

**Update on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls**

Mr. Speaker, today is the third-year anniversary of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I wish to honour the Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people who have lost their lives or who have experienced or continue to experience trauma and violence.

Mr. Speaker, most people in the NWT, and certainly everyone in this room, knows someone who has attended a residential or day school, whose grandparent lost a family member during the 50's and 60's tuberculosis outbreak, or whose sibling was taken away during the 60s scoop. We may also know someone whose friend, sister or mother suffered from violence or was taken away from her family too soon.

Rooted in systemic factors, this violence is often the result of economic, social, and political marginalization, as well as racism and discrimination. The emotional and psychological effects of these events and actions manifest into the present day, with multi-generational and intergenerational trauma continuing to impact Indigenous people in the NWT and across Canada.

I have said this before and will continue to say, violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people is a crisis that demands an urgent response. Those words come from the Native Women's Association NWT's first of four core recommendations to the National Inquiry calling on all levels of Canadian leadership to acknowledge this national crisis.

Mr. Speaker, despite the increased attention being paid, the crisis is far from over and therefore we must continue to meaningfully and sincerely acknowledge.

In December 2021, I tabled the GNWT's Draft Action Plan in response to the Calls for Justice on missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people. Entitled "Changing the Relationship," the draft action plan aims to transform the GNWT's approach to service delivery and begin to undo the effects of colonialism and racial and gendered discrimination from all levels of government and public institutions.

The Gender Equity Unit is expected to begin visiting communities in the spring, to talk to people about our draft action plan and how we propose to respond to the Calls for Justice. Our territory's gradual emergence from the pandemic stalled our progress in gathering people together but we are making important progress. Just this week, the GNWT and Native Women's Association of the NWT co-hosted an Indigenous Language Terminology Workshop with interpreters and Elders on common terms related to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and gender-based violence. The purpose of the workshop was to address potential language barriers that may prevent residents from providing feedback on the draft action plan.

The terminology workshop was an important first step ahead of further community engagement on the action plan. Over the summer, we will visit communities throughout the NWT to engage with Indigenous governments, community governments, and all NWT residents about the Calls for Justice and our draft response. The work done at the terminology workshop will be incorporated into the development of Indigenous language materials for community discussions, leading to more meaningful engagement with Elders and people with lived experience. Materials will also be available online and distributed in advance of all public engagement activities.

Earlier this week, I had the honour to share lunch with the participants at the translators' workshop. It was a deeply moving experience. When I walked in, the room was almost literally buzzing. Groups of Elders, knowledge keepers and language experts representing almost all of the official language of the NWT were each gathered at tables. They were not merely asking how to explain a particular word in a different language. They were

discussing the root meanings of those words and the cultural understanding or expression underlying it.

When I was there, the group was wrapping up discussion around the translation of 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples. Representatives from several tables stood to summarize their discussions.

From one table I heard that historically, sexuality, sexual preferences and gender expression was more fluid. That discrimination against 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples was something taught or imposed by colonialism. I learned that there were traditional words for people whose genders changed after birth and that was no disrespectfulness associated with this, rather, it reflected the individual as a person.

From more than one table, I heard sadness and frustration at the cultural loss of the traditional esteem once accorded to two-spirited people. The speakers described that people who were gifted with elements of both genders were revered because having gifts incorporating both genders placed them closer to the Creator.

Mr. Speaker, imagine the impact as communities reclaim this kind of knowledge. Imagine the impact when leadership and governments reflect these kinds of cultural and social understandings. This is a reminder of why our draft action plan must be more than a collection of discrete actions department by department but rather a way of thinking and serving that builds on seeing people as they are, where they are and builds trust.

Mr. Speaker, the release of the Final Report of the National Inquiry was momentous and brought to the forefront the need for change in all levels of leadership, all governments and across society. Social change takes time but we have an opportunity to take an active role in a process of change to improve the safety and well-being of NWT Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.