

NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE ON MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION TO PREVENT AND ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The goals of the National Roundtable are to:

1. Create a dialogue with all levels of government, Indigenous¹ representatives and families to effectively address the crisis of violence against Indigenous women and girls.
2. Identify solutions and collaborative means of moving them forward, including the ongoing engagement of Indigenous Peoples, families and communities in reducing and eliminating all forms of violence.

The National Roundtable brings together federal, provincial and territorial governments in partnership with National Aboriginal Organizations (NAOs) to discuss how best to collaborate and coordinate action to prevent and address violence against Indigenous women and girls, including those cases that result in their murder or disappearance. As noted in the *2014 Federal Action Plan to Address Family Violence and Violent Crimes Against Aboriginal Women and Girls* "...no organization or level of government alone can eradicate this violence. This work must be done in partnership across federal organizations, with provinces and territories and through the leadership of Aboriginal communities and organizations."

All Indigenous women and children have an equal right to live free of violence and all forms of discrimination. In recent years, there have been a number of initiatives aimed at responding to the prevalence of violence against Indigenous women and girls, including the disproportionate rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. A variety of responses and actions have been developed by communities and governments, including provincial, territorial, federal and Indigenous governments, however no comprehensive and coordinated response exists. Such a response would bring broader attention, education and focus to prevention and immediate solutions, while enabling local flexibility and decision-making.

¹ Indigenous refers to Inuit, Métis and First Nations peoples in Canada. Parties to the National Roundtable acknowledge specific needs that arise as a result of urban/rural/northern and on/off reserve-based considerations, Inuit Nunangat considerations, the application of the Indian Act, and gender issues.

To move this dialogue forward and initiate coordinated action, the following three priority areas have been identified for discussion at the National Roundtable to address the disproportionate number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls:

1. Prevention and Awareness
2. Community Safety
3. Policing Measures and Justice Responses

PRINCIPLES

There is consensus **that additional action must be taken now** and increased efforts need to be made to assess our progress while ensuring that everything possible is being done for the safety and security of Indigenous women and girls. The National Roundtable presents a unique opportunity for federal, provincial and territorial governments to come together with NAOs and representatives from the families of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls to move on coordinated actions, prevention and solutions.

It is anticipated that the National Roundtable will result in commitments to prevent, reduce and eliminate violence against Indigenous women and girls, focusing on the three priority areas. Parties to the National Roundtable believe an important foundation for this Framework is agreement on a set of common principles that guide how the Parties work together to prevent and address violence against Indigenous women and girls. Parties to the National Roundtable endorse the following principles:

Human Rights: Violence against Indigenous women and girls implicates numerous human rights including the right to life, to security, to equality and to be free of discrimination.

Shared responsibility: Preventing and addressing violence against Indigenous women and children is a shared responsibility, requiring shared commitments across governments and communities.

Community-based solutions: Solutions to prevent and end violence against Indigenous women and girls must be community-based and led, recognizing the diversity of community situations, and appropriate support given to building community capacity.

A focus on healing: Addressing violence against Indigenous women and children acknowledges the need for improved relationships based on respect and understanding among Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians, and the need for holistic approaches in concert with support for the healing of individuals and communities.

A collaborative focus: Indigenous Peoples must be partners in developing and implementing responses to addressing violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Bringing about behavioral change: Addressing and preventing violence against Indigenous women and girls requires a shift in societal attitudes and behaviours, within individuals, institutions and organizations, including men and boys, who are key agents of that change.

Changing the discourse: Mobilizing Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to change how we talk about the issues can help re-frame institutional responses, community perspectives and individual attitudes.

These principles underlie recent work as noted in the reports cited in this Framework document that have identified paths forward in developing community-based approaches to ending violence against Indigenous women and girls.

PATHWAYS FORWARD

As a result of the National Roundtable, each federal, provincial and territorial government and each NAO will coordinate efforts toward tangible and immediate actions in each of the priority areas. Together this will constitute a shared national commitment to increased, ongoing collaboration with the development of regionally and community-based and community-driven solutions to prevent and address violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Parties to the National Roundtable have agreed to improve coordination and collaboration across sectors, and amongst each other, along the following high-level pathways, recognizing these areas are fundamentally interconnected and must not be viewed in isolation.

