



## **Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) Companion Document First Ministers' Meeting (FMM), Kelowna, British Columbia November 24 - 25, 2005**

### **Introduction**

This First Ministers' meeting is the culmination of year-long negotiations between Aboriginal Peoples, the Government of Canada, and Provincial and Territorial Governments. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has been actively involved throughout this process, drawing attention to and articulating the unique perspectives and circumstances of Aboriginal women. Although the NWAC has agreed to participate in this process the issues of inherent Aboriginal and Treaty Rights have to be recognized as a key issue underlying any transformative changes.

NWAC's goals are to enhance, promote and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well being of Aboriginal women within First Nations, Métis and Canadian societies. NWAC works collaboratively with the Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada towards the same collective goal for Inuit women. As such, this puts NWAC in a position of not only taking the responsibility for speaking on behalf of Aboriginal women, but also sharing its vast wealth of knowledge and experience on Aboriginal issues with key stakeholders and governments, both nationally and internationally. NWAC works to address and protect the rights of marginalized women in Canada, including women with disabilities, young women, girls, two-spirited, and trans-gendered persons.

### **Violence Against Aboriginal Women**

For the NWAC, violence against Aboriginal women in all its forms is the single most important and overarching issue that confronts us. Aboriginal women in Canada suffer from extreme forms of violence, including sexual violence such as rape and trafficking of women and girls, at alarmingly high rates.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that over 500 Indigenous

---

<sup>1</sup> The systemic human rights violations related to violence against Indigenous women have been documented by Amnesty International's report, *Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and violence against*

women have been murdered or gone missing over the past 30 years as a result of racialized, sexualized violence, as referred to by the report of the Special Rapporteur Roldoph Stavenhagen on his mission to Canada.<sup>2</sup>

In the domestic context, at least three-quarters of Indigenous women have been the victims of family violence, and the overall mortality rate due to violence is three times higher for Indigenous women than non-Indigenous women, a rate that rises to five times higher for Indigenous women aged 25 to 44, compared to non-Indigenous women.<sup>3</sup>

Indigenous women also suffer from high rates of poverty and related ill-health, low education and employment levels and homelessness. In particular, the sexual and reproductive health and rights of Indigenous women have not been adequately protected. The result is that Indigenous women lack access to reproductive health services and supplies, increasing our vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. A lack of sexual health education for young Indigenous women prevents our youth from adequate information to exercise control over their sexuality, even where reproductive health supplies and services are available.

This requires attention to the overall causes and consequences of violence, related to socio-economic conditions, gendered discrimination and the lack of recognition of land and collective rights of Indigenous peoples. All of these have a negative impact on Indigenous women's ability to live free from violence.

NWAC launched the Sisters in Spirit Initiative in March 2004 with the goal of securing \$10 million over 2 years to address racialized, sexualized violence against Aboriginal women in Canada. NWAC has been successful in obtaining \$5 million over 5 years. This funding will begin to support NWAC's work to address systemic and structural violence against Aboriginal women. This Initiative is composed on four key elements: research and the compilation of data on the number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, public education, policy development (including striving for legislative and policy reforms) and a sustainability strategy for the Initiative.

For the goals of the Sisters in Spirit Initiative to be met, to address systemic violence against Aboriginal women, partnerships will be required to ensure that solutions are integrated at all levels of governance. The provincial and territorial governments, the federal government and other National Aboriginal Organizations (NAOs) play a critical role in exercising their respective jurisdictions and mandates. While we acknowledge the significant contribution made by the federal government in funding this Initiative, half of the intended action plan remains un-funded.

---

*Indigenous women in Canada.* This report can be found at the following link:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR200012004>.

<sup>2</sup> U.N. Commission on Human Rights, *Human Rights and Indigenous Issues: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, Mr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Addendum, Mission to Canada, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 2004/62, E/CN.4/2005/88/Add.3/ 2 December 2004* at 34.

