inquiry has the power to investigate the issue at hand by collecting evidence and hearing testimony from witnesses. This is done in as open and transparent a manner as possible, creating a “public record” of critical information that can live on past the life of the National Inquiry. The Commissioner or Commissioners then write a report and make recommendations for change. Governments are not required to implement these recommendations. However, public attention and education, particularly through the ongoing legacy work of the public inquiry, help put pressure on governments wherever possible.

One of the National Inquiry’s main limitations – which is the same for all public inquiries – is that a public inquiry can’t resolve individual cases or declare certain people legally at fault. This is because public inquiries are meant to focus on systemic problems and solutions with the understanding that these problems cannot be traced back to “a few bad apples.” The National Inquiry also can’t do anything to jeopardize ongoing criminal investigations and must follow the privacy rules around personal information as laid out in federal, provincial and territorial privacy laws and obligations.

However, if new information comes to light during our Truth-Gathering Process or if the Commissioners have reasonable grounds to believe the information relates to misconduct, they can remit the information to appropriate authorities.

Gathering Truth

With these powers and limitations in mind, the Commissioners designed the overall format of the National Inquiry – what we now call the “Truth-Gathering Process.”

Overall, the National Inquiry sought to be families-first (putting the family members of lost loved ones and survivors of violence ahead of others who usually hold the power, including politicians, governments, and the media), trauma-informed (supporting healing in a way that does no further harm), and decolonizing (centring Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and

doing). All of these goals were grounded in the National Inquiry's guiding principle, "Our Women and Girls are Sacred." This vision would help to build the foundation upon which Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people will reclaim their power and place.

The National Inquiry also recognizes that, from an Indigenous perspective, there is not necessarily a singular "truth." Instead, each person brings with them their truth, and by gathering these truths together, we can gain a more complete understanding of the issue. For these reasons, the National Inquiry determined that our process would be called the "Truth-Gathering Process," recognizing multiple "truths" or perspectives to be brought forward.

These truths were offered by a variety of different people, families, and organizations, as well as by the National Inquiry's advisory bodies. Advisory bodies include the National Family Advisory Circle (NFAC), made up of family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and survivors; the National Inquiry Elders and Grandmothers Circle, in which the Commissioners and the executive director have an Elder or Grandmother who works closely with them; and external advisory bodies on four key cross-cutting perspectives that are often overlooked in national Indigenous research or events: Inuit, Métis, 2SLGBTQIA, and Quebec.

Part 1 of our Truth-Gathering Process focused on the lived experiences of those who came forward as family members and as survivors themselves. All family members, friends and supporters of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people, as well as survivors of violence within these groups, were automatically entitled to participate in the National Inquiry's process at Community Hearings, through statement gathering, or through artistic expressions. The National Inquiry did this through a public communications campaign to tell as many people as possible how to contact the National Inquiry, but did not contact family members or survivors without being asked to, to solicit their story; we believed very strongly that it was up to each person to decide if they wanted to participate. If they did, we would assist in every way to facilitate this participation.

Once a family member or survivor reached out to the National Inquiry, either by mail, email, or phone, they did an initial intake process with a member of our Health team (later renamed Outreach and Support Services) to get their contact information and hear if they had any immediate needs. Multiple options of how people could share their truth was explained to them, in keeping with the principles of our trauma-informed approach and greater personal control over the process.

This first option was to share publicly at a Community Hearing in front of the general public and the Commissioners; in this case, their testimony would be livestreamed to the rest of the country, and the transcripts of the testimony made public on the National Inquiry's website. The only restrictions would be on names and events redacted to comply with privacy laws. Our decolonizing approach meant that we travelled only to those communities that welcomed us, following local protocols and taking guidance from local Elders. In order to be trauma-informed and create culturally safe spaces, we did not allow cross-examination of family members and survivors. Commissioners asked questions for clarification only.

Sharing their truths in-camera, or privately, at a Community Hearing was another option. In this case, families and survivors shared directly to a Commissioner with their supports, National Inquiry staff members, and Parties with Standing present, but without any access by the general public. This was for the safety of the people sharing their truth, in some cases, as well as within the trauma-informed approach where people might have difficulty describing their stories in public. Whether it was for physical safety, mental safety, or cultural safety, holding private hearings was crucial to ensure we could hear the true stories of family members and survivors of violence. Confidential transcripts of these sessions were created to help contribute to the National Inquiry's findings of fact and recommendations, and identify overall trends, but they will not be released to the public and will not be made available after the life of the National Inquiry. While truths shared in-camera have helped shape the National Inquiry's findings and conclusions, no direct quotes are used from in-camera testimony in this report to respect that person's confidentiality, except in exceptional circumstances where permission was granted by the witness for portions of the testimony to be used.

Sharing with a Statement Gatherer was another option. In this case, Statement Gatherers travelled to the family member or survivor and conducted an in-person, videotaped interview with them, which would later be reviewed by one of the Commissioners in all jurisdictions but Quebec, which required review by three. The person sharing could request that their transcripts be made public or kept private. There were also statement-gathering events, where multiple statements were collected from participants at one location.

Another option was to submit an artistic expression that represented that person's response to, or experience of, violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people to the National Inquiry's Legacy Archive. Commissioners welcomed people's testimony in more than one form.

