



***Presentation for the
Standing Committee on the Status of Women
On the***

**IMPACTS OF FUNDING CUTS ON THE NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA and ALL ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN CANADA**

December 6, 2006

Greetings

Traditional greetings // Acknowledge the Algonquin territory

On behalf of the Native Women's Association of Canada I wish to thank you for inviting me here today to speak to the issue of funding cuts and program changes at the Status of Women.

The direction this government is taking on women specific issues is disturbing. These decisions have huge implications for Aboriginal women and children in Canada

My goal here today is to impress upon you, respected committee members, the extent to which grass roots Aboriginal women will be affected

Aboriginal Women and Violence

First, I'd like to acknowledge how particularly fitting it is for us to be presenting here today - December 6 - as we commemorate National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women

Our hearts go out to the families and friends of those 14 women who were murdered on this day in Montreal in 1989 – murdered because they were women

As the only national organization representing Aboriginal women in Canada, we must also take a moment to remember all those who have been taken from us over the years – not because they were women, but because they were *Aboriginal women*

The Manitoba Justice Inquiry (1999) noted that Helen Betty Osborne's might be alive today had she not been an *'Aboriginal woman'*

Extensive lobbying in the years following the Inquiry by NWAC and other equality seeking organizations brought about federal support for Aboriginal women's issues, and enabled us to look more closely at a trend called *racialized, sexualized violence*

History & Human Rights: Ending Violence against Women

The following points provide context or background to the position we are presenting here today:

This is really a Human Rights issue. We've worked very hard over the years to help the Canadian Government understand that the historical treatment of Aboriginal women has resulted in permanent adverse effects

With colonization and assimilation came the systematic breakdown of our societies. Our connections to the land were severed through legislation intended to 'civilize'

We quickly became disenfranchised from our families, our children, from our communities and our traditional territories; we lost vital connections to our roots - our traditional roles and matriarchal ways of being were denigrated and ultimately abolished.

This experience has translated into alarmingly high rates of violence, incarceration, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide and death; it has resulted in Aboriginal women's overall poor health and socio-economic

40% of our women are living in poverty

NWAC works towards revitalizing individual and collective human rights with the main goal of ending violence against Aboriginal women

Human rights infringements and legislated discrimination perpetuate the alarming statistics; in order for real change to occur these root causes must be targeted for change

Without the continued support of the SWC, our ability to see these changes through will be jeopardized; our women will not have a national voice; and the families of missing and murdered women will be devastated

Sisters in Spirit and the Impacts of SWC Cuts

We need to reverse prevailing societal attitudes that Aboriginal women are somehow acceptable targets of violence

The *Sisters in Spirit* initiative was a direct result of tireless advocacy work raising the profile of the violence issue; it was only after several months that NWAC and other national supportive agencies finally received attention

Given that the *Sisters in Spirit* initiative is currently the LARGEST CONTRIBUTION AGREEMENT at the SWC, the question in our minds is this:

TO WHAT DEGREE WILL OUR ABILITY TO ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S ISSUES THROUGH THE SIS INITIATIVE BE AFFECTED BY THE CUTS AND CHANGES AT THE DEPARTMENT?

The funding cuts and proposed changes to the department are extremely upsetting, and quite honestly, confusing. We are struggling to understand the rationale that would support this move.

The SIS initiative has a strong research component that is critical for the development of policy positions and effective advocacy measures; we want to express how concerned we are for the security of SIS staff, and the overall capacity we've gained through this initiative

Historical Advancements by the SWC: Gender Based Analysis

The SWC has successfully advanced the gender equality portfolio through the accountability agenda of the current government

Great strides have been made this year toward the development of equality legislation; these are instrumental steps forward, validating the work we do; it would be a huge blow to abandon these achievements

NWAC's work on a Culturally Relevant Gender Based Analysis framework complements SWC's achievements in this area

We are shocked by the recent announcements; that almost half of the department's budget has been cut, that 12 regional offices are closing

These measures fly in the face of election promises to respect and promote women's rights; they are contradictory to Minister Prentice's agenda to make Aboriginal women and children a priority for this government

Effects on The Native Women's Association of Canada

NWAC is almost exclusively dependant upon contributions by the Status of Women; unlike other National Aboriginal Organizations, we receive no core-like funding from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

As an organization, we are particularly susceptible to what's happening

We've been doing what we can to prepare for the worst; however I must tell you that it has been most difficult preparing the families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women

We re *THE* only independent Aboriginal women's organization in Canada willing and able to do this work; we are the only organization dedicated to ensuring grass roots Aboriginal women are heard at the national level – our role is critical

We are 100% in support of this committee's recommendation to ***"...reverse the \$5 M in cuts to the operating budget of the SWC and reinstate the original terms and conditions of the Women's Program"***

Further to this, we are asking for some assurance that Aboriginal women's violence related issues will remain a priority; and that our ability to keep the issue high profile will not be compromised

Thank you.

Note: A copy of this presentation will be available at www.nwac-hq.org