<sup>3</sup> Health Canada, Women's Health Bureau, "The Health of Aboriginal Women", online: [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/women/facts\\_issues/facts\\_aborig.htm](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/women/facts_issues/facts_aborig.htm)

We call upon provincial and territorial governments to make this violence against Aboriginal women a priority and enter into agreements with NWAC, involving its Provincial and Territorial Member Associations, to support solutions to the systemic causes of marginalization that leave Aboriginal women vulnerable to violence. In every area of discussion at the FMM, from relationships to health to housing to education to economic opportunities, the unique needs and perspectives of Aboriginal women will not be met if the right and fundamental freedom to live free from violence is not respected, protected and fulfilled.

Resolving the high rates of violence against Aboriginal women in Canada is critical to closing the gap between non-Aboriginal Canadians and Aboriginal Peoples, particularly Aboriginal women. The impact of violence against Aboriginal women, and solutions for change, is discussed throughout this document.

## Relationships

NWAC is of the firm position that no real change in quality of life will occur until women and men stand together with women taking their rightful position as leaders. The inclusion of women is the first step in ensuring that a culturally relevant gender based analysis informs our journey to transformative change. The journey to form new relationships between all Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian governments is critical to the long-term success of this process. In the area of negotiations of Aboriginal and Treaty rights, including the right to self-determination protected under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, it is imperative that greater attention is paid to the equality rights of Aboriginal women as protected by section 35(4). Advances need to be made in this regard due to the colonial influences that, in some ways, continue to exist today. The particular aspects of Aboriginal and Treaty rights that are gendered, such as harvesting rights traditionally exercised by Aboriginal women, must be advanced through the federal, provincial/territorial and Aboriginal partnerships formed at the FMM and other relevant processes.

In our submissions to the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable (CAPR) process leading up the FMM, NWAC has provided many recommendations and these have not all been gender specific. We have urged the government to respect our human and constitutional rights including Aboriginal and Treaty rights. The right to self-determination is paramount in the spectrum of constitutional rights – the advancement of this right nationally, regionally and internationally is critical. NWAC recognizes that policy, program and administrative alterations in our relationships look more like devolution than respect for Aboriginal governance unless these changes are based on fundamental shifts that respect the self-determining status of Aboriginal persons, communities and nations. We have consistently urged that all policy and program changes must respect the distinct cultures, traditions and languages of Aboriginal Peoples. These traditions include equal respect for women. We remind other Aboriginal

political leaders that the teachings of many of our nations include the teaching that women are the first teachers to our children of our cultures, languages and traditions.

NWAC has been successful in raising the importance of including Aboriginal women's knowledge into critical policy discussions in Canada. However, to date, through the CAPR process, gender has not been adequately integrated at all times. One such example is that the absence of inclusion of women by all parties in the creation of a Council of Aboriginal Affairs. While it is essential that NWAC holds a position in the Council, it is also essential that all governments, Canadian and Aboriginal, ensure the full and effective participation of women from within their organizations in filling their positions on the Council.

NWAC is concerned that there is no Canadian government commitment, federally or provincially/territorially, to funding parity among the NAOs. Current funding practices further entrench colonial relationships and give priority to the imposed quality of "status" under federal legislation and as a result greatly disadvantage Aboriginal women.

A fundamental goal of transforming relationships is to close the gap between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Canadians in terms of the quality of life. NWAC has concerns about the measurements that will be used to determine improvements made to quality of life. Although the common statistical indicators of quality of life (education, income and so on) are important to track, these kinds of indicators are insufficient. Aboriginal persons may improve their lives in these ways yet still suffer a lower quality of life compared to many other Canadians. This, in our view, is because of the discrimination and violence that impacts on our lives both directly and indirectly. This includes police abuse of our young men, the extreme of which leads to their death, as witnessed in Saskatoon. Aboriginal women also express fears of the police and also experience trauma because of the indifference shown to them by police, particularly in centres such as Saskatoon, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. We know that the common quality of life indicators do not measure the toll that violence in the home takes on Aboriginal women. To truly chart our progress toward an "equal" society means being rigorous and creative in the measures we use. Further, where statistics are collected on Aboriginal peoples, these must also be disaggregated on the basis of Aboriginal women. For example, of the urban Aboriginal population how many are women?

