

Indigenous Women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People Declaration



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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1. Development and Intent of the Declaration: We, Indigenous women from the BC region, met at the Women's Dialogue Session hosted by the BC Assembly of First Nations on March 16-17, 2017 on the traditional territory of the Musqueam people, and on November 1-2, 2017 on the traditional territory of the Sts'ailes. The purpose for the sessions was to bring together First Nations women in leadership to discuss challenges, successes, and strategies to support and enhance the wellbeing and development of ourselves and our communities. The Women's Declaration that was developed during these sessions was supported by the BC Chiefs-in-Assembly via Resolution 01/2018: Support for BC Indigenous Women's Declaration

On January 24, 2020 we gathered again on the traditional territory of the Musqueam people to build on the Declaration from 2017, support one another, and gain strength to thrive in the political, business, family, and community contexts we live and engage in. The 2020 iteration of the Declaration that was developed based on this session was supported by the BC Chiefs-in-Assembly via Resolution 11/2020: Support for Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People Declaration and Strategy

2. Where We Come From/Our Cultures and Traditions: We acknowledge that we are here because of the strength of our diverse cultures, traditions and teachings of our ancestors, which have sustained our people since time immemorial.

We acknowledge those who have come before us. We thank the generations of women who continued to organize and gather in the face of adversity. It is because of their perseverance, sacrifice, love, vision, and hope that we are rooted in our identities and inherent rights.

As our teachings tie us to the land, we affirm our responsibility to protect, defend, and secure our rights to the environment that surrounds us, and to our lands and waters, as they provide the essentials of life for our people. As women, we are the givers of life and bring future generations into being. We commit to raising and nurturing our children, especially our sons, to be respectful of and honour Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2SLGBTQQIA+) individuals.

3. What We Have Lived Through: Since the time of contact and into the present day colonization and assimilation has purposefully and systematically aimed to divide and conquer Indigenous peoples, fracture communities and wellbeing, and disrupt Indigenous ways of living. Indian Residential Schools, the reserve system, the 60s Scoop, the *Indian Act*, sex-based discrimination, the over-representation of First Nations children in the child welfare system, and countless pieces of genocidal legislation, policies, and procedures have impacted the legal, social, health, financial and political contexts that women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people have had to navigate to survive.

Indigenous women continue to suffer from a multitude of traumas, which largely flow from the effects of colonization. The continued silence about these traumas impedes healing and is killing our people. By naming, and walking through this trauma, we can begin to heal.

Violence, poverty, homelessness, isolation, mental and physical health challenges, abuse, discrimination, and lack of access to culture, language, and education are all part of the lived experience of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals in our communities.

Indigenous women and girls are five times more likely to experience violence than any other population in Canada and three times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be victims of violence.

Despite the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guaranteeing gender equality, from 1982 to 2019, the *Indian Act* discriminated against Indigenous women because of their gender and has cut off women from their communities, entitlement to Status and the benefits that flow from that entitlement, and created familial tensions and separation that have resulted in exclusion and isolation.

Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are underrepresented in political processes at the local, regional, provincial, and national levels.

Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (2SLGBTQQIA+) individuals encounter unique challenges, including meeting needs for identity and belonging, accessing culture and ceremony, health services, security, economic opportunities, education, and justice. While many 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are reclaiming their identities and roles in community, and are supported by community, they continue to face distinct barriers. 2SLGBTQQIA+ truths are also often excluded from advocacy and discourse around missing and murdered Indigenous women and gender-based violence, despite the high rates of violence this community faces.

In the face of these realities, we have hope. Women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals have the right to live free from violence, to live fully, and have wellbeing. We look to those around us who are on their healing journey and gain courage from their strength. We are encouraged by those who have stood in the gap to bring positive change. We are inspired by each generation, and in particular our young people, who carry forward our tremendous vision for the future.

5. Where We Are Going: We have the right to health and wellness, and a responsibility to ensure the health and wellness of our children and of our families.

Healing, reconciliation, and restoration can happen when women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are restored to their rightful place.

Reconciliation and decolonization will not be achieved until our traditional way of life, our languages and cultures are revitalized and thriving; until our inherent rights to our lands and resources are recognized; until our rights to self-determination are recognized and implemented; and until the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being of our peoples are restored, not just in words, but in actions.

6. Commitments: We have our hands and hearts on the community. We commit to fostering healthy homes, communities, natural environments, and spaces to go where our children and families feel safe, secure and loved.

We not only acknowledge complex trauma, but join with others to walk through it, in healing. We acknowledge that the path to healing is often a long one, and we will forgive ourselves and others for our shortcomings as we continue on our paths.

We commit to breaking the silence and working together to facilitate healing among our peoples, both those abused and those who are abusers.

