



Native Women's
Association of Canada



L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

'COVID-19 & the Increase of Domestic Violence against Women'

Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women

30 June 2020

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Introduction

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) hereby submits information to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women's call for submissions for the upcoming report on 'COVID-19 & the Increase of Domestic Violence against Women'. In this submission NWAC provides detailed responses in relation to UN Special Rapporteur's questions 1, 4 and 8 with an overall focus on the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase of domestic violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada.

The intrinsic value of the current submission is that the up-to-date information contained therein will convey to the UN Special Rapporteur a snapshot of the real-life impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic on Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people in Canada. In particular, the results illustrate the significant extent to which the absolute right to physical and mental integrity is being violated in practice. In short, a steep rise in domestic violence has shadowed the current Covid-19 pandemic in Canada, as has regrettably been the case elsewhere.¹

Disturbingly, this surge in violence is taking place at a time when the Canadian authorities are meant to be tackling all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls head-on. The much-anticipated report, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, was finally published in June 2019. The broad scope of the National Inquiry's mandate allowed it to address a range of interrelated issues concerning all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls in a holistic manner.² The report contained 231 clusters of recommendations, known as Calls for Justice, which have been described in the Final Report as 'legal imperatives', namely that they are not optional for government.³

The National Inquiry presented its raft of recommendations by different themes and actors. As the limits of this submission do not allow for these themes to be set out in detail, the UN Special Rapporteur should consult the official National Inquiry document, *Calls for Justice*, for more detailed information.⁴ Nonetheless, the individual Calls for Justice are strategically targeted at righting past human rights wrongs and avoiding their repetition across an array of social themes. Significantly, multiple Calls for Justice directly refer to the pressing need to counter domestic abuse in Canada.⁵

¹ See: UNDP, *Gender-based violence and COVID-19* (May 2020); and UN Women, *COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls* (April 2020).

² *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Volume 1b* (June 2019) 1b 58.

³ *ibid* 168.

⁴ National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, *Calls for Justice* (June 2019).

⁵ *ibid*: please see the following Calls for Justice: 4.7, 5.3, 5.5 iii, 5.6, 5.7, 5.9, 5.18, 5.19 and 5.25.

In December 2019, the Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett publicly stated that the Canadian government was developing a National Action Plan to act on the 231 Calls for Justice, which would be published by June 2020.⁶ Regrettably, however, on 26 May 2020 Minister Bennett announced that this deadline would not be honoured by the federal government. As a result, on 3 June 2020 - the first anniversary of the publication of the Final Report - NWAC issued a press release and a so-called *Report Card* to the Canadian government, critically evaluating its performance in ensuring swift, meaningful and concrete follow-up to the National Inquiry Final Report.⁷

In April/May 2020 NWAC also published two related reports which focused on concrete follow-up to the Final Report titled *NWAC's National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Highlights of the Key Findings & Recommendations* and *Reparations & Remembrance in Canada for Indigenous Women, Girls & Gender-Diverse Persons*, both of which are attached as annexes 1 and 2 of this submission. Both reports make key recommendations regarding the National Inquiry Action Plan and follow-up process.

The Absence of Follow-up to the National Inquiry Final Report

In view of the on-going public health emergency as well as past Canadian government lack of action in relation to state-sponsored inquiries, it is entirely understandable that there now exists considerable skepticism concerning the likelihood of meaningful follow-up to the Final Report, including the numerous Calls for Justice aimed at countering all forms of violence against Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people.

It can only be hoped that the worrying survey results below add renewed impetus to the stalled National Action Plan process and that the Canadian authorities redouble their efforts to address widespread violence against Indigenous women and girls in the country.

⁶ Global News, *Action plan on missing, murdered Indigenous women inquiry to be released in June: minister* (Global News, 4 December 2019): <<https://globalnews.ca/news/6255882/missing-murdered-indigenous-women-inquiry-june/>> accessed 25 June 2020.

⁷ Please see: NWAC, *Report Card on Government Follow-up to Reclaiming Power and Place: Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (3 June 2020); and NWAC, *Covid-19 May Have Stopped The Government But It Hasn't Stopped Indigenous Women* (3 June 2020): <<https://www.nwac.ca>> accessed 25 June 2020.

Responses to Questions:

1. To what extent has there been an increase of violence against women, especially domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns? Please provide all available data on the increase of violence against women, including domestic violence and femicides, registered during the COVID-19 crisis.