Reforms to the justice system also must be at the forefront of the Canadian-Aboriginal Peoples agenda. Positive examples of culturally relevant, gender-based solutions in this area include reports on the discrimination faced by Aboriginal women who are federally sentenced. This analysis began with the report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, by the Correctional Service of Canada entitled, "Creating Choices: The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women" (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1990). and continued with the work produced for the Canadian Human Rights Commission's Special Report released in February 2004. The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women noted in 1991 that many of the women who were federally sentenced were survivors of sexual abuse including incest, battering relationships and sexual assault. The over-representation of Aboriginal persons, including women, in the

Canadian criminal justice system, is just one reflection of our poverty and Canada's colonial legacy.

Violence against Aboriginal women is a central issue that the Canadian criminal justice system must begin to comprehensively address. The issue of systemic and structural violence against Aboriginal women is compounded by a lack of sensitivity and action on the part of Canadian police services in most jurisdictions. These are all situations that cannot be tolerated and NWAC urges the inclusion of criminal justice reforms as a necessary aspect of our work to improve the quality of life of all Aboriginal persons in this country. When violence and discrimination against the least powerful in our society is tolerated, then we all remain vulnerable.

The time for action on these issues of justice and human rights is now. If this positive example of gender-based analysis is not carried through to implementation, then Aboriginal women will continue to face exclusions that impede our rights to freedom, peace and quality of life. Indeed, in October 2005, the United Nations Human Rights Committee admonished Canada for its failure to address the human rights of Aboriginal women and implement its recommendations.

The Sisters in Spirit Initiative is one small step in addressing systemic violence that Aboriginal women continue to face. A National Inquiry into the missing and murdered Aboriginal women is another suggested way to document the extent of this problem and to identify concrete solutions. Reforms to the criminal justice system and protection of the human rights of Aboriginal women are also critical.

## Health

The health of Aboriginal women is a major concern for NWAC, as women make up the largest segment of the total Aboriginal population. The life expectancy rate of Aboriginal women is well below that of the Canadian female population. Furthermore, Aboriginal women, because of continuing oppression, abuse, violence, discrimination, and poor socio-economic status, are more apt to experience illness and disease associated with these conditions, including diabetes, certain cancers, cardiovascular diseases, disabilities, addictions, sexually-transmitted infections, and depression. As a result, their quality of life is negatively affected. Furthermore, without appropriate political and social intervention, their life expectancy rate will remain low. There is an urgent need, therefore, to provide First Nations, Métis and Inuit women equitable access to complete health care services. To address the health needs of Aboriginal women in a culturally relevant manner health needs to be re-defined from its traditional Aboriginal meanings to encapsulate the Aboriginal Peoples' understandings of health including the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Further, NWAC believes that health is an Aboriginal and Treaty right that must be upheld throughout the implementation of the Blueprint and all ensuing processes. Accordingly, health is inclusive of wholistic notions of well-being, as well as traditional knowledge, medicines and healing practices.

Throughout all phases of the Aboriginal Health Blueprint, there must be adequate acknowledgement of health issues specific to Aboriginal women. NWAC's Provincial/Territorial Member Associations must be equal partners in the design, development, and implementation of national, regional, provincial, or territorial Aboriginal Health Blueprint frameworks. NWAC must be included at federal/provincial/territorial/Aboriginal levels in the development, implementation and evaluation of culturally appropriate, women-specific health care programs and services. It must be guaranteed that the specific health needs, beliefs, and practices of all Aboriginal women, i.e. First Nations, Inuit, Métis, non-status, women with disabilities, youth, and two-spirited persons are respected throughout the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the Blueprint process.

