



April 8, 2013

Members of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women  
 c/o Clerk Jean-Marie David  
 E-Mail: [iwfa@parl.gc.ca](mailto:iwfa@parl.gc.ca)

Dear Honourable Members of Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women

**Re: Learning from the failures of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry**

We write to draw your attention to a report produced by three prominent human rights organizations that is highly relevant and should be useful to your work as members of the House Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women. [Blueprint for an Inquiry: Learning from the Failures of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry](#), produced by the BC Civil Liberties Association, Pivot Legal Society and West Coast LEAF, analyzes the failures of BC's recently concluded Missing Women Commission of Inquiry and makes recommendations aimed at avoiding similar failures in future inquiries involving marginalized communities.

Despite the persistent calls from a wide range of Indigenous, women's and human rights organizations from across the country demanding a national public inquiry into the hundreds of Aboriginal women and

girls who have gone missing and been murdered in Canada over the last several decades, the Canadian Government has refused to honour these calls. Requests from international bodies including the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to conduct country visits and undertake their own investigations have also been ignored.

To date, calls for accountability for the hundreds of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls across Canada have been effectively stonewalled. The creation of this Special Committee falls far short of the independent public inquiry called for by the community for so long. We are deeply concerned about the Special Committee's lack of independence, the potential for its politicization and the distinct possibility that it will be unable to investigate the depth and breadth of the crisis. In a recent example that illustrates our concerns, the final report on violence against Indigenous women and girls released in December 2011 by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women was criticized by its own Committee members for ignoring the testimony of most of the Indigenous women it heard during its consultations, and for simply listing current spending and services geared towards addressing violence against Indigenous women and girls, without providing concrete recommendations for the future.

We are also concerned that the Special Committee will be used to deflect requests from international bodies to conduct their own investigations into the tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. The decision to strike the Committee should not preclude the Government of Canada from immediately granting the visits requested under international and regional human rights procedures which Canada has agreed to.

It is clear that without an independent public inquiry, we will not uncover the whole story behind the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls or the systemic reasons for the failed police response to the crisis. However, it is also clear that this Special Committee is the only forum for addressing these issues we can expect from the federal government at this time. It is therefore essential that the Special Committee be prepared, equipped and committed to procedures with the greatest potential to uncover important information and make meaningful recommendations to prevent this tragedy from continuing.

As organizations who were among those granted standing to participate in the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry but who were subsequently denied the necessary funding to enable that participation – contrary to the recommendations of the Commissioner – our organizations had a front row seat from which to observe the failures of that Inquiry. We witnessed the exclusion of key voices from the Inquiry's proceedings, failure to develop adequate structures and systems to support vulnerable witnesses, a lack of collaboration and consultation with marginalized communities and the organizations that work with them, and the omission of key themes from the Inquiry's terms of reference.

In the [Blueprint for an Inquiry](#) report, the authors make 23 recommendations for future inquiries involving marginalized groups. The recommendations focus on broad trends and procedural approaches that can be adapted to the Special Committee’s particular structure. Recommendations for consulting and collaborating with affected communities, developing terms of reference through inclusive processes, supporting vulnerable witnesses, and ensuring that all relevant evidence is brought before the Commission are all highly and practically relevant to the Special Committee as it begins its work.

We strongly encourage you to review the [Blueprint for an Inquiry](#) report and consider how best to integrate the lessons learned from the failed Inquiry in BC in order to ensure that the Special Committee develops a more inclusive, productive and healing process for its own work. We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss these findings and to assist you to implement these recommendations.

Yours truly,

BC Civil Liberties Association, report co-author  
Pivot Legal Society, report co-author  
West Coast LEAF, report co-author  
Union of BC Indian Chiefs  
Aboriginal Front Door Society  
Amnesty International Canada  
Atira Women’s Resource Society  
Battered Women’s Support Services  
Butterflies in Spirit

Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre  
Ending Violence Association of BC  
February 14<sup>th</sup> Women’s Memorial March  
Committee  
Hospital Employees Union  
Justice for Girls  
Union Gospel Mission  
Women Against Violence Against Women  
WISH Drop-In Centre Society