



ONTARIO NATIVE
WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

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12 November 2010

RE: DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE CANADA ANNOUNCES \$10 MILLION IN SUPPORT OF MISSING AND MURDERED ABORIGINAL WOMEN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ONTARIO – The Department of Justice Canada recently announced that \$10M would be allocated to address the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. While ONWA supports the Government of Canada in taking steps to address this very important issue, we share the serious concerns of NWAC and Sisters In Spirit of how this money is allocated. Furthermore, it is very disappointing that Sisters In Spirit will be excluded from the ongoing development of public policy in the matter.

NWAC launched the Sisters In Spirit campaign in 2004 to address violence against Aboriginal women and girls. It was estimated that over the past 20 years, 500 Aboriginal women had gone missing in communities across Canada. Yet government and Canadian society continued to minimize the seriousness of this issue. In 2005, NWAC secured funding for the Sisters in Spirit initiative – a five-year research, education and policy initiative supported by Status of Women Canada to address the root causes and trends of missing and murdered women and girls. NWAC spent the next 5 years collecting evidence and compiling the information into the Sisters in Spirit database. In 2010, NWAC holds the only research identifying the disappearance and death of 582 Aboriginal women and girls across Canada; of those 115 still remain missing. The overall findings of the Sisters in Spirit research indicate that ***Aboriginal women continue to be the most at risk group in Canada for issues related to violence. They were targeted because they were Aboriginal, and it was assumed that they would not fight back or would not be missed.*** These disappearances and murders have gone unnoticed because only those who knew them and loved them paid attention. Murdered Aboriginal women represent approximately 10% of the total number of female homicides in Canada despite the fact that Aboriginal women make up only 3% of the total female population in Canada. “This statistic is staggering and it cannot be ignored,” says Dawn Harvard, ONWA President.

While this announcement was intended to show the government’s commitment to allocating funds towards addressing the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls, the proposed national police support centre for missing persons and unidentified remains won’t be up and running until at least 2013. The RCMP needs this time to gather information for developing their database. Not only will this be a duplication of work that was already completed



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by Sisters in Spirit, but the data will be inferior as the RCMP has limitations and restrictions for gathering information about Aboriginal identity.

Furthermore, families will be asked to wait 2 more years before any government action is taken to address the issue that the Sisters in Spirit Initiative already clearly identified. The centre will become the third branch of the Canadian Police Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, but it still will not have a separate section dedicated for Aboriginal women.

It is offensive that the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women is being used to funnel more dollars into mainstream programs that do not specifically address this issue or provide adequate support to Aboriginal families and their communities. This announcement shows that the government is only concerned with giving more money and power to police and not interested in focusing on Aboriginal women or supporting initiatives like Sisters In Spirit, that might actually make a difference in the lives Aboriginal women and their families.

In light of this, ONWA fully supports NWAC's request for funding to be immediately restored to the Sisters In Spirit initiative. It is also imperative for the government to show ongoing support for Sisters In Spirit by ensuring that NWAC has a seat at the table when deciding how future money will be allocated on issues that affect Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) is a not for profit organization that empowers and supports Aboriginal women and their families in the province of Ontario.

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