Discussion continues among Parties to the National Roundtable on specific examples of how these pathways can be implemented. Means and processes for implementation will vary based on relationships and priorities among Indigenous communities and organizations and provincial, territorial and federal governments.

Prevention and Awareness

- Raising public awareness aimed at changing attitudes that devalue Indigenous women and girls and the contributions of Indigenous Peoples as an educational tool for violence prevention.
- Reducing the marginalization of Indigenous women and girls by improving socio-economic development and outcomes.
- Improving prevention and responses to violence within intimate relationships and families.

Community Safety

- Supporting Indigenous communities, organizations and individuals to develop safety initiatives that respond to their unique cultural, traditional and socio-economic needs and realities.
- Engaging communities, governments, organizations and institutions, in supporting prevention, action, and intervention when violence has occurred.
- Supporting and addressing safety and healing of individuals, families and communities.

Policing Measures and Justice Responses

- Improving the relationship between justice sector professionals, including police, and Indigenous Peoples and strengthening community-based policing in Indigenous communities.
- Identifying strategies within the justice system to protect and assist Indigenous women and girls who are victims of violence.

FOLLOW-UP AND SHARING OF OUTCOMES

All Parties to the National Roundtable commit to continuing to work together in coordinating action to prevent and end violence against Indigenous women and girls. To further solidify these efforts a 2nd National Roundtable will be held by the end of 2016 to discuss progress and continue dialogue on efforts underway and areas for further focus. All Parties commit to work directly with Indigenous communities and organizations to move forward on these priorities and in preparation for the 2nd National Roundtable.

Public accountability is paramount to the continued progress in addressing violence against Indigenous women and girls, including the tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Accordingly, Parties to the National Roundtable commit to using their respective reporting and accountability mechanisms to report on their activities and progress and will increase efforts at enhanced public reporting, and sharing information on effective collaboration efforts both within and across jurisdictions, organizations and communities.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

It is well understood there are complex and long-standing underlying issues that have brought us to where we are today in respect of the disproportionate levels of violence against Indigenous women and girls which perpetuate this critical situation. Indigenous women and girls are three times more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women and this violence results in more serious harm. In May 2014, the RCMP released a National Operational Overview on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women. The research identified 1,181 missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canadian police databases between 1980 and 2012; of those 1,017 were murdered, and there are 164 investigations of missing Aboriginal women dating back to 1952.

Indigenous Peoples are not a homogeneous group culturally, traditionally or geographically. Diversity and distinctions exist between and within First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples based on a number of factors including language, cultural beliefs, social structures, geography, governance structures and the existence of Treaties and other agreements with the Crown in some areas. **This means effective solutions must be community-based and community-driven.** In recognition of this diversity and differences in documented outcomes for various First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples, special attention needs to be given to the development of responses that reflect these differences. Additionally, the varying needs and perspectives of women, youth, Elders, urban, northern and remote populations must also be taken into account.

The safety and well-being of Indigenous women and girls is integral to ensuring healthy and prosperous Indigenous families, communities and nations within Canada. There is no more important role for governments or the state than protecting citizens. Equally, there is no more important role for families or communities than keeping each other safe and promoting safety.

Numerous reports, forums and inquiries have brought attention to this issue, including the seminal Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, (1999), Amnesty International's *Stolen Sisters* Report (2004), the BC Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (2012), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights report on *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in British Columbia, Canada* (2014) and each of the reports from the National Aboriginal Women's Summits 2007-2014.

Jurisdictions and Indigenous communities have responded with a range of activities. Additionally, there are a number of cross-jurisdictional efforts underway to address violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Frameworks have been developed by the Aboriginal Affairs Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders Working Group (*Framework for Coordinating Action to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls*), the Federal/Provincial/Territorial (FPT) Ministers of Justice and Public Safety (*Draft Justice Framework to Address Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls*) and the FPT Forum of Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women endorsed the Iqaluit Declaration in 2007 to address violence against Aboriginal women.

Federally, a Special Parliamentary Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls released its report *Invisible Women: A Call to Action – A Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada* in March 2014. The Government of Canada provided a response to this report in September 2014 in the *2014 Federal Action Plan to Address Family Violence and Violent Crimes Against Aboriginal Women and Girls*.