To meet the above objectives, the Aboriginal Health Blueprint framework must consider and include specific policies, programs and services to address women's health issues, including violence against women, breast cancer, gynecologic cancers, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic pain, arthritis, depression, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, eating disorders, peri- and post-menopausal health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, contraception, gender difference in bacterial sexually transmitted infections, women and HIV/AIDS, factors associated with women's medication use, disabilities, and maternal and child health. Research indicates that many of the health conditions listed above are linked to poor diet, obesity, inactivity, alcohol and substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, smoking, depression, being single parents, traumatic childhood events, low self-esteem, poor socioeconomic status, less formal education, and high risk lifestyles, such as gang involvement.

In summary, most Aboriginal women in Canada are experiencing and living in situations that give rise to and perpetuate poor health conditions. Without intervention, these conditions will deteriorate even further resulting in higher demands on an already strained healthcare system.

## Education

NWAC strongly supports the education mandate and notes that it has been part of the Aboriginal agenda since at least the seventies when we heard the call for "Indian Control of Indian Education." Over the decades since, education is an area that has remained a key concern for Aboriginal peoples and has continued to be under-resourced, financially and in other ways. NWAC acknowledges that to be meaningful, education must embrace Aboriginal distinctiveness including language, culture, tradition, ceremony and territory. We must recognize that our ancestor's placed so much value on education that they included it in treaty negotiations in many territories.

The commitment to lifelong learning provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that gender is an essential praxis for our analysis of the FMM process. Statistics indicate

that Aboriginal women and girls in the urban centres studied have been more successful in their efforts to secure education than have been Aboriginal men and boys. High school graduation is a minimum requirement for most jobs and as the 2001 Statistics Canada survey, "Aboriginal Peoples in Canada's Urban Areas" indicates, Aboriginal females in most cities have been more successful in completing their high school education than males between 1981 and 2001. Additionally, it was Aboriginal women who in the same time period also experienced an increase in post-secondary completions.

It is illuminating to consider the reasons the youth provided as to why they are not completing high school. Statistics Canada reports that Aboriginal male youth cited boredom as the most common reason for quitting school (25%). Canadian males cited boredom in 19% of the cases. Young Aboriginal women discontinued their high school education because of pregnancy or to look after children (25%). This reason was given by only 16% of their female counterparts. This statistical evidence demonstrates that a strategy that is not gendered may not impact on all youth equally as the causes for lack of school completion are very different across the sexes. It demonstrates why gender is an essential consideration for those planning to affect the rates of high school graduation among Aboriginal youth.

Furthermore, census data from 1996 point out that almost one-third of all Aboriginal children under the age of 15 live in single-parent families ("The Daily – 1996 Census: Aboriginal Data"). This is twice the rate of the general population. Drawing on data from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (2001), it is clear that in urban centres these single-parent families are primarily female. In Toronto 87.03% of the single families are headed by women; 83.95% in Thunder Bay; 87.04% in Winnipeg; 89.76% in Saskatoon and 88.33% in Vancouver. In Montreal, women head 81.05% of single-parent families and in Halifax the rate is the highest at 93.75%. Again, these figures indicate clearly that educational planning must consider gender if we intend to realize its full impact on our youth.

NWAC is in agreement that goals of increasing high school graduations and improving the Aboriginal education experience are essential. However, we do not believe that this can be done at the expense of post-secondary training and skills development. Again, the specifics of women's experience of higher education must be considered, particularly because more women than men are attending post-secondary institutions.

It is also our observation that Aboriginal women sometimes engage in educational activities because women are not tolerating violence in our communities and are leaving for the city. One of the few ways they can access band support to leave violent circumstances is through accessing educational funding. For this as well as for other reasons funding for the pursuit of post-secondary education should be increased and funding caps removed. Because of the gaps in our knowledge base, a full analysis is unfortunately not possible. We would point to the findings of the 1991 Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba where the Commissioners noted that Aboriginal men leave the reserve for employment while women leave because they are fleeing violence.



Although we applaud the creativity and courage of these women, NWAC believes that more must be done to support women leaving violent relationships.

