



September 26, 2017

## Chief Commissioner's Opening Remarks during Smithers Community Hearings

Bonjour, bon matin, je me présente Marion Buller, et je suis la commissaire en chef. Je vous présente avec grand plaisir mon amie la commissaire Michèle Audette.

Hello, I am Marion Buller and I am the Chief Commissioner of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It is with pleasure that I introduce my dear friend Commissioner Michèle Audette, who is also here this week.

I want to start by acknowledging the Spirits of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and young Girls. I am grateful for the courage of the families, the survivors of violence, and the LGBTQ2S people. I also want to take this time to acknowledge that we are on the unceded, traditional and ancestral territory of the Wet'suwet'en people.

Bienvenue à nos audience à Smithers. Welcome to our Smithers hearings.

Thank you to Chief Timberwolf for starting us off in a good way this morning. Molly Wickham thank you for singing a beautiful Wet'suwet'en women's water song and for your strong voice. I am also very grateful for the fire keepers—they are attending our sacred fire outside around the clock throughout this week. And especially, thank you to the Elders for all that you do for us Commissioners—for supporting us and for always keeping us on the right path.

Commissioner Qajaq Robinson was supposed to be here this week, however, while en-route to Smithers, she found out about the death of a close family member. She went home to support her family in their time of need, and she asked that I pass on a simple message to all that are here today: "Speak up, speak out."

Commissioner Brian Eyolfson sends his warm regards and wishes for strength and courage for all of us.

Yesterday the Hereditary Chiefs of this area welcomed us and led us into town. We are humbled and truly honoured to be able to walk with the Hereditary Chiefs and the many family members and survivors of violence. We walked in memory of lost mothers, sisters, cousins, nieces, aunties, and good friends. They were real people—real people who are gone from us, gone from all of Canada, but remain in our hearts.

The National Inquiry came to Smithers because it lies in the middle of the Highway of Tears, a stretch of road that connects Prince George and Prince Rupert. Northern British Columbia is a very important location because it's part of the national tragedy of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Here this week, we will listen to families and survivors of violence. We will listen to them with open minds and open hearts. The families and survivors will help us understand what went wrong, what worked, and how to make life better and safer for all Indigenous Women and Girls, and indeed for all Canadians.