In this section of the submission to the UN Special Rapporteur, NWAC presents an overview of its May 2020 survey, *'The Impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous Women and Gender-Diverse People in Canada.'* The purpose of NWAC's survey was to measure the impact of the global pandemic on Indigenous women and gender-diverse people in Canada. The findings of the survey very much echo wider concerns that women have experienced heightened levels of domestic abuse during the current COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. Numerous reports in the Canadian news media similarly point to a worrying upsurge in violence committed against women in the home, including against Indigenous women.⁸ It is evident from the survey findings below that now more than ever Indigenous women need action on violence.

Methodology

The on-line survey was completed using *SimpleSurvey*. The survey was posted on NWAC's social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, and Google Ads.

The field dates for this survey were May 1 to May 29, 2020. In total, a sample of 750 Indigenous women and gender-diverse people aged 18 and over completed the survey. Unless stated otherwise, the responses reported below are only those of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.

⁸ As illuminating cases in point, please see the following selected items: Canadian Women's Foundation, 'Frequently asked questions about women and the COVID-19 pandemic' (Toronto): <<https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/women-and-pandemics/>> accessed 24 June 2020; Vathsala Illesinghe, 'Pandemic exposes existing link between isolation and domestic violence' Policy Options (28 May 2020): <<https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/may-2020/pandemic-exposes-existing-link-between-isolation-and-domestic-violence/>> accessed 24 June 2020; P. O'Campo, 'It's Time For Solutions, How Science Can Help Women And Children Affected By Partner Violence' RSC COVID-19 Series, Publication #21 (11 June 2020) 1; and P. Palmater, 'Gendered Pandemic Response Needed to Address Specific Needs of Indigenous Women' RSC COVID-19 Series, Publication #19 (4 June 2020) 1.

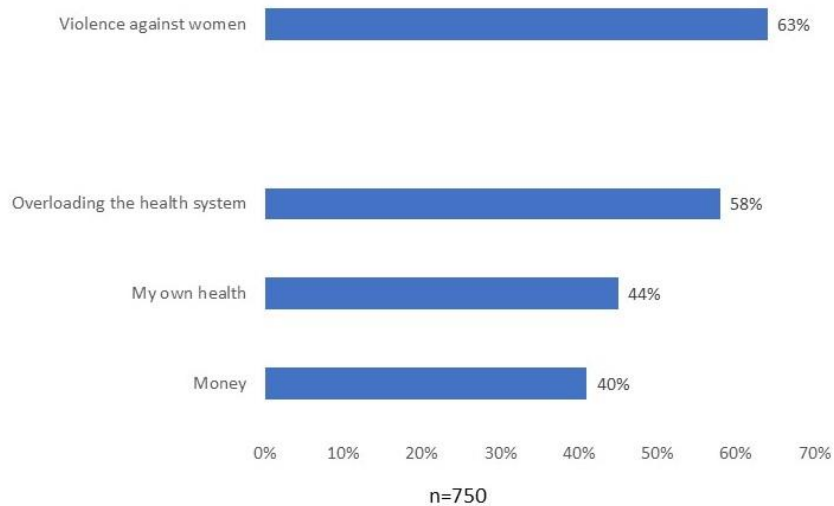
Key Highlights of the Survey

1. Indigenous women are more worried about domestic violence than they are about most COVID-19 issues.
2. Many more Indigenous women are experiencing violence during this pandemic than usual.
3. Indigenous women most vulnerable to violence in the past three months are in the North, under 35, and have been financially impacted by COVID-19.
4. Romantic partners are overwhelmingly seen as the biggest source of violence.
5. The financial impact of COVID19 is strongly correlated to violence against Indigenous women.

The overall conclusion of this survey suggests that actions from government at all levels are needed to address the issue of systemic violence against Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.

Indigenous Women* are more Worried about Domestic Violence than they are about most COVID-19 issues