Here, we have also demonstrated the multiple ways in which violence, education, health, housing, economic opportunity and governance structures are inextricably linked. By approaching our analysis from a gendered place, the breadth of those linkages is demonstrated. Hence, the result of a culturally relevant gender-based analysis holds potential for all Aboriginal persons.

## **Housing**

In Canada, jurisdictional issues, control and governance as it relates to contemporary Aboriginal Housing policies continue to create barriers and challenges for the full realization of an Aboriginal woman's ability to achieve one of the most basic human needs, that is, shelter or access to adequate housing. Aboriginal women's housing issues continue to profoundly affect the safety, health and well-being of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and families in Canada. For Aboriginal women in Canada closing this critical gap would mean access to adequate housing both on and off the reserve until such time as parity in living conditions with the majority of Canadians is achieved. This will require creative innovative solutions targeted specifically to addressing the distinctive housing needs of Aboriginal women.

For example, in one area that affects mainly Aboriginal women stem from inequalities facing First Nations women on reserve and this must be remedied. Currently, federal law does not provide spouses living on reserves with legal recourse for obtaining interim exclusive possession of the family home equivalent to that which is available to all spouses living off-reserve. Equally, a regime governing the division between spouses of matrimonial real property on reserves when a marriage ends in separation or divorce continues to be conspicuous by its absence from federal law. Where provincial family laws do apply, lack of enforcement renders them ineffective in protecting the rights of Aboriginal women who face geographic, cultural, and language barriers, to name just a few.

### **Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Homelessness**

In March 2004, the National Aboriginal Housing Association released its report<sup>4</sup>, which documents that a majority (71%) of Aboriginal people live off reserve. According to the NAHA report, in 1993, the federal government as part of fiscal restraint halted all new spending for social housing, including any new non-reserve Aboriginal housing projects. In 1996, the federal government moved to transfer administrative responsibility for existing

---

<sup>4</sup> National Aboriginal Housing Association, A New Beginning: The National Non-Reserve Aboriginal Housing Strategy, March 2004, online: National Aboriginal Housing Association, <http://www.aboriginalhousing.org/The> National Non-Reserve Aboriginal Housing Strategy. (NAHA)



social housing policy to the provinces. To date no province has accepted responsibility for new non-reserve commitments and no new housing has been constructed for Aboriginal households off reserve since 1993. This lack of action and failure to take responsibility for off-reserve housing struggles must be corrected.

The National Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (NCHH) documented a shortage of rental housing, increase in average market rent, steady losses in the numbers of exiting rental housing units, declining or stagnant incomes and wealth, sharp increases in tenant affordability problems and a disproportionate representation of Aboriginal persons among the homeless. A recent report by the Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation<sup>5</sup>, that the main causes of family homelessness were lack of affordable housing, poverty family violence and inadequate funding for social programs. It was found that for 40% of families, family violence was among the factors that caused them to leave their homes. In a related report CMHC reported that 62% of Aboriginal lone parents' households off reserve were in core housing need.

Aboriginal women, especially single mothers, have the highest incidence of poverty in Canada – more than twice the rate of non-Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women are thus uniquely vulnerable to all of the barriers in accessing housing that are experienced by other low-income women, while simultaneously confronting systemic discrimination particular to their position as Aboriginal women.

Although there is little research that focuses exclusively on empirically identifying gender-specific housing factors and needs of Aboriginal women across Canada there can be no denying that Aboriginal women remain at the lowest level of the population lagging far behind on all socio-economic indicators from the rest of the Canadians population. For example a recent study on Homelessness in the Greater Vancouver Regional District reports that Aboriginal people made up 17% of those who are homeless, even though they make 1.7% of the population in the region and “homeless women are more likely to be of Aboriginal ethnicity.”<sup>6</sup>