Another decolonizing and trauma-informed decision made was to include chosen families, or "families of the heart," in all of our definitions of "family members." This includes a broad sense of family that goes beyond a person's nuclear, biological, or extended family to include others who consider themselves family. These "families of the heart" have chosen to stay closely involved and support each other out of mutual love and respect. This is especially important for many 2SLGBTQQIA people, women who have had to leave their biological families and/or communities due to violence, or those who have been separated from their birth families through child welfare, adoption, and the Sixties Scoop.

Parts 2 and 3 of the Truth-Gathering Process involved Institutional Hearings and Expert and Knowledge Keeper Hearings. Institutional Hearings inquired into the systemic causes of institutionalized violence, as well institutional responses to violence, while those who shared as part of the Expert and Knowledge Keeper Hearings – Elders, academics, legal experts, front-line workers, young people, specialists, and others – provided their recommendations on systemic causes of violence and possible solutions. As part of the hearing process, National Inquiry lawyers and Parties with Standing had the opportunity to examine Parts 2 and 3 witnesses. The topics covered during the Institutional and Expert and Knowledge Keeper Hearings grew out of

the topics and issues that families and survivors were identifying as important to them during the Community Hearings. The Institutional and Expert and Knowledge Keeper Hearings allowed the National Inquiry to hear from representatives of the systems and institutions that many of the families spoke about during their testimony and to explore in more depth how these systems and institutions worked. It also ensured that the experiences and issues raised by families and survivors remained at the centre of the Truth-Gathering Process, even when we were hearing from experts and institutional officials.

The National Inquiry did not maintain a narrow or Western definition of “experts,” but specifically sought to include Elders and Knowledge Keepers. These are Indigenous people who are known for their wisdom, knowledge, experience, background, and insight. They are generally sought out by community members or individuals for advice on traditional as well as contemporary issues. Knowledge Keepers in particular have deep knowledge or expertise in Indigenous knowledge systems, including Indigenous intellectual traditions, world views, and laws. Some are considered the keepers of traditional knowledge or oral history within their families, communities, or Nations.

The Parties with Standing played an important part during this phase of the Truth-Gathering Process. Parties with Standing are groups that applied to have additional rights to participate in the National Inquiry’s processes because they had substantial and direct interest in the subject matter of the National Inquiry or because they represent distinct interests within which their expertise and perspective would be essential for the National Inquiry to fulfill its mandate. There are 94 Parties with Standing, including groups representing non-governmental organizations, Indigenous women’s organizations, civil societies and governments, and some police agencies.

Two of the most important ways that Parties with Standing participated in the Truth-Gathering Process were by asking questions of the Institutional and Expert Witnesses at the hearings (called “cross-examination”) and by providing closing oral and written submissions once all the evidence had been gathered to offer their additional recommendations on how to end violence. These submissions made up Part 4 of the Truth-Gathering Process. They also provided advice on how to interpret the evidence before the National Inquiry and on the key findings that needed to be made, in addition to the actions and recommendations required to promote safety and security. Their submissions are accessible on our website online.⁴⁹ Their contributions to the entire process, as well as their particular contributions in proposing recommendations and resources for us to consider, are evident in the Calls for Justice that we demand be fulfilled at the close of this report.

The evidence considered by the Commissioners includes all testimony, or truths, gathered in Parts 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Truth-Gathering Process. It also includes exhibits submitted as part of a witness’s testimony. For family members and survivors sharing in Part 1, these exhibits could include photographs of loved ones, newspaper clippings, or other materials that would help tell their story. In Parts 2 and 3 hearings, exhibits usually included relevant reports, studies, public records, or other supporting documents.

Reclaiming Power and Place

The result of research conducted through the Truth-Gathering Process that privileges the voices of those with lived experience, and that focuses on the sacred place of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people in their families, communities, and Nations, is a report that insists on self-determined solutions distinctive to the needs of those most affected as rights bearers. And while it is far from the first report released on violence against Indigenous Peoples, and it likely won't be the last, we maintain that the framework behind *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* is both powerful and empowering in its calls to focus on rights and relationships at every level – from the individual day-to-day encounters that feed violence and discrimination, to those larger institutional and systemic structures that need to change.

In its presentation of findings, this report connects the testimony collected nationally during the Truth-Gathering Process to violations of Indigenous women's, girls', and 2SLGBTQQIA people's human and Indigenous rights. By applying a human and Indigenous rights lens, as well as a gendered lens, to the truths shared during the Truth-Gathering Process, we argue that the violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people – as well as all forms of violence experienced by Indigenous Peoples – is a human rights issue. In sharing their truths, families, loved ones, and survivors were not only sharing stories about the violence they or their loved one endured but also sharing stories about human rights abuses and violations. Making the changes required to end violence against them is not a matter of public policy but one of domestic and international law.

Based on the findings from our Truth-Gathering Process and our analysis of previous reports, the National Inquiry finds that the main reason these changes and recommendations haven't been implemented yet is that they rely on governments and bureaucracies to want to change their own laws, contracts, and policies. While many of these should indeed be changed, they miss the fundamental role of *relationship*. After all, Canadian laws are not set in stone; they are based on the values and relationships of the people who write them.