Percentage of people who are very worried or extremely worried



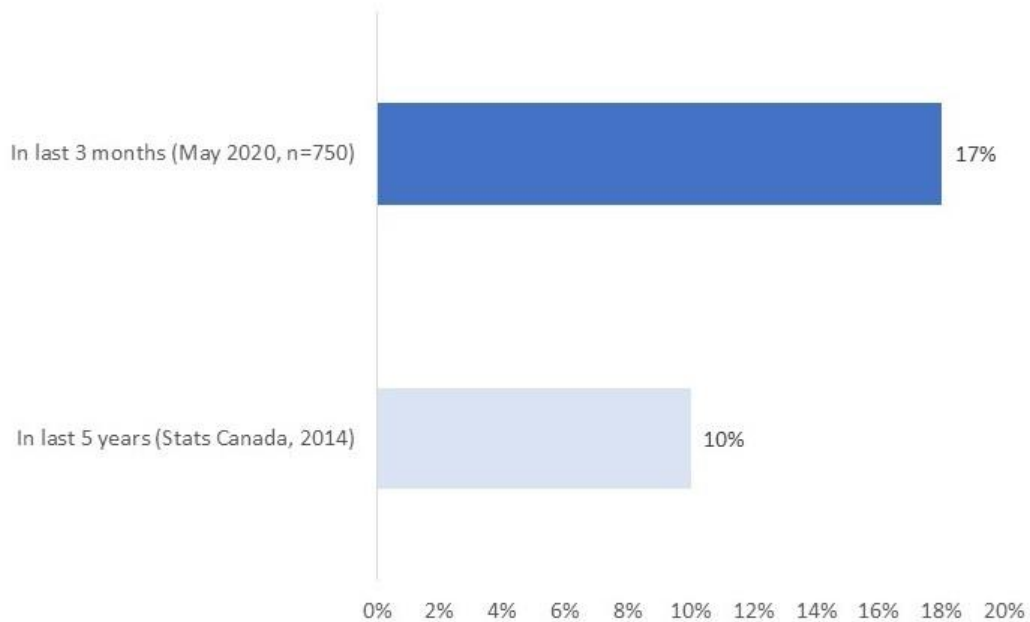
*Throughout this report, "Indigenous women" includes Two Spirit and Gender Diverse people

Overall, Indigenous women are more worried about domestic violence against women than they are about COVID-19.

Indigenous women and gender-diverse people who have experienced violence in the past three months are far more worried about COVID-19 contributing to violence in the home than those who have not experienced violence.

Why? Violence doesn't Stop for COVID 19, in fact, it is Intensifying!

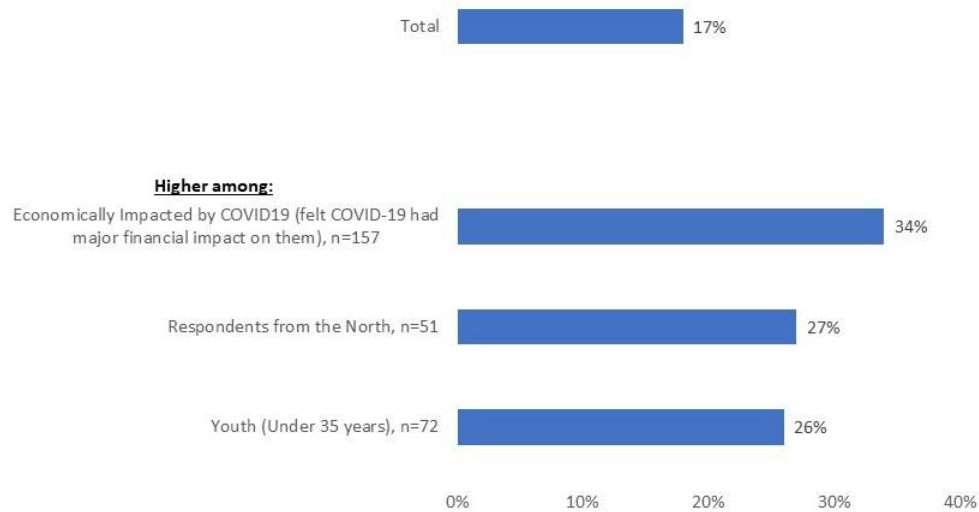
Percentage of women saying they have been victim of violence



Indigenous women are reporting more violence during this time of sheltering in place. In May 2020, 17% have experienced violence (physically or psychologically) in the past three months, compared to 10% reporting violence from their spouse over the past five years since 2014.

Indigenous Women in the North*, Under 35, and those Economically Impacted by COVID-19 are even more Likely to Have Experienced Violence

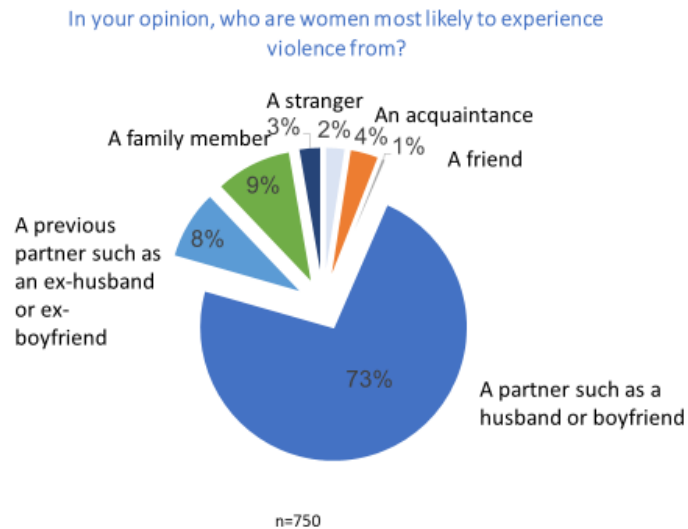
Percentage of women saying they have been a victim of violence in the past 3 months



*North = Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon

Indigenous women are not all the same: some sub-groups are especially at risk of violence at this time. Those who have been financially impacted by COVID-19, those in the North, and those under 35 are even more likely to have experienced violence in the past three months.