There has been little analysis of homelessness as a women's issue or consideration of government programs and responses to homelessness from the standpoint of women. According to shelter data, women and children are the fastest growing group using shelters. The increasing number of women in shelters is only a small fraction of the number of women across Canada experiencing housing crises and homelessness in diverse ways, such as living with the threat of violence because there are no other housing options; sacrificing other necessities such as food, clothing and medical needs to pay rent, or moving into overcrowded accommodation with family or friends. Most of these individualized housing crises do not show up in homelessness counts or media

---

<sup>5</sup>Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation, Research Highlights, Family Homelessness: Causes and Solutions, July 2003, [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca)

<sup>6</sup>See, Homeless Research in the Greater Vancouver Regional District: An Agenda for Moving Forward, prepared by Darryl Quantz and Jim Frankish, Institute of Health Promotion Research, University of British Columbia, June 2002.

portrayals of homelessness, but they increasingly define the lives of lower income Aboriginal women in Canada.

Housing needs of Aboriginal women must respect that violence is a central factor in women's housing needs. Inuit women who face violence in the home may have a difficult time leaving the relationship, due, in part, to northern remoteness and lack of adequate housing. In the event of marriage dissolution, provincial courts have no jurisdiction to award the female spouse or partner interest in the family home, which is usually in the legal possession of the husband. This often results in women having to leave the reserve and move to urban centers, where they are faced with multiple challenges, such as lack of adequate childcare, lack of long-term shelter, lack of employment, and lack of peer support.

Aboriginal women with disabilities are already marginalized by society. Those with physical disabilities and who use wheelchairs, particularly on reserve and in remote northern communities, are often confined to their homes due to lack of accessible housing and supports. Without a ramp leading away from the home, for example, a young girl cannot attend school, cannot attend recreational activities, and, more specifically, cannot become independent enough to contribute to her own health and well being, let alone contribute to society. While universal design allows for changes to existing housing structures to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities, visitability allows for the adaptation of environments at the planning stage, before the home is built, thereby decreasing long-term costs when homes have to be modified at a later date to fit wheelchairs, permit access to bathrooms, etc. Visitability requires only three simple and practical provisions:

- a. A no-step entrance;
- b. Doorways wide enough to accommodate entry by people and wheelchairs; and
- c. A main-floor bathroom with a doorway and space sufficient to enter with a wheelchair and close the door.

Suitable, safe, accessible housing is key to individual and family sustainability for Aboriginal women. The homelessness crisis facing women is also a poverty crisis and cannot be understood merely in relation to scarcity of appropriate housing. To find sustainable solutions, it is important to consider the interconnections between housing, geographical location, income, and access to credit, transportation and support services.

## **Economic Opportunities**

Rights related to lands, resources and territories of Indigenous Peoples must be respected, protected and promoted if an adequate economic basis for sustainable economic opportunities is to exist.

In the area of economic opportunities, planning must emphasize the need to consider the linkages between all of the target areas. NWAC agrees that activities must focus both within our communities and in broader Canadian and international economies. We see economic opportunities as being dependant, not merely influenced by, issues of health, housing and education. As with educational opportunities, NWAC believes that a culturally relevant, gender-based analysis is essential to progress in this sector. Discrimination based on gendered racism, including factors such as violence and workforce discrimination, negatively impacts the economic opportunities available to Aboriginal women. Inequalities both within and outside of Aboriginal communities must be addressed to create real economic opportunities for Aboriginal women. This plan must respect women's place as the first teachers of children and the many responsibilities women have for the care of children.

NWAC envisions the development of a national, long-term strategic plan to support, advance and fully integrate Aboriginal women entrepreneurs into the Canadian economy. This would include a full complement of support services, such as training programs, business service centers, mentorship programs and unique lending and granting programs, all designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated by Aboriginal women at the provincial/territorial and national levels. NWAC, including its Provincial and Territorial Member Associations are well-placed to initiate these services and programs.

Further, all provincial, territorial, federal and Aboriginal governments should apply a culturally relevant, gender-based analysis to ensure that Aboriginal women are served by all economic development initiatives. This analysis will identify changes to the regulatory and legislative frameworks that will facilitate the involvement of Aboriginal women in economic activities.

