



# Statement

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June 4, 2019

## For Immediate Release

The release of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is an important milestone for social justice in Canada. This exhaustive document, comprising more than 1,000 pages, explains why Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals have been, and continue to be, subject to horrendous violence, abuse and overarching injustices in our society.

Most importantly, the report features prominently the voices of grandmothers, mothers, daughters and Elders with deep personal connections to those who have been lost. I want to acknowledge the families, survivors, and loved ones who courageously gave their testimony and, in so doing, helped the inquiry go beyond the statistics and helped us all remember the women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals who have been taken from their families and communities. There are many lessons that must be learned so that their stories are honoured and inspire transformational societal change.

The final report makes 231 recommendations, or “Calls for Justice” aimed at improving the safety, health, economic circumstances, human rights protection, cultural connection and general well-being of Indigenous peoples. These calls could also be considered a blueprint for decolonization and reconciliation as many of them extend to general population wellness – including calls for a guaranteed basic income; clean, running water in all communities; and accessible and equitable health care for Indigenous peoples in this country.

In British Columbia, my Office’s work is based on the principles of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, as well as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. I am pleased to see that the MMIWG Inquiry has strongly recommended that all governments in Canada finally live up to these fundamental principles to which they are signatories.

It has long been apparent that provincial child welfare systems in Canada, including B.C., have been and continue to be a disservice to Indigenous peoples and that the resulting trauma and family disruption have been a direct

cause of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people. *“The Canadian state has used child welfare laws and agencies as a tool to oppress, displace, disrupt, and destroy Indigenous families, communities, and Nations,”* the report reads. *“It is a tool in the genocide of Indigenous Peoples . . . There is a direct link between current child welfare systems and the disappearances and murders of, and violence experienced by, Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.”*

The MMIWG report shines a spotlight on these truths and makes 15 key recommendations aimed directly at the child welfare system, including the call for *“all governments, including Indigenous governments, to transform current child welfare systems fundamentally so that Indigenous communities have control over the design and delivery of services for their families and children. These services must be adequately funded and resourced to ensure better support for families and communities to keep children in their family homes.”*

The report also calls for each provincial and territorial child and youth advocate to establish a specialized unit *“with the mandate of Indigenous children and youth.”* This is a step we have already taken, and we will continue to strengthen our Indigenous Strategies and Partnerships team at RCY. We also support the Inquiry’s call for the federal government to establish a National Child and Youth Commissioner *“who would also serve as a special measure to strengthen the framework of accountability for the rights of Indigenous children in Canada.”*

We are pleased to see the Inquiry recommend that governments comply with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling of 2016 that called for substantive equity with respect to funding levels and services for Indigenous children and youth. And we are encouraged by references to the importance of investing in and prioritizing prevention, family support, reunification and supports to youth who are “aging out” of child welfare systems. We fully support and see significant benefit to such shifts in focus.

While the report correctly calls out serious issues with child welfare systems across Canada, it also highlights some promising practices, a number of which are happening in B.C., including the Lu’ma Native Housing Society, the Atira Women’s Resource Centre, Grandma’s House and Young Bears Lodge.

The focus of the MMIWG report's attention is not limited to child welfare, however. Its recommendations call for necessary improvements in policing, the legal system, health care, education and housing. The report emphasizes the protective factors that connection to culture can bring, including calls for consistently available and culturally appropriate services for Indigenous children and families, for Indigenous languages to be recognized as official languages and for children to be guaranteed their right to be educated in their language.

Many of the pages of the MMIWG Inquiry report tell similar, heart-wrenching stories – from mothers who have lost their daughters and from young women who have been victims of sexual exploitation or violence themselves. Far too many of these stories have occurred, and continue to occur, in B.C.

Notably, my Office is deeply concerned about a recurring pattern we are seeing of young Indigenous girls in this province who are dealing with historical and intergenerational trauma that has contributed to problematic substance use, sexual exploitation and mental health issues. The systems of care are not fully listening to or understanding these young people nor providing adequate care, support and housing. Many of the issues identified in the MMIWG report are common to these girls and many of the recommendations, if fulfilled, would no doubt help address the issues that we see.

Besides making recommendations to improve the lives of Indigenous people, the MMIWG Inquiry report calls for all Canadians to be a part of what Chief Commissioner Marion Buller says must be a *“transformational change.”*

*“This report is about these beautiful Indigenous people and the systemic factors that lead to their losses of dignity, humanity and, in too many cases, losses of life,”* Buller writes in her report Preface. *“This report is about deliberate race, identity and gender-based genocide.”*

Later, the report adds: *“One of the things that makes this National Inquiry unique is that we are not investigating a past wrong, but one that is still ongoing and that is getting worse. Acts of violence stemming from the structures of colonization and coupled with racism, sexism, homophobia, and*

*transphobia are not few and far between, but pervasive, immediate, and urgent.”*

Indeed, for all Canadians, this report should be about education and about joining in a public push for change that is long overdue.

Our Office deeply appreciates the work that the Commission has undertaken and we will do our part to honour this work and the testimony and contributions of all involved to address the history and current reality.

You can find the report in full here: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>



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