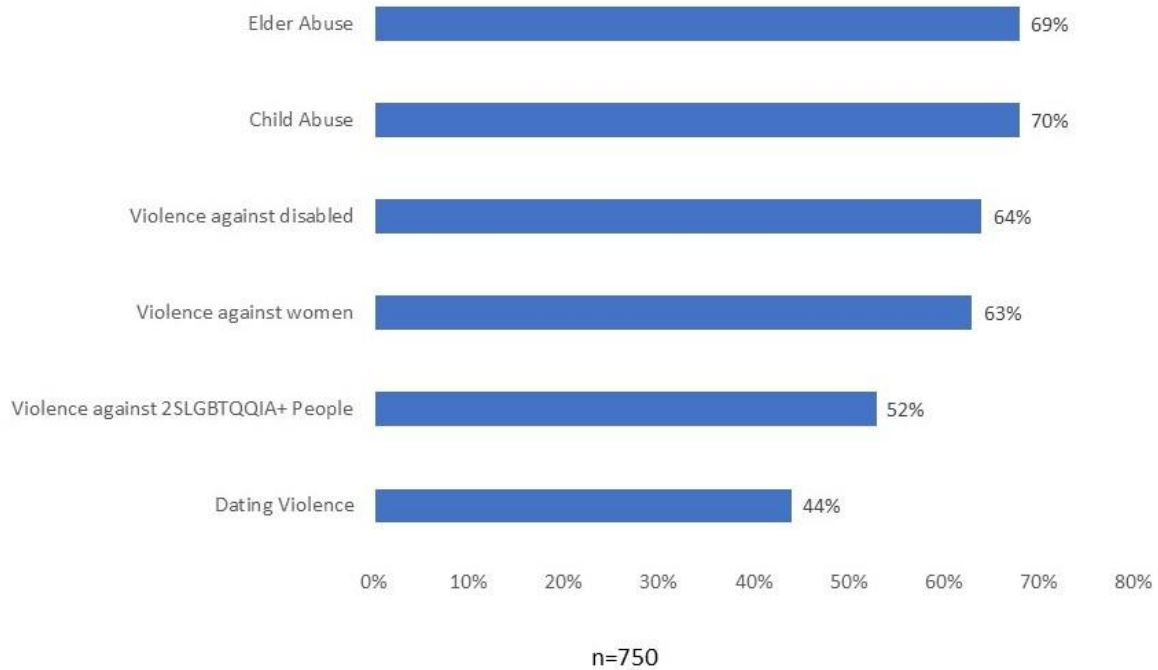
Romantic Partners Considered the Most Dangerous to Indigenous Women



Participants overwhelmingly identify current and past partners as posing the biggest threat of violence to Indigenous women. However, family is also a significant source: victims are twice as likely as non-victims to identify family members as the biggest threat. This may be because women are sheltering with family during the crisis. This is consistent with what we know from the literature: when facing financial hardship and difficulty finding housing, Indigenous women are more likely to stay with family members. As described below, Indigenous women are being hit harder financially than Canadians, in general.

Indigenous Women are also Very Worried about Violence to Elders, Children, and Disabled

In general, how concerned are you about these forms of violence?
Percentage of people who are very worried or extremely worried

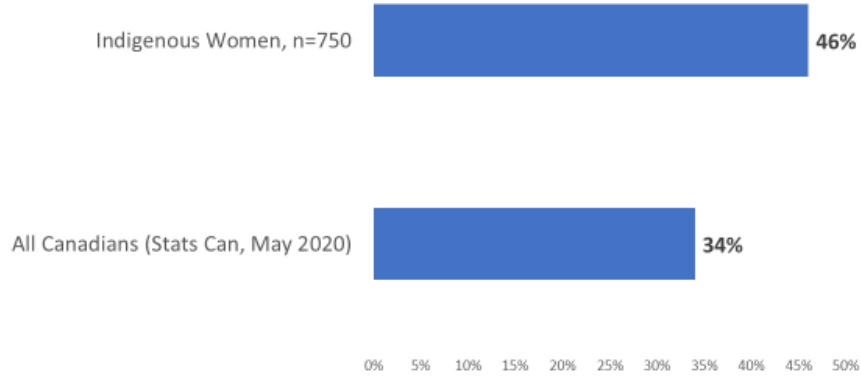


Most Indigenous women are very worried about many different types of violence and are most worried about Elders and children.