## Conclusion

NWAC, as previously stated, believes that the CAPR provided an excellent opportunity to open a dialogue between NAOs, provincial/territorial and federal governments. This is a beginning step that still requires greater commitment. In particular, we point to the failure to include a gender-based analysis in the documents produced by the Canadian government, provincial/territorial governments as well as other NAOs. We note that this has caused some tension and divisions rooted in familiar colonial patterns.

NWAC is an organization born out of the history of discrimination that we have faced in this country. We believe that advancing our equality is beneficial to our communities as a whole. If Aboriginal women's equality is secured, this will enhance the well-being of all of our members. One example of this is youth justice initiatives in Canada. The vast majority of these initiatives started because the women in the communities stood up to protect themselves, their children, their brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers and all of their relations. The leaders of NWAC draw strength from our territories, our traditions, our ceremonies and the knowledge that these things will keep all the people strong as we struggle to gain the quality of life we deserve.

## Recommendations

NWAC requires that the commitment to transformative change must include the honouring of the promise to create an Aboriginal women's table if the inclusion of Aboriginal women's knowledges, issues and concerns are not sufficiently present at these two days of meetings. It is our view that Aboriginal women's knowledges, issues and concerns are still not sufficiently integrated in our journey toward transformative change

NWAC insists that we take further steps to ensure that a culturally relevant, gender-based analysis is applied to all areas of partnership in meeting the objectives of the FMM, following up to the CAPR, by ensuring the full and effective participation of Aboriginal women, as represented by NWAC and other representative Aboriginal women's organizations, at all decision-making tables.

In addition, the Native Women's Association of Canada makes the following specific recommendations:

## Violence

1. Ensure that all governments and NAOs work towards ensuring that Aboriginal women can exercise their human right and fundamental freedom to live free from violence.
2. Recognize that violence against Aboriginal women takes many forms including violence in the home and in intimate relationships, political silencing and racialized sexualized violence on the streets.
3. Make violence against Aboriginal women a priority in all areas. In health, this includes providing sexual and reproductive health services, particularly sexual health education programs, HIV/AIDS awareness, education and health prevention and promotion services. In education, particularly post-secondary education, provide supports that meet the unique needs of Aboriginal women, such as child care and housing, to decrease their vulnerability to violence and increase their opportunities for economic opportunities. In housing, ensure that emergency shelters, second stage housing and transition shelters are adequately funded in areas where these services are currently not accessible to Aboriginal women.
4. Immediately mandate a National Inquiry into the missing and murdered Aboriginal women. This Inquiry's mandate must include the opportunity to develop prevention strategies and services for women facing violent situations.

## Relationships

1. Protect and promote Aboriginal and Treaty rights recognized and affirmed in s.35 and in particular section 35(4) which ensures the Aboriginal and Treaty rights apply equally to men and women.
2. Support the strong recognition of the right to self-determination at the national level, the regional level and the international level (including the Organization of American States' American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).
3. Ensure respect for distinctive cultures, traditions and languages.
4. Ensure full and effective participation of Aboriginal women on the proposed Council of Aboriginal Affairs.
5. Create funding parity among the NAOs. Only when NWAC is adequately resourced will there be sufficient capacity to provide culturally relevant, gender based analysis to all policy and programming discussions at the Aboriginal, federal, provincial and territorial levels.
6. Immediately create new relationships between Statistics Canada and the NAOs, including the sharing both of data and expertise. Efforts should be made to collect disaggregated data on the basis of both gender and race combined, so that there is a clear statistical picture of the realities of the lives of Aboriginal women. The quality of life indicators must include the measurement of the harms caused by racialized and/or sexualized violence.
7. Reform the criminal justice system so that it adequately addresses the over-representation of Aboriginal women, their marginalization and the related high rates of violence against Aboriginal women. The recommendations of the many existing reports of Aboriginal justice inquiries should be fully implemented without delay.

## Health

1. Design, develop, implement and evaluate the Aboriginal Women's Health and Healing Action Plan.
2. Organize women-specific preparatory tables.

