

**Native Women's Association of Canada  
President Kukdookaa Terri Brown**

**Canada – Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable  
April 19, 2004**

It is an honour to be meeting with the Prime Minister, other Parliamentarians and our brothers and sisters from the National Aboriginal Organizations for this historic Canada - Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable. The Native Women's Association of Canada views this meeting as an opportunity to further the relationship between the Federal Government and Aboriginal peoples and to ensure that the voices of First Nation and Métis women are heard when developing future Aboriginal policy in Canada.

We would like to acknowledge the Algonquin people for welcoming us to their territory. In the short time I have to speak today, I am going to briefly outline our position on the following issues: our Sisters in Spirit Campaign, Aboriginal poverty and the policy priorities for this afternoon's agenda: economic development, education, housing and health.

### **Sisters in Spirit Campaign**

The Sisters in Spirit Campaign aims to increase public awareness and education levels about the alarmingly high rates of racialized violence against Aboriginal women all too often leading to their disappearance and death. We estimate that over the past 30 years, approximately 500 Aboriginal women have gone missing in communities across Canada.

We are in an urgent state of affairs in regards to the safety of Aboriginal women. We request that the Federal Government commit to providing a fund of \$10 million to implement the Sisters in Spirit Campaign. This year, the Native Women's Association of Canada will need resources to develop a strategic plan that would be implemented when this commitment is made. This plan will include research, education and community-based programs to assist marginalized Aboriginal women vulnerable to this extreme violence. Time is of the essence in this situation. Immediate action is required to stop the needless killings of Aboriginal women in Canada.

### **Poverty**

In the recent Throne Speech, it was stated that conditions in far too many Aboriginal communities can only be described as being "shameful". We applaud the Government of Canada for acknowledging the severity of the socio-economic problems facing Aboriginal people. Many studies have found that Aboriginal peoples in this country are

living in developing world conditions. From an Aboriginal women's perspective, the findings are particularly harsh.

- Poverty amongst Aboriginal women is greater than that of Aboriginal men by a significant margin: 43% of Aboriginal women live in poverty compared to 35% of Aboriginal men.<sup>1</sup>

Poverty impacts over half of all Aboriginal children in Canada: 52.1% of all Aboriginal children are poor.<sup>2</sup>

The rate of sexual exploitation of Aboriginal children and youth has reached levels of more than 90% in some communities where Aboriginal population is less than 10%. Sadly, these children are more easily exploited because they lack basic needs of food, shelter and clothing.<sup>3</sup>

Poverty in Aboriginal communities must become a priority for this government. Canada must work with the National Aboriginal Organizations in order to develop a strategy to help alleviate the abject poverty we are facing in our communities that is a significant contributor to the extremely high levels of violence and death faced by Aboriginal women.

## **Policy Priorities for this Roundtable: Economic Development, Housing, Education and Health**

### **Economic Development**

Economic development can play a role in improving the poverty rates and the rates of violence against Aboriginal women if a holistic approach is taken and the multiple factors of oppression against Aboriginal peoples are addressed in a comprehensive way. However, this has not been the trend in recent times. Instead of moving forward on addressing economic development for Aboriginal women, the federal government has actually reduced spending in this area.

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*1 M. Céleste McKay and FAFIA, Report on Canada's Compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in Response to Canada's 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Reports to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. (FAFLA Think Tank Paper No. 3, August 2001), page 22.*

*2 Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Urban Aboriginal Child Poverty: A Status Report on Aboriginal Children & Their Families in Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, October, 2000*

*3 Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Urban Aboriginal Child Poverty: A Status Report on Aboriginal Children and Their Families in Ontario. Fact Sheet, Toronto, Ontario, 2000.*

The Native Women's Association of Canada experienced:

- Human Resources Skills Development Canada funding was reduced by **\$502,000**
- Cut-backs reduce the ability of our organization to address the employment and training needs of Aboriginal women
- Native Women's Association of Canada receives **.7%** of the total funding under this Agreement, despite the fact that Aboriginal women make up 53% of the Aboriginal population
- It is imperative that Aboriginal women's organizations are central to the implementation of these type of strategies if changes to Aboriginal women's socio-economic status are to be realized.

Concretely, then, the Native Women's Association of Canada calls upon the federal government to reinstate or increase our levels of funding so that the economic development needs of Aboriginal women in Canada can begin to be adequately addressed. This type of action will set apart Prime Minister Martin from past leadership, as a Prime Minister willing to go beyond the rhetoric of promises to improve the status of Aboriginal peoples in Canada to making this an **actual** reality. We urge you to meet this challenge and work in partnership with our organization and the other National Aboriginal Organizations.

## Housing

- There must be a national Aboriginal Housing Strategy developed using a process that includes Aboriginal women's organizations
- Matrimonial Real Property on Reserve must be addressed

## Education

- Education is the solution to poverty
- Increase education funding to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples
- There must be changes to INAC education policies

- Gendered racism facing Aboriginal women result in barriers to seeking employment even where individuals hold requisite educational qualifications. Without addressing systemic barriers, the benefits of post-secondary education will not be fully addressed

## **Health**

- Lower socio-economic status of Aboriginal women requires gender specific approaches to existing health initiatives
- There needs to be more gender specific health studies
- Accessible services for rural, remote, and northern communities

## **Conclusion**

These forums for dialogue between Canada and National Aboriginal Organizations are important and heartening to the Native Women's Association of Canada. They represent opportunities for Aboriginal representative organizations and the Canadian government to develop policy in partnership among one another in a meaningful way.

It is vital that Aboriginal women's organizations be included in processes designed to address all issues affecting Aboriginal people including Self-Government, Justice, and Health as well as ensuring that legislative changes are a priority. It is imperative that the results of these discussions are implemented.

The Native Women's Association of Canada looks forward to a renewed and revitalized approach to developing concrete steps that includes Aboriginal women's voices. We intend to be vigilant in calling Canada to account and ensuring that the partnerships formed here today result in positive changes to the lives of our women and their families.