In sharing their truths with the National Inquiry, family members and survivors told not only stories about violence but also stories about the relationships through which violence takes place. In this report, we focus on the role of relationships, and the significant encounters within relationships, that family members and survivors described as leading to or lessening harm, violence, and suffering. Taking a basic lesson offered through the testimony – that relationships matter – this report presents many examples that illustrate how relationships – whether those as small as the relationship shared between two people or as large as the relationship between two world views – offer important ways of understanding how violence continues and how violence may be prevented. While the report and its recommendations argue for changes to the relationships that colonial systems and structures are built on, it also strives to provide examples of the way individual people and their day-to-day interactions can make a difference in ending violence.

Family members and survivors have revealed to us that relationships provide critical moments of encounter that can either harm or help others. Whether it was at the hearings, in private statements, or through artistic expressions, they told us about moments in their lives where either healthy or harmful relationships had a huge impact on their lives. This is key to understanding the real causes of violence. Because of this, we are focusing on the relationships behind the laws and structures that are currently failing to keep women and 2SLGBTQQIA people safe.

This report presents its findings in such a way that it takes the truths, experiences, and expertise held by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people as the most important word on the subject of the violence committed against them. By looking to Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people and their testimony to explain what needs to be done to end violence in their lives, this report reflects a recognition of their strength, resilience, and expertise.

Opaskwayak Cree researcher Shawn Wilson has said:

One thing that most of these Indigenous inquiries hold in common is that they look at social, historical and economic factors to explain the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and then make recommendations that are intended to adapt the dominant system to the needs of Indigenous people. These programs proceed with the assumption that if economic and environmental conditions were the same for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, Indigenous people could ‘pull themselves up’ to the standards of dominant society. This same attitude promoted the forced assimilation of Indigenous people through such social tragedies as the ‘stolen generation’ and forced residential schooling.⁵⁰

In the past, “expertise” generated within academic institutions, governments, or Western ways of knowing and conducting research – all systems that have historically excluded women and especially Indigenous women – has been seen as that most suited to addressing the complex problems presented in this report related to issues such as culture, health, security, and justice. In contrast to much previous research that positions Indigenous women as “victims” in need of protection or saving, or that positions their experiences as “less than” knowledge gathered according to Western research methods or approaches, this report instead centres these voices in recognition that it is the wisdom held by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people that has the potential to create more healthy and safe environments for all.

In this sense, the information presented in this report and the recommendations it offers are not easy to understand or implement. Due to the denial of knowledge and expertise held by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people for so long, respecting these opinions and teachings will challenge readers, researchers, policy makers, and the general public who are used to thinking about policy solutions or social issues in a particular way or within already established systems. Really listening to this expertise often requires questioning standard ways of doing things, challenging the status quo, and being open to radical, new alternatives.

Most importantly, this report recognizes that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people also have the solutions to counter this violence, overcome indifference, and reclaim their power and place. Greg M., whose sister Jackie has been missing since 1997, said, “It’s tough being an Indian these days. There’s so many things against us. But still we’re resilient people. We stood ... for 10,000 years here. We’re still going to be here.”⁵¹

Evaluation of the Federal Government’s Response to the National Inquiry’s *Interim Report* Recommendations

One of family members’ and survivors’ biggest fears in opening themselves up for a process as intense as this one is that in the end, nothing is done – that the report gathers dust on a shelf and the recommendations are left unanswered. As family member Melanie D. said:

My biggest question is what is the government planning to do after this Inquiry? Like, what is the action plan? Because I hope it’s not like another RCAP [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples] report. I hope it’s not 94 Calls to Action where we have roundabout circle talks about reconciliation.... And I’m not just placing that on to the government, but ... what is Canada, all of Canada going to do?⁵²

In *Our Women and Girls Are Sacred: The Interim Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, we issued 10 recommendations for immediate action. Many of these recommendations had to do with the procedural work of the National Inquiry itself, to make it easier and more responsive to families’ needs.

Holding those with the power to act on these recommendations to account is an essential step of this process, and evaluating the progress made to date is an important indicator of the work left to accomplish.⁵³ As Terry L. shared: “I hear words all the time. I don’t want words anymore. I want action.”⁵⁴

The National Inquiry’s 10 Calls for Immediate Action from the *Interim Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*

1. Implementation of all the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, particularly those that impact Indigenous women and children, including the immediate implementation of Jordan’s Principle and the immediate and full implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a framework for reconciliation, and including a federal action plan, strategies and other concrete measures to achieve the goals.

To date, this has been partially implemented, and we recognize that the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is in itself a fulfilled TRC Call to Action. Other actions include endorsing and passing New Democratic MP and reconciliation critic Romeo Saganash's Bill 262, a private member's bill aimed at ensuring that Canada's laws are in harmony with those rights set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – a declaration that Saganash himself helped to create. At time of this writing, the Bill was in its second reading, in Senate. In 2018, the federal government had also agreed to work toward the equivalent of Jordan's Principle for Inuit children, to ensure health care for them would not be delayed. In addition, Bill C-91, *An Act Respecting Indigenous Languages*, which would establish measures for long-term and sustainable funding for the support and promoting Indigenous languages, was unveiled in early 2019.

Collectively, these are important pieces of work, which will require careful implementation and reporting. In particular, ensuring that the principles that animate them are applied to all services that can help to promote security and safety for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people is a complicated process, but one that we argue needs to move more urgently and quickly.

2. Full compliance with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling (2016) that found that Canada was racially discriminating against First Nations children.

This has not been implemented. Canada has now received seven non-compliance orders from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT).⁵⁵ The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society is back in court against Canada, which is now rejecting First Nations children's claims based on their lack of Status as determined by the *Indian Act*. Aside from the many problems with assigning First Nations identity through colonial legislation such as the *Indian Act*, which we cover in more detail elsewhere in this report, the CHRT decision makes no distinction between Status and non-Status First Nations children, and the Supreme Court of Canada recently ruled that Ottawa has a fiduciary duty to non-Status First Nations people, and to Métis. As of February 19, 2019, the tribunal issued interim relief orders for Jordan's Principle in favour of the Caring Society, stating that non-Status First Nations children in urgent situations will be covered under Jordan's Principle until the evidence has been heard regarding the definition of "First Nations."⁵⁶

Given that the *Canadian Human Rights Act* forbids discrimination based on race, it is the Caring Society's position that Jordan's Principle also applies to Inuit children where public services have been delayed or denied.

The National Inquiry heartily agrees with Dr. Cindy Blackstock when she says: "When I look at the wealth of this country, I think that equality for First Nations children should come in a leap, not in a shuffle. And just frankly, if they can afford to spend five billion on a pipeline, they can afford to eradicate inequalities in education and other areas for their kids."⁵⁷

3. That the federal government finds a way to provide the contact information of the families and survivors who participated in the pre-Inquiry process to the National Inquiry. Alternatively, that the federal government provide families and survivors of the pre-Inquiry information on how to participate in the National Inquiry.

To our knowledge, this was never done. Many families who participated in the pre-Inquiry consultation process told our Outreach and Support Services team members that while they were glad to see the National Inquiry moving forward, the registration process itself was confusing due to the manner in which Canada conducted its pre-Inquiry consultations. Many families believed that being part of those placed them on a list; the reality was that these were separate processes. The pre-Inquiry process led families to believe that we would have their contact information and we would reach out to them.

Also, many families believed that as Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) had their contact information, we would have that information too and reach out to them. This was not the case. We sincerely regret that family members and survivors experienced added stress and confusion regarding our registration process as a result.

4. That the federal, provincial and territorial governments provide project funding, in addition to regular operational funds, to help ensure Indigenous organizations full and meaningful participation in the National Inquiry.

This recommendation was partially implemented. The federal government did increase funding to help improve the participation of the Parties with Standing, who consist mostly of Indigenous organizations, at the National Inquiry’s urging. However, many smaller community and grassroots organizations, which are already underfunded and understaffed, did not receive any additional funding to participate in the process or help the Inquiry do community outreach. In addition, the requirement to pre-pay expenses and then get reimbursed was taxing for already overstretched organizations reliant on sometimes unstable funding.

5. That the federal government establish a commemoration fund in collaboration with national and regional Indigenous organizations (including Indigenous women’s organizations) and in partnership with family coalitions, Indigenous artists, and grassroots advocates who spearheaded commemoration events and initiatives related to missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ2S people.

This is one of the few recommendations that the Government of Canada responded to directly. The federal government, through Status of Women Canada, committed to a commemoration fund that would provide \$10 million over two years “to honour the lives and legacies of Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ2S individuals.”⁵⁸ The commemoration fund committed to supporting Indigenous communities in developing and implementing commemorative events.

The National Inquiry is glad to see that the federal government recognizes the power of public commemoration to “honour truths, support healing, create awareness, and to advance reconciliation.”⁵⁹

However, we have serious concerns with the way the federal government reinterpreted this recommendation. In particular, our recommendation specifically noted the importance of involving Indigenous women’s organizations, family coalitions, Indigenous artists, and grassroots advocates. However, the call for proposals for this commemoration fund applies only to legally constituted organizations, and it is not clear to what extent others will be able to access it.⁶⁰ This excludes these very same family coalitions and grassroots organizations we wanted to include, who have been organizing around missing and murdered women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people for decades with very little support.

It can be a long and onerous process to legally incorporate as an organization; coupled with the very short time frame organizations were given to apply, this almost certainly excludes the very groups we intended this recommendation to reach.

6. That the federal government immediately provide additional funding to Health Canada’s Resolution Health Support Program and expand its services to meet the increased needs flowing from the National Inquiry’s work, and at a minimum for the duration of the National Inquiry.

In response, the Government of Canada committed to increase health support and victim services by

providing \$21.3 million over three years to complement the health supports provided by the inquiry, such as allowing the expansion of services to include all survivors, family members and those affected by the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, improving their access to health support services and extending the timeframe during which health support services will be available up to June 30, 2020.⁶¹

They also committed to “providing an additional \$5.42 million in 2019–2020 to extend the timeframe for the two Department of Justice Canada initiatives: Family Information Liaison Units and funding for community-based organizations to support families beyond the life of the National Inquiry.”⁶²

The National Inquiry welcomed this announcement, and in particular the portion of the Resolution Health Support Program that was designated to support the health needs of those who participated in the National Inquiry. This did help family members and survivors.

However, the National Inquiry was only minimally consulted in how to allocate these funds. Because most of the funds were allocated through regional First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) offices, the support services available to family members and survivors did not include travel or cultural healing, wellness ceremonies, or transportation to meet with Elders or traditional medicine practitioners, instead covering only Western approaches to health and wellness – namely, counselling. While counselling is, in fact, an important part of many Indigenous Peoples’ healing journeys, cultural safety must be a key component in any Indigenous health and wellness service. However, the FNIHB did lift all eligibility criteria so that everyone could seek advice,

including all those affected by the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, whether they be Status First Nations, non-Status First Nations, Inuit or Métis.

In addition, distributing these funds through existing regional offices meant that families and survivors who already had trouble accessing health services due to living in rural and remote areas continued to have the same problems accessing these funds.

7. That Health Canada’s Resolution Health Support Program provide funding to Indigenous organizations and other service providers (including provincial and territorial governments) through contribution agreements and transfer funds to families and survivors participating in the National Inquiry’s Truth-Gathering Process and engaging in its commemoration activities.

The goal of this recommendation was to ensure that families and survivors, and not only established organizations, had a voice in their healing and commemoration. The National Inquiry was ultimately successful in negotiating contribution agreements with individuals for their aftercare plans, which a Canadian government had never agreed to before. This gave families and survivors direct ownership over their own healing and wellness. We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 9.

8. That the federal government undertake an engagement process with families, survivors, Indigenous organizations, and the National Inquiry to investigate the feasibility of restoring the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

To date, this important recommendation has not been implemented.

9. That the federal government work collaboratively with provinces and territories to create a national police task force to which the National Inquiry could refer families and survivors to assess or reopen cases or review investigations.

The Government of Canada announced that they would provide

\$9.6 million over five years [which] will support the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)'s new National Investigative Standards and Practices Unit. Members of this unit will provide national oversight to major RCMP investigations. A significant proportion of this oversight will focus on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls investigations.⁶³

However, this does *not* fulfill the National Inquiry’s recommendation. We maintain that Canada needs an independent national police task force specifically designed to meet the needs of family members and survivors of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, which would include non-police members and investigators, and other built-in, transparent oversight mechanisms.

Our most important objection to providing additional funding to the RCMP in this manner is that, once again, this involves police policing themselves. The RCMP have not proven to Canada that they are capable of holding themselves to account – and, in fact, many of the truths shared here speak to ongoing issues of systemic and individual racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination that prevent honest oversight from taking place.

In addition, our recommendation was for a national police task force, whereas the government’s response includes only the RCMP, which does not cover other police service investigations or areas covered by a national task force.

The National Inquiry is also concerned about the non-specific language used, in that “a significant portion” will go toward investigations of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. In 2010, the federal government cut funding to the Native Women’s Association of Canada’s “Sisters in Spirit” research, education, and policy initiative to provide additional funding to other departments and to the RCMP, where enhancements made were general and not specific to Indigenous women and girls.⁶⁴ These actions don’t inspire confidence for the future.

10. Given the short timeframe of the National Inquiry and the urgency of establishing robust administrative structures and processes, that the federal government provide alternatives and options to its administrative rules to enable the National Inquiry to fulfill the terms of its mandate.

Overall, the National Inquiry recognizes that many improvements were made to expedite some administrative services, particularly in the areas of staff hiring, security clearance, and procurement of goods and services. However, problem-solving administrative processes that were designed for indeterminate and well-established federal government organizations continued to cause significant delays and frustration. Such administrative processes do not lend themselves to inquiries with short timelines, let alone a National Inquiry with an Indigenous cultural mandate that stresses the need to accomplish the work in a trauma-informed and decolonizing way.

The area where this had the deepest effect on families and survivors was in aftercare, where the critical support the National Inquiry needed to provide to participants in order to avoid being retraumatized as a result of sharing their truths was placed on shaky ground. This came to a head in January 2018, when the federal government challenged the National Inquiry’s Terms of Reference and authority to provide health support to families and survivors in preparation for and during their appearance before the National Inquiry, and after sharing their truths. This effectively froze all movement on aftercare supports for three months, while families and survivors, including those in urgent crises, suffered. Even after coming to a funding resolution, there were many rules and regulations that continued to hamper aftercare services, causing more delays and valuable time lost. These required multiple paperwork amendments and new signatures, which generated stress for the families and survivors as well as delays in payments.

Successes and Challenges of the National Inquiry

In reflecting on where we are today, the National Inquiry recognizes it has had many successes as well as many challenges.

One of the most important successes of the National Inquiry is how many people entrusted us with their stories. We see these stories as sacred. The National Inquiry made some mistakes along the way, but family members and survivors of violence were able to work one-on-one with our Health and Legal teams to share their stories, and continued to receive support through the National Inquiry's aftercare program for several months after they shared their truths. We are humbled by the sheer number of people who shared their stories in order to help others truly understand the levels of violence in this country.

Having so many people break the silence has already created a momentum much bigger than the National Inquiry, and has continued to build. Trauma has widespread effects, but so does healing. As one Inuk Elder told the members of the National Inquiry's internal Inuit Working Group, their work was "already saving lives." These healing effects are still rippling gently through families and communities. It is one of Canada's most important jobs in the months and years ahead to ensure that these ripples build into waves of change.

One of our biggest challenges was working under the federal government's rules and procedures, which are designed for government departments with long lifespans, not two-year public inquiries working in a culturally safe and trauma-informed way. Finding ways to navigate these rules designed for a completely different context was particularly critical, given our other biggest challenge: the lack of time.

The two years and four months' mandate given to the National Inquiry at its outset was not enough. With the broadest mandate of any public inquiry in Canadian history, and given the time required simply to hire staff, get the infrastructure in place, and begin to build key relationships, this time frame significantly hampered our ability to fully work according to families-first, decolonizing, and trauma-informed approaches. Processes that would normally take months in a government department needed to be compressed into weeks to fit our schedule. Many of our hearings were held back-to-back, and we were never able to give as much notice for hearings and events as we would have liked. It was very difficult to get the appropriate systems and policies in place until well into our mandate. It was also very difficult to build relationships with Indigenous communities with enough lead time to allow them to report back to, and work collectively within, their families, communities, and governance structures. In some cases, family members felt rushed, and received short notice for when they were scheduled to testify.

From an organizational perspective, National Inquiry staff members experienced delays in receiving computers, phones, Internet connections, email access, and access to a central shared drive – extremely important for a National Inquiry working from coast to coast to coast. Many staff members worked from home, across all time zones and in remote locations, or spent a great deal of time on the road. Ongoing technology and IT problems, along with the complex require-

ments of a public inquiry operating in 14 jurisdictions at the same time, delayed processes regarding travel arrangements, hospitality planning, procurement, and financial approvals and payments.

In the end, the National Inquiry held dozens of events, large and small, in urban settings and in northern locations across Canada. There were challenges. For example, the Community Hearing in Smithers was held while the town was under a boil-water advisory, which meant bringing in hundreds of litres of bottled water. In Rankin Inlet, National Inquiry-related activities used up every single available hotel room in the community, and, in Iqaluit, we used up almost the entire town's bandwidth of Internet to be able to livestream the hearing online. In Whitehorse, an earthquake damaged the facility originally booked for the first Community Hearing, which resulted in relocating to the already-full Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre and setting up large tents outside.

However, we recognize that these challenges were temporary for the National Inquiry. The communities we visited have to manage with these challenges all the time. These are the kinds of geographic and distinction-based needs that must be taken into account when governments are responding to the National Inquiry's recommendations.

The National Inquiry also had many other highlights. For example, the National Inquiry advocated on behalf of Indigenous women and girls at the Supreme Court of Canada in the case of *Barton v. Her Majesty the Queen*.⁶⁵ This case involves the trial of Bradley Barton, the man accused of killing Cindy Gladue, who bled to death after what the accused said was consensual sexual acts. In our intervention related to the trial process, the National Inquiry argued that the trial is emblematic of how Indigenous women are seen as less believable and “less worthy” victims than non-Indigenous women, and that justice does not serve Indigenous women. Importantly, we discussed the court's failure to apply the law correctly under section 276 of the *Criminal Code* of Canada, and to take judicial notice of the high victimization of Indigenous women. We submitted that widespread racism and discrimination against Indigenous women exists and that the courts must take judicial notice of such systemic bias against Indigenous women complainants. We argued that indifference by all actors in the court, who often referred to Cindy as a “native prostitute” instead of by her name, may have led to reinforcing discriminatory beliefs, misconceptions, or upholding bias by the jury about the sexual availability of Indigenous women and specifically, Cindy Gladue.

The National Inquiry's action on this issue marks the first time a public inquiry has sought intervenor status at the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court's determination in this case, which is still pending, is anticipated to be a seminal case for determining the extent of the laws around sexual violence and consent. We felt it was imperative to act and do everything possible to speak out for Indigenous women on the issues that profoundly affect so many survivors and families.

In designing our communications approach, it was a challenge to tailor our messages to diverse stakeholders from families and survivors across Canada, to national and provincial Indigenous organizations, and to federal and provincial governments. We needed to use a tool kit to reach

people that included a variety of channels and platforms – from social media to e-newsletters to traditional print, television, and radio news stories – while being responsive to diverse cultural, language, and demographic needs and perspectives.

However, with the guidance of the Grandmothers Circle and the National Family Advisory Circle members, the National Inquiry created space for families to be heard and their truths to be validated at every event. Public awareness of the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women is also on the rise. In 2017 on Twitter, for example, there were 13,529 tweets and 112 million impressions on a variety of topics, including spreading news of upcoming Community Hearings. When we livestreamed Knowledge Keeper, Expert and Institutional Hearings on Facebook and CPAC, thousands tuned in each day to watch the proceedings, comment, share, and be inspired by the strength of the testimony presented.