3. Design an Aboriginal women's health reporting framework.
4. Implement a Holistic Health and Well-Being Model.
5. Determinants of health such as socio-economic marginalization and violence, facing Aboriginal women must be addressed holistically for real change in Aboriginal women's health status to be realized.

## Education

1. Ensure that education embraces Aboriginal distinctiveness including languages, cultures, traditions, ceremonies and territories.
2. Ensure that all levels education is culturally relevant and gender specific and that the unique educational needs of Aboriginal women are considered and integrated into education strategies.
3. Child care supports for young mothers who are often single parents and sexual health education programs aimed specifically at Aboriginal youth - with gendered components - must be part of the commitments made to education.
4. Programs and services to support victims of violence must be adequately provided to ensure that this determinant does not preclude Aboriginal women from attaining high-school graduation or post-secondary education and opportunities to apply this education to the labour market.
5. The important linkages between health, housing and violence against Aboriginal women must be acknowledged in our efforts to create transformative change in the educational sector.
6. Educational opportunities must exist for girls and women from head-start to advanced university degrees.

## Housing

1. Ensure that all housing proposals indicate how Aboriginal women's interests will be addressed, including the integration of equality of outcome measures between men and women.
2. Ensure that, where jurisdictional control is transferred to First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, NWAC or other representative Aboriginal women's groups, such as Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, conduct research and policy development to ensure the application of a culturally relevant gender-based analysis to the

development and implementation of matrimonial real property codes, such as those currently being developed under the First Nations Land Management Initiative.

3. Guarantee that First Nations women living on reserve have access to legal recourse for obtaining interim exclusive possession of the family home and equal division of matrimonial property upon separation or divorce, equivalent to that which is available to all spouses living off reserve.
4. Ensure Canadian and Aboriginal governments act in accordance with Canadian equality laws and international human rights obligations. This includes providing, in the context of violence against First Nations women living on reserve, legal recourse, such as restraining orders and an order for exclusive possession of the matrimonial home.
5. Provide funding to conduct further research to determine how housing initiatives, such as emergency shelters and safe houses for women, are part of the most appropriate solutions to violence against Aboriginal women.
6. Provide access to culturally appropriate services, such as shelters, safe houses and second stage housing, for all Aboriginal women and their children
7. Resolve current shortages in high quality, safe, accessible, affordable housing available to Aboriginal women and their families through adequate funding for renovations and building of new units. This must include considering Aboriginal women's housing needs both on and off reserve.
8. Address, particularly in urban areas, discrimination, including gendered racism against Aboriginal women.
9. Assist lone parent families to address the underlying causes of poverty and violence.
10. Provide funding to women's Aboriginal groups for research initiatives to address the systemic causes of women's homelessness.
11. Investigate and adopt principles of universal design to existing homes to enable women and children with disabilities to live independent and healthy lives.
12. Investigate and adopt principles of visitability in the construction of new homes/environments, such as schools, health clinics.



## Economic Opportunities

1. Ensure that the rights related to lands, resources and territories of Indigenous Peoples form the foundation of any economic opportunities initiatives. This will create an adequate economic basis for sustainable economic opportunities.
2. Ensure economic strategies consider all the socio-economic conditions that are required to create the right environment for Aboriginal women to participate in the economy. For example, child care, adequate housing, strategies to combat gendered racism and ensuring that the right and fundamental freedom to live free from violence are all factors to be considered. Existing inequities facing Aboriginal women must be removed in all sectors. This requires the application of a culturally relevant gender-based analysis.
3. Financially support NWAC and its Provincial and Territorial Member Associations in the development, implementation and monitoring of a national, long-term strategic plan for Aboriginal women entrepreneurs in the Canadian economy.
4. Ensure that all provincial, territorial, federal and Aboriginal governments apply a culturally relevant, gender-based analysis so that Aboriginal women are well served by economic development initiatives and that all regulatory and legislative frameworks reflect the needs of Aboriginal women.