Indigenous Women are more Financially Impacted by COVID-19 than Other Canadians

What has been the financial impact of COVID-19 on your ability to meet financial obligations or essential needs, such as rent or mortgage payments, utilities and groceries?

Percentage of women saying moderate or major financial impact



Indigenous women are being harder hit financially in this crisis than other Canadians, and as the literature and this survey show, violence against women is correlated with economic insecurity.

Victims of Violence and those Under 35 are even more Financially Impacted

What has been the financial impact of COVID-19 on your ability to meet financial obligations or essential needs, such as rent or mortgage payments, utilities and groceries?



A majority (70%) of the women and gender-diverse people who have experienced violence in the past three months have been moderately or majorly impacted financially by COVID-19. Similarly, women under 35 are also hit especially hard financially, which is also probably contributing to their higher rate of violence.

Survey Conclusion

Indigenous women need action on violence now more than ever. Financial impact seems to be playing a significant role in making women unsafe. In this time of the pandemic, when shelters cannot always stay open, one of the best ways to help Indigenous women and gender-diverse people experiencing violence is to ensure they know about and can easily access the government's financial support benefits, so they can afford to shelter in safe places.

Responses to Questions:

4. Are shelters open and available? Are there any alternatives to shelters available if they are closed or without sufficient capacity?

A press release issued by the government department, Women and Gender Equality (WAGE), on 14 May 2020 titled ‘Government of Canada supports over 500 women’s shelters and sexual assault centres during the COVID-19 pandemic’ announced a commitment of up to 40 million CDN for women fleeing gender-based violence. According to the statement:

The Government of Canada is supporting Canada’s most vulnerable people during these times of uncertainty. This includes taking critical measures and making new investments to support shelters that provide a safe space for women fleeing violence and their families, and to ensure the continuing resilience of organizations assisting survivors of sexual assault. On April 4, 2020 the Government of Canada announced up to \$40 million through Women and Gender Equality Canada for women fleeing gender-based violence.

Today, the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, announced that this funding has been disbursed to over 500 women’s shelters and sexual assault centres from coast to coast to coast.⁹

Despite this welcome commitment of additional resources, from an Indigenous women’s perspective the provision of emergency accommodation in Canada remains problematic, not least due to the distribution of shelters throughout the country. Equally as significantly, a lack of decent, affordable housing results in too many Indigenous women being forced to remain in abusive relationships due to a lack of alternative housing.

A *COVID-19 Statement* issued by Sheltersafe, a network of 14 provincial and territorial shelter networks representing over 400 shelters across Canada, noted the following: “Women’s shelters and transition houses are open during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect women and children fleeing violence ... Shelters and transition homes may be at or over capacity and even more under-resourced during this time.”¹⁰

⁹ Women and Gender Equality Canada, ‘Government of Canada supports over 500 women’s shelters and sexual assault centres during the COVID-19 pandemic’ (Ottawa, 14 May 2020): <<http://www.ilrtoday.ca/government-of-canada-supports-over-500-womens-shelters-and-sexual-assault-centres-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>> accessed 24 June 2020.

¹⁰ Sheltersafe, COVID-19 Statement: <<https://www.sheltersafe.ca/>> accessed 22 June 2020.

The Canadian Women's Foundation similarly noted that in Canada 'women's shelters and organizations have also sounded alarms about the risk of increased violence.'¹¹ The organization stressed: "While the federal government and Ontario provincial government have announced emergency funding for women's shelters and other services for those who experience gender-based violence, we know more funding is urgently needed. Services for violence prevention and intervention were already struggling to meet needs before the arrival of COVID-19, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo Movement and the Globe and Mail's Unfounded investigation."

A very real challenge for Indigenous women is that, while Canada boasts several hundred emergency shelters, relatively few are located in Canada's 'North' comprising the three Canadian territories of Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon. As such, the availability of such safe spaces remains highly problematic in Canada. According to the organization Sheltersafe, just 11 shelters are listed as being located in Canada's 'North'.¹²

During a fact-finding visit to Canada in 2018 the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women noted a slightly higher figure, stating:

*There