We also redesigned the National Inquiry’s website in 2018 to better offer up-to-date information on news and events, and an interactive map of all past hearings and events with links to documents and videos. Additional upgrades designed in early 2019 involve organizing and featuring thousands of public records of evidence, including testimony from survivors, families, experts, academics, and Knowledge Keepers, as well as written submissions, statements, orders, and motions on our website. It is a significant record of information now available to the public – a lasting testament of truth for all Canadians.

In many ways, this record is as much a part of the legacy of the National Inquiry as this report itself. While the *Final Report* is the culmination of over 1,000 hours of truths shared with us, it still only scratches the surface of the examination of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Our evidence belongs to the public, and is available in video and as transcripts. We hope that academic institutions, governments, policy makers, and individuals who want to better understand these issues will return to this public record. It presents a unique opportunity for Canadians to hear these truths for themselves and change the relationships they have with Indigenous women and girls in their own lives.

Response to the Denial of a Two-Year Extension

One of the biggest blows to the National Inquiry’s ability to balance the urgency of these issues with the need to do this work thoroughly was the government’s decision to deny the Inquiry its requested two-year extension, providing only a six-month writing extension instead.⁶⁶

The National Inquiry was given an extraordinarily large task to accomplish in a time period that federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions, with their knowledge of their own bureaucratic natures, should have known was too short from the beginning. This was profoundly disappointing, and does a disservice to the thousands of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people lost to violence, and to the survivors of violence, some of whom advocated for decades for a public inquiry. As Nahanni Fontaine explained to the Commissioners at the Winnipeg Community Hearing:

Often I'll say, well, we've been working on this for 30 years, if you look at the Highway of Tears. But ... actually we have collectively been working on this for 50 years. If you look at Helen Betty Osborne, if you look at some of the first cases of missing women on the Highway of Tears, those go back actually to the late '50s, right? So, over 50 years, MMIWG families have been quietly, loudly, courageously, resiliently, have been from coast to coast to coast demanding action on MMIWG. It is only because of MMIWG families that we are here today, along with Indigenous women who have stood with families, and have been lobbying, and that voice in support of families.⁶⁷

This extension would have allowed the National Inquiry to hold more Community, Institutional, and Expert Hearings, so we could have heard from more women and gender-diverse people involved in human trafficking and exploitation, who are homeless, who are in federal institutions, and who live in more remote areas and in other regions. An extension would have ensured the ability to look at regional specificities, and into larger or more complex issues.

Most importantly, however, an extension would have given more people a national public platform to speak up and speak out about issues some people haven't ever spoken about before. The opportunity to share one's truth can be remarkably transformational, especially when coupled with a flexible and responsive aftercare program. There are many, many people whose strength still need to be recognized, who are ready to take the next step. We cannot control the outcome of this National Inquiry, but we have done our best to make the process itself a healing one. We wish this National Inquiry could have been that tool for even more families and survivors.

The National Inquiry has done what it can to honour the spirits of those who are no longer with us, and the future generations that are still yet to come, in the time we were given. However, Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA people cannot continue to fall to the bottom of the priority list. They cannot be expected to make do with a few extra dollars here or a new program there.

Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls for real, significant, foundational change. The rest of Canada must be prepared to meet this challenge.

Foundational Concepts in Understanding Violence

Despite the short time frame to engage in this critical work, the National Inquiry humbly offers this *Final Report* as an important piece of understanding violence in a different context. As many witnesses shared, confronting the epidemic of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people – what the National Inquiry has deemed to be practices that are genocidal – begins with acknowledging the scope of the harm that has been caused. Throughout this report, we use a variety of terms and concepts to help draw critical connections between the experiences

and issues brought before the National Inquiry. Some of these terms and concepts were used by families and survivors; others were used by Elders, Knowledge Keepers, researchers, and activists. Here, we provide a brief explanation of some of these concepts that are critical to understanding why we need foundational changes, not band-aid solutions, to ending violence against Indigenous women and girls.

The National Inquiry uses a broad definition of “**violence.**” We started with the World Health Organization’s definition of “violence,” which involves the intentional use or threatened use of power or force that is likely to cause harm against someone else (for example, interpersonal violence), against a group or community (for example, armed conflict), or against oneself (for example, suicide or self-harm).⁶⁸

These types of violence can take many forms:

- physical (hitting, choking, murder)
- sexual (unwelcome sexual comments, fondling, rape)
- emotional (name calling, jealousy, humiliation)
- psychological (threats, social isolation, stalking)
- spiritual (not allowing someone to practise their preferred spirituality or religion, belittling said spirituality or religion)
- cultural (violence in the name of a culture, religion, or tradition)
- verbal (yelling, lying, telling someone they are worthless)
- financial (not allowing someone access to money, destroying personal property)
- neglect (failing to meet the needs of someone who can’t meet those needs alone)⁶⁹

We expanded that definition to include colonial, cultural, and institutional violence. Altogether, these lead to systemic or structural violence, as well as, in many cases, lateral violence.

