



To: Leaders of BC political parties

Green: Sonia Furstenau

Liberal: Andrew Wilkinson, Paul Barbeau

New Democratic: John Horgan, Craig Keating

October 14, 2020

OPEN LETTER: Call for a BC Action Plan on MMIWG2S

Dear Leaders,

We, members of the Coalition on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls in BC (the Coalition), are writing to express grave concern and disappointment that no political party's released platform includes a plan to implement the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. With less than three weeks until voting day in BC, residents in this province are extremely concerned that the safety and security of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people is not a priority when it is literally a matter of life and death.

We call on each party to commit to fully implement the recommendations that will bring the human rights crisis of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people to an end. Survivors, family members, advocates, and expert human rights bodies have set out clear recommendations in numerous reports and commissions. These include the review conducted by the Legal Strategy Coalition on Violence Against Indigenous Women (LSC)¹; Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside²; the Path Forward Indigenous Women and Girls Safety Action Plan³; the report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in British Columbia*,

¹ Legal Strategy Coalition on Violence Against Indigenous Women, (2015), *Review of Reports and Recommendations on Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*, online: <https://www.leaf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Analysis-of-Implementation.pdf>

² Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, (2019), *Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*, online: <https://dewc.ca/resources/redwomenrising>

³ *Path Forward Indigenous Women and Girls Safety*, (2019), online: <https://www.pathforward.ca/action-plan.html>

Canada;⁴ the report of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on its Article 8 Inquiry into murders and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls in Canada⁵; and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The Coalition is an alliance of organizations that came together in 2010 at the time of the Oppal Missing Women Commission of Inquiry. The Coalition includes the February 14th March Committee, one of the first organizations in Canada to bring the crisis of violence against Indigenous women to public attention, and a broad range of organizations representing Indigenous women and their allies in women's anti-violence, human rights, and labour organizations. Among the members of the Coalition there is deep knowledge and expertise. Members have lived experience of discrimination and violence; are family members and friends of murdered and disappeared women, girls, and two-spirit people; and have been engaged for years in front-line, grassroots anti-violence work on the streets and in shelters. Members of the Coalition also have expertise in policy development and analysis regarding Indigenous rights, child welfare, and policing, as well as knowledge and practice in human rights, civil liberties criminal, constitutional, and international human rights law. Members of the Coalition were also parties with standing, and witnesses at the National Inquiry. Due to our depth wealth of knowledge, expertise and experiences, we comprehensively know the dire challenges Indigenous women and girls face, including the new challenges associated with COVID-19, that need to be addressed through a strong and transparent election platform.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed progress toward developing a National Action Plan at the federal level, it has further highlighted the need for urgent action on the part of our provincial government to address gender-based violence and structural barriers to wellbeing, justice, and safety. We call on all party leaders to support development of a BC-specific Action Plan. Concrete action to end the violence must not be delayed any further.

The pandemic has also revealed that every level of government can mobilize when the cost of inaction is properly realized. The negligence of government and its failure to act swiftly to implement the Calls for Justice betrays a lack of value for the lives of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. In recent months the systemic racism and police brutality that Indigenous women encounter regularly have been on public display. Changes to failing police and justice systems must have the voices of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals at the centre.

⁴ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in British Columbia, Canada*, 21 December 2014, online: <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/Indigenous-Women-BC-Canada-en.pdf>

⁵ United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Report of the inquiry concerning Canada of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, CEDAW/C/OP.8/CAN/1, 30 March 2015, online:https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/CEDAW_C_OP-8_CAN_1_7643_E.pdf

So far, we see no tangible commitments from the Government of British Columbia to implement the Calls for Justice fully and without delay. We are disappointed and concerned to have no clear commitment from any political party in BC to implementing the Calls for Justice.

The “Path Forward Women and Girls Community Safety Sessions”⁶ held in Summer 2019 provided an opportunity for a community-based discussion on priorities, but it has now been a full year since these conversations, and the real situation on the ground for Indigenous women has not changed. The “Government of B.C. Reflection on Ending Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls: A Statement on the Anniversary of the Release of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls”⁷ did not provide a clear plan for implementing the Calls for Justice.

Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people need a plan that takes seriously each and every Call for Justice, every recommendation in “Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside”, and every recommendation of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, and that is grounded in a commitment to the full realization of their human rights.

We call for each party to release their plan for implementing the Calls for Justice and for responding to the following recommendations:

1. Plan

Create a BC-specific Action Plan to implement the National Inquiry’s findings. Such a plan can be harmonized with the National Action Plan. However, ensure that action to end the violence isn’t delayed until the plan is created. Concrete action must be taken now, even while a plan is developed.

2. Engagement

Guarantee that the development of a BC Action Plan will be led by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, and family members, and their voices and knowledge will be at the center of the BC Action Plan process design, decision-making structures, implementation, and outcomes.

Ensure Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, families, survivors, advocates, Indigenous organizations and governments lead and participate in an open process that is strategic, transparent, accessible, and time bound, and provides for the development of community-based action plans.

3. Focus

⁶ See <https://www.pathforward.ca/>

⁷ See <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/about-bc-justice-system/inquiries/mmiw/mmiwg-overview-report.pdf>.

Build upon the work already done. Root causes and promising practices have already been identified in numerous reports and through the National Inquiry Final Report and Calls for Justice. These urgent, succinct, action-oriented calls now require an implementation plan and commitment of resources. Discussions must now be focused on how to actualize the solutions.

Ensure the BC Action Plan establishes timelines, responsibilities, milestones, indicators, resources, and Indigenous leadership for each and every Call for Justice, as well as numerous regional and sector-specific reports and recommendations.

4. Funding

Immediately commit appropriate, sufficient and sustainable funds for Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ organizations, family members and survivors to lead the development and implementation of the BC Action Plan. These organizations hold expertise regarding poverty and economic inequality, housing, safe spaces, child welfare, data gathering and indicators, policing and oversight, the justice system, support services for victims and families, community services and healing, reparations, education, healthcare, funding, BC Action Plan implementation oversight and reporting, Indigenous rights, communications and engagement, as well as First Nations, Inuit and Métis and 2SLGBTQQIA+ specific Calls for Justice.

Allocate significant new funds in the 2021-2022 provincial budget to create the BC Action Plan, with separate multi-year funding to implement the BC Action Plan. In conclusion, we urge you to release a plan that outlines your commitment to implementing the Calls for Justice and a BC Action Plan with respect to engagement, focus, and funding. Without this crucial information, your platforms fail to respond to the Government of BC's human rights obligations to Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people and family members. This is a national tragedy that cannot continue. Working to end it must be a central priority of the next Government of British Columbia.

Sincerely,

Aboriginal Mother's Centre
Aboriginal Women's Action Network
Amnesty International Canada
Atira Women's Resource Centre
Battered Women's Support Services.
BC Assembly of First Nations
BC Civil Liberties Association
Butterflies in Spirit
Downtown Eastside Women's Centre
First United Church
Myrna Cranmer
Poverty and Human Rights Centre
Provincial Council of Women of BC
Union of BC Indian Chiefs

Union Gospel Mission
Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre
WISH Drop-In Centre Society