

# Love and Support to the Mothers of Indigenous Daughters

*Sunday May 12, 2019*



As we approach Mother's Day, we send our love and support to the mothers of Indigenous daughters who were murdered or disappeared, to the children left behind and the families grieving the loss of a loved one. We have been forever changed by our experience serving on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It has been our deep honour to meet so many courageous and resilient families, survivors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and many others as we traveled from coast to coast to coast.

On June 3, 2019, we will present our Final Report to the Government of Canada and of each province and territory. We feel it is our duty to share what we have learned as broadly as possible, so that each of us may reflect more deeply on the kind of Canada we want to create. A brief glimpse of history shows us that there was a time when First Nation, Métis and Inuit women had significant influence in governance, lands, economies and cultures. Indigenous oral stories from across Canada show women and gender-diverse people played key roles including leaders, as "mothers" of the nation; healers and medicine people who tended to physical, emotional, and spiritual health; and protectors who managed community resources, and acted as land defenders and water keepers.

Colonization affected Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people differently than men. The European systems relied on patriarchy – the dominance of men. This new, patriarchal worldview consistently undermined the traditional roles of Indigenous women. Indigenous women also experienced economic, political and social marginalization through the patriarchy imposed by Christian churches, and the government of Canada, most notably with the 1876 Indian Act.

Colonization created the ethnocentric ideas that continue to dehumanize Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people and make them targets of violence today. This is central to the National Inquiry's findings: The current tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people is centuries in the making.

This is a hard truth to hear. As Canadians, we pride ourselves on being a just and principled society, bound by the rule of law, respectful of human rights and human dignity. We see ourselves as champions for human rights on the international stage.

Today, many Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people do not trust child welfare, justice, health, police, or education systems. Their encounters with these systems can often feel brutal and punishing. We heard over and over again, that quite simply, our systems hurt — even the ones that are supposed to help.

The expertise and agency of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people is also too often ignored. In fact, the National Inquiry itself is the result of decades of tireless and creative efforts by Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people to be heard. They have the solutions to ending violence in their lives, at both the individual and community level, and yet their voices have not counted.

This must change.

We see a Canada where a Mohawk girl in Akwesasne, or an Inuit baby girl born in Arctic Bay, Nunavut, or a Métis girl in downtown Regina, comes into a world that is ready to welcome her. Before she is even born, her mother has access to pre-natal care and nutrition and support programs in her home community that are culturally

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appropriate. In more remote communities, it may mean an Indigenous doula is there to help in the birth, so that new mother does not have to travel hundreds of kilometres to have her baby among strangers.

That Indigenous baby comes home to a house that is properly insulated and warm, where there is clean, running water and electricity, just like other Canadian children begin life. We see that little girl in school where First Nations and Métis and Inuit stories and language and world views and role models are part of the curriculum. She learns that her mother and her aunts and grandmother are respected and valued and sacred members of their community, and this country. She learns that 2SLGBTQIA members of the community and this nation are equally respected and valued and sacred.

When that little girl turns on the television or reads a newspaper or social media, she finds strong, positive, healthy images of herself and the community she lives in. She feels pride. We see a Canada where men and boys, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, stand in solidarity with their sisters, and help end the cycle of violence.

This is the Canada that is possible. It is not only possible, it is essential. Through our actions, let us honour and give life to the truth.

**Kinana'skomitinnow-ow**

**Marion Buller**  
Chief Commissioner

**Tshinashkumitnau**

**Michèle Audette**  
Commissioner

**Chi-meegwetch**

**Brian Eyolfson**  
Commissioner

**Nakurmiik**

**Qajaq Robinson**  
Commissioner