Colonial violence stems from colonization or colonialism, and relies on the dehumanization of Indigenous Peoples. Colonial violence is perpetuated through a variety of different strategies, including depriving people of the necessities of life, using public institutions and laws to reassert colonial norms, ignoring the knowledge and capacity of Indigenous Peoples, and using constructs that deny the ongoing presence and dignity of Indigenous Peoples. It is also linked to racism. The National Inquiry grounds racism through all of its analysis, insisting that racism takes concrete and devastating forms. Racism, then, must be seen as more than just a set of ideas, but as a set of practices that are grounded in systems that serve to target Indigenous Peoples over generations, undergirding intergenerational and multigenerational violence, and contribute to economic, social, and political marginalization; lack of will; maintenance of the status quo; and the denial of agency, expertise, and value.

The process of **colonialism** is defined as the attempted or actual imposition of policies, laws, mores, economies, cultures, or systems and institutions put in place by settler governments to support and continue the occupation of Indigenous territories, the subjugation of Indigenous individuals, communities and Nations, and the resulting internalized and externalized ways of thinking and knowing that support this occupation and subjugation. These impositions are race- and gender-based.

Colonialism is not to be confused with **colonization**. “Colonialism” is the ideology advocating colonization. “Colonization” generally refers to the process by which Europeans invaded and occupied Indigenous national territories.

While some people refer to the present as “**post-colonial**,” many Indigenous Peoples reject this idea that colonialism is “over, finished business.” As Maori researcher Linda Tuhiwai-Smith says, “This is best articulated by Aborigine activist Bobbi Sykes, who asked at an academic conference on post-colonialism, ‘What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?’”⁷⁰

There are many kinds of violence, particularly within the context of colonization. Colonization is based on the practice of **cultural violence**, in a broader sense than is discussed above. These practices, which can be explained by peace and conflict scholar Johan Galtung, target “those aspects of culture ... that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.”⁷¹ This includes Canada’s Western, white-dominant, mainstream culture, where racist attitudes and forced assimilation policies are both examples of cultural violence, since it stems from racist beliefs deeply embedded in Canadian culture.⁷²

Systemic patterns of thinking such as racism, sexism, and colonialism also result in **institutional violence**. Institutional violence is perpetrated by institutions such as the military, the church, the educational system, the health system, police and emergency responders, and the justice system. Because these institutions are generally well regarded within society, and operate on specific rules, institutional violence can easily become the “status quo.”⁷³ This makes them more difficult to challenge or change.

As a result of all these forms of violence, many examples of **structural or systemic violence** become embedded in Canadian society over time. As political scientist and scholar Rauna Kuokkanen writes: “All these systems and structures – colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy – are predicated on violence, whether direct and interpersonal or structural, economic or epistemic.”⁷⁴

Structural violence can be understood as the gap between a person’s or community’s potential well-being and their actual well-being, when that difference is *avoidable*. These gaps are due to injustices, inequalities, and other forms of violence embedded in everyday life that privilege some people to the detriment of others. For example, extreme levels of poverty are not, in themselves, examples of structural violence. But when Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are disproportionately affected from extreme poverty, and when state governments and

other institutions could address the inequalities and injustices that lead to this disproportionate level of poverty, but don't, then it becomes structural violence.⁷⁵ As explained by Robyn Bourgeois, in speaking about her own approach to understanding violence,

You have to recognize that all of the systems, whether it's class exploitation, whether it is disability and ableist privilege, whether it's racism or colonialism – they all work in and through one another. So, they work in mutually sustaining ways. So, this framework really requires that we pay attention to how all of those things work together.⁷⁶

Because these structures still exist today, “**decolonization**” (or “**decolonizing**,” since this process is still ongoing) is also a key concept. “Decolonizing” is a social and political process aimed at resisting and undoing the multi-faceted impacts of colonization and re-establishing strong contemporary Indigenous Peoples, Nations, and institutions based on traditional values, philosophies, and knowledge systems.

A decolonizing mindset requires people to consciously and critically question the legitimacy of the colonizer and reflect on the ways we have been influenced by colonialism. According to expert in Indigenous research methodologies Margaret Kovach, the purpose of decolonization is to create space in everyday life, research, academia, and society for an Indigenous perspective without its being neglected, shunted aside, mocked, or dismissed.⁷⁷

The ideas of “**resistance and resurgence**” are important to a decolonizing approach. “Resistance” refers to the diverse strategies Indigenous Peoples and Nations use to resist colonialism. To Indigenous Peoples, resistance is not just mass mobilization, armed conflict, and protest. It encompasses a broad range of strategies and activities that promote decolonization, Indigenous ways of life, values, knowledge, and broader political goals. Indigenous resistance includes “everyday acts of resistance” that embody individuals and communities living by their traditional teachings, despite overwhelming pressure from the dominant society not to do so. As a related concept, “resurgence” is the increase or revival of an activity or of ideas. For Indigenous Peoples, this involves increasing or reviving traditional land-based and water-based cultural practices that existed long before colonization and will continue to exist long after, as well as the revitalization of languages and cultural practices that have been under attack.

“She’s not just a picture on a wall”: Privileging the Stories of Lives Lived

These concepts inform our findings, as well as undergird the testimonies of those who shared their truths. These larger concepts, however, don't obscure the most important elements of the National Inquiry's research: the loved ones who are no longer among their families, communities, and Nations. As Bernice C. said about her daughter Jennifer, “She’s not just a picture on a wall somewhere or a newspaper clipping. She’s not just a statistic with the 1,000 or more missing. She was our daughter.”⁷⁸