

Why support a National Public Inquiry?

Aboriginal women and girls are strong and beautiful.
They are our mothers, our daughters, our sisters, aunties, and grandmothers.

The Native Women's Association of Canada has documented over 582 occurrences of missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls (*What Their Stories Tell Us, 2010*). We know that there are more cases that have not been documented. We also know that this epidemic of violence is continuing to claim more lives and irreparably harm more families every month.

Addressing this issue requires that the factors causing it are correctly identified, and those individuals, processes and policies responsible for the maintaining the status quo—and the subsequent harms to Aboriginal women and girls—are remedied. Recommendations and ACTION for the change are needed to increase the safety of Aboriginal women and girls in all walks of life across Canada.

NWAC believes that a National Public Inquiry is a crucial step in implementing a comprehensive and coordinated National Action Plan to address the scale and severity of violence faced by Aboriginal women and girls.

What does NWAC Recommend? A National Public Inquiry would enable the federal government—and, if it was constituted as a joint inquiry, then also the provincial and territorial governments—to conduct a comprehensive national investigation into violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

A National Public Inquiry would support a comprehensive investigation that considers the overlapping responsibilities of all levels of government. It is hoped that this would provide an independent, unbiased and public review that addresses the crisis of confidence felt in the Aboriginal communities in relation to government responses to violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

How might this help Aboriginal women and girls in Canada? A National Public Inquiry would increase public awareness of this human rights crisis in Canada and provide assurance to Aboriginal peoples that all levels of government recognize the severity of the issue and are committed to ending these cycles of violence. This would begin to address the crisis in confidence felt within Aboriginal communities in relation to government and justice system responses to violence against Aboriginal women and girls. This lack of confidence is increasingly understood and shared by the Canadian public, as evidenced by their support of events such as the October 4th Sisters In Spirit Vigils and related activities. Unfortunately, there are still many Canadians who do not recognize or understand that Canada is facing a human rights crisis in terms of its lack of safety and protection for Aboriginal women and girls and a National Public Inquiry is one way to change this.

Won't this cost too much money and time? In the long term, a National Public Inquiry would be more cost-effective than conducting multiple investigations that include only some regions or partial investigations of causes and factors. Moreover, there is an ongoing annual cost to individual families and to Canada that will continue until this issue is resolved.



Will this bring justice for families? Any process that acknowledges, includes and works to understand the lived experiences of Aboriginal families will be successful. For far too long families have been silenced and although many have found their voice and continue to share, there are many many more who need the opportunity and resources to come forward. A National Public Inquiry is a processes that will encourage and 'give voice' to all interested families and this is something that NWAC is deeply committed to.

What are families telling us? NWAC believes that those most affected by this extreme form of violence must be an integral part of a National Public Inquiry. For years, families and communities have pointed to the high numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. As they shared, NWAC listened and began the basic framing of the issue, although not limited to:

- Families face too many barriers when trying to report a missing person to police;
- There are too few available or appropriate services to help families with missing or murdered female family members;
- Police investigations into missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls are not always sufficiently timely, thorough, rigorous, or coordinated;
- Police resolve too few cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls;
- Aboriginal women and girls who have experienced violence may avoid reporting this to the police due to concerns about further victimization;
- There is too much societal indifference to the extent of and severity of violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada which perpetuates these cycles of violence; and,
- There is support at the Provincial and Territorial level for improved services and programs to address violence against Aboriginal women and girls but there is a lack of political will and commitment from the Federal government to identify new and secured funding.

Although some are familiar with the underlying issues that families have shared above as well as with the root causes of violence, this human rights crisis is not widely recognized nor well understood by the majority of Canadians. The inclusion of Aboriginal families in the process of conducting a National Public Inquiry, from planning to post-report implementation, will be central to the success of this activity and will ensure that the voices of families will be heard.

Who else would be involved in this process? NWAC hopes that the National Aboriginal Organizations, Aboriginal leadership and those most impacted would be involved in all levels of the National Public Inquiry. Conducting a comprehensive inquiry, with the participation of all levels of government and national aboriginal organizations will provide the knowledge we need to act with wisdom, to create meaningful change, and to design a National Framework and Action Plan that will prevent Aboriginal families from experiencing the pain and horror of the loss of a loved one to violence in the future.

"We require nothing less than transformation: of the relationship between Aboriginal women and girls and those who are supposed to help and protect them; between Aboriginal peoples and the government, police and justice systems; and of the way that we think about and respond to violence in Canada."

Michèle Audette, NWAC President

How can I as an individual help? Anyone can help by learning more about the issue of Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls and supporting the call for a National Public Inquiry. To get involved go to: www.nwac.ca



What are the other options? To learn the difference between a National Public Inquiry and Task force/Special Committee see Table 1.0.

Table 1.0	Task Force/Special Committee	National Public Inquiry
Formation	Ad hoc committee established by government minister, department head, Director, etc.	Formal. Jurisdiction established under legislation (either federal or provincial)
Duration	Temporary. Duration can be changed at any time. Can be closed or wound up at any point in activities. Often short term.	Set duration established in Terms of Reference (ToR). Can be extended. Continues until expiry of duration as set through ToR. Can be short, medium or long term.
Composition	Usually an individual or small team of government employees and/or subject matter experts. Roles and responsibilities may shift over time.	Headed by one or more Commissioners appointed to the role. Legal and support staff hired by commissioners at their own discretion.
Public access	Often not accessible to public. Documents, process, hearings and final report may be confidential.	Often open to public. Documents, process, hearings and final report may be posted on internet.
Relationship to gov't	Dependent. Answers to minister, director, department or ministry that created it.	Independent once established. Sets own course and activities: is responsible to meet terms and conditions established in ToR
Budget	May have a separate line item for budget or resources in government departmental budget. Budget or resources can be augmented or removed at any time.	Independent budget established by gov't is detailed in ToR and managed by Commissioner.
Recommendations	Non-binding.	Non-binding.
Cost	Can be limited or low cost, consisting of in-kind provision of salary, space and administrative resources by founding institution.	Can be high, depending on duration and scope of investigations. Includes salaries, office space, equipment, supplies, hearings venue, travel, legal services for witnesses, etc.
Structure	Informal or Formal. May have a Terms of Reference or similar document to outline and guide activities.	Formal. Terms of reference are legally binding and outline scope, mandate, timeframe, budget, etc.
Activities	Targeted investigation of specific issue or problems. May call subject matter experts.	Generally intended to advise or investigate. May call subject matter experts, witnesses, etc.
Process	Problem-solving orientation: identifies multiple solutions to a specific issue and recommends 'best' solution based on some criteria established by government or Task Force.	Broadly investigative, within mandate and scope established in ToR. May "go where the evidence leads".
Authority	Cannot compel witnesses to testify nor to produce documents.	May compel witnesses to testify, or to provide documents.
Future actions	Are at the discretion of the founding institution	Are at the discretion of the government (s) that established the Inquiry
Participation	By invitation. May be limited by time frame, budget, or by design.	"Parties" are granted standing by Commissioner at hearings. Written submissions may be accepted.



NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

