



Prepared for the  
Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples  
April 16, 2008

**Bill C-292, An Act to Implement the Kelowna Accord**

Submission by the  
**Native Women's Association of Canada**

Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this Committee on this important topic. Beverley Jacobs, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada sends her regrets as she is attending important meetings out of the country.

The Native Women's Association of Canada is a nationally representative political organization comprised of thirteen Provincial Territorial Member Associations. Our goal is to enhance, promote and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well being of Aboriginal women within First Nations, Métis and Canadian societies.

NWAC aims to ensure that the unique needs of Aboriginal women are addressed throughout all processes at the national level. Empowering Aboriginal women by facilitating their participation in legislative and policy reforms promotes equal opportunity, and ensures that the use of culturally relevant, gender-based approaches result in a more balanced, holistic approach to the issues under consideration.

We are all familiar with the historic processes that led to the Kelowna Accord. NWAC especially notes that our presence at the preparatory meetings in 2004 with the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable marked a new understanding by the other participants of the need to include Aboriginal women in the joint development of balanced, holistic solutions. While our participation at the meeting in Kelowna in 2005 was not all that we had hoped or expected, it was nevertheless the first time we were invited to a First Ministers' Meeting and we believe we were again making progress, however slow and

incremental it was, towards our goals of achieving recognition and inclusion of Aboriginal women into these national processes.

NWAC supported at the time, and continues to support, a number of elements expressed through the Kelowna Accord. First, the relationships that were developed between the National Aboriginal Organizations that participated in that process continue to inform their work to this day. The development of a shared vision, common goals and an agreed-upon strategy to reach them was a valuable outcome of the Kelowna process.

Second, NWAC supported then, and continues to support now the plan that was expressed in the Kelowna Accord. NWAC provided many recommendations and these were not all gender specific. We urged the government to respect our human and constitutional rights including Aboriginal and Treaty rights and to address the significant gaps in health and well-being that affected Aboriginal people then and continue to harm them today.

A third valuable outcome that would have derived from the Kelowna Accord was an improvement in the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the federal government. NWAC regrets that this opportunity to move forward with better unity and harmony between the National Aboriginal Organizations and the federal government was lost.

NWAC is aware that the opportunity to implement the Kelowna Accord as originally envisioned has not materialized. There is still an opportunity, however, to implement the principles and beneficial actions that were contained in the Accord.

NWAC urges the federal government to honour crown commitments, and to take responsibility for the horrific conditions that so many Aboriginal people experience every day. The Kelowna Accord demonstrated our ability to collectively agree upon an agenda and create a comprehensive and extensive plan to address the socio-economic issues facing Aboriginal peoples. A piecemeal approach to addressing only some issues but not others will not bring about long term, effective change. Unfortunately, this uncoordinated approach that we now experience seems to form the current plan of the federal government: we believe it will not be effective at addressing the ingrained socio-economic issues facing Aboriginal peoples today.

Bill C-292 represents an opportunity for the federal government to take action and stop the cycle of poverty and abuse experienced by Aboriginal peoples, including that of the most marginalized people in Canada, Aboriginal women. It would assist in repairing the relationship between the federal government and the National Aboriginal Organizations, and the people we represent. It represents a more comprehensive representation of the concept of “need” that includes health, social, cultural, economic and spiritual well being. NWAC continues to be concerned about the measurements that are being used to evaluate progress towards closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Commonly used statistical indicators that measure quality of life, such as

education levels and income, are important, but they do not measure other issues that negatively impact Aboriginal women's lives, such as the impact that violence against Aboriginal women has on their health and well being.

We have consistently urged that all policy and programme changes must respect the distinct cultures, traditions and languages of Aboriginal Peoples. These traditions include equal respect for women. It is not enough to consider or analyze the implications of policy decision on Aboriginal women: we must include the voices of Aboriginal women and their representatives in these processes as we move forward and target this segment of the Aboriginal population for positive change. It is our firm belief that when Aboriginal women are safe and healthy, their children, families, communities and Nations will also be healthy.

Canada's Aboriginal population is a young one, with one third being under the age of 25. Without a comprehensive and targeted plan to close the gap between Aboriginal peoples and the rest of Canada, our youth will have no future. Two and a half years have passed since the Kelowna Accord was endorsed by 19 parties, leaving us with another seven and a half years to meet the targets set at that meeting and close the gap once and for all.

NWAC as an organization was formed in part to address the discrimination that Aboriginal women have faced in this country, and the discrimination embedded in federal laws and policies affecting Aboriginal women. We believe that taking measures to advance the equality of Aboriginal women will be beneficial to Aboriginal communities

as a whole and to Canadian society as well. We have not completed this task: but we believe that the measures contained in the former Kelowna Accord, and now in Bill C-292 are an important step towards this goal.

Thank you.