We will support our community members in their struggles with substance use, as we recognize the damage that substance abuse has done, and continues to do, to our people across our territories. We commit to taking proactive steps to ensure the safety and well-being of our communities in the face of the proliferation of dangerous drugs and the opioid crisis. This will involve a range of mental health supports and public safety approaches.

We will support and embrace our people who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, and recognize it can come in many forms: physical, emotional, mental, and financial.

We must make space and keep widening the circle to include our people who are returning from prisons and institutions, and who are homeless.

We will widen the circle to engage First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people wherever they live and work, including on-reserve, in community, urban areas, and remote areas.

We commit to finding community-based solutions to promote healing and forgiveness to bring people back to our traditional ways, ceremonies, family gatherings, and safe spaces.

When we are faced with or observe violence against Indigenous women, 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, and children, lateral violence, abuse, discrimination, ableism, sexism or racism, we commit to call it out and address it in a good way, which includes ensuring that adequate supports are in place for all impacted individuals.

We commit to continue promoting the full and effective participation of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in political processes, and will work to have Indigenous women sitting at all levels of government. We commit to supporting one another to address the unique challenges that face Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ leaders. We commit to creating space, encouraging and mentoring young Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people to become involved in political processes and to flourish.

In our own communities, we will encourage our own leaders to support employment equity and ensure women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are represented in the workforce. We will encourage our young women to pursue their personal, educational, and social goals without judgment or reservation.

We commit to honouring Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in our communities who are dedicated to making a positive change, and those who have overcome great challenges.

We commit to fostering and upholding Indigenous knowledge, as we know this knowledge enables us to care for one another in a good way.

We commit to finding effective strategies to ensure the safety and security of Indigenous women and girls through adequate transit and housing initiatives for First Nations people wherever they live.

We will continue to build our networks to ensure we have the support we need to achieve our goals.

6. Resilience and Respect: We acknowledge the tremendous strength and resilience of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in overcoming challenges and reclaiming our distinct roles and responsibilities in our societies. We will support each other, and vow to connect with one another when we need support.

We commit to bringing each other into the circle, to be inclusive, because we know we are stronger together than apart. We are as strong and resilient as mighty cedar trees; we move with what is going on, but we are always rooted in our culture and will stand strong.

We have a responsibility to share our knowledge and strength with women and girls who need mentors and support to bravely realize their potential. We agree that education and experience will come, but that a spirit of hope and belonging is crucial.

We embrace our trans, two-spirit, and non-binary relatives, acknowledging them as part of our circle. We lift up how they choose to define their role within our families and communities.

We honour and respect ourselves and one another. We are one in love and prayer. We will continue to honor the memory of those murdered and missing Indigenous people we have lost in our families and communities, and respect their memory by living each day with purpose and compassion.

We call upon our men to join us, as they are part of the balance in our families and communities. We need to have and restore balance in our communities, and we need the men to stand beside us as we step into a new chapter of healing, reconciliation and restoration.

7. Calls to Action: There is a responsibility by all to redress the systemic racism and to eliminate the gendered colonial violence perpetrated against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people within Canada.

We uphold and respect those who have shared their truths in the process of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and in numerous other processes and circles over many years.

We support calls by the BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly in 21a/2019 for:

- the immediate implementation of the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and also the recommendations coming directly from families, Indigenous front-line, grassroots, and women's organizations, and particularly the recommendations from Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside; and
- a "comprehensive national-level integrated action plan to eliminate violence against Indigenous women, girls, trans and two spirit people must address all the socio-economic factors impacting Indigenous women's, girls', trans and two-spirit's safety including equitable access and self-determination over land, culture, language, housing, child care, income security, employment, education, and physical, mental, sexual and spiritual health," as called for in Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

We support and call on governments to adhere to international mechanisms that advance the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples, and in particular, women, 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, and children, including:

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

Article 21 1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security. 2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

Article 22 1. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration. 2. States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination; and

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We call upon the BC Assembly of First Nations to develop a strategic plan for addressing this Declaration and other issues that impact Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. This strategy should be led by the BC AFN Women's Representative, and should be reviewed at the next Women's Dialogue Session. It should include, but not be limited to:

- a. Securing funds for the implementation of activities within the strategy;
- b. Working with like-minded organizations and individuals;
- c. A review of all BCAFN policies and advocacy initiatives to ensure they are inclusive of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people;
- d. A review of all BCAFN policies to ensure they promote an organization that is free from gendered and lateral violence;
- e. Ongoing action and advocacy to implement the 231 Calls for Justice and the Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people-led development of a National Action Plan;
- f. Advocacy for timely and efficient registration for those newly entitled to status pursuant to amendments to the Indian Act coming into force on August 15, 2019;
- g. A plan to hold regional Women's Dialogue Sessions;
- h. Strategic initiatives regarding sexual assault supports, resource development, justice, and support for grassroots organizations and community-based initiatives; and
- i. A plan to support the full and equitable participation of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people in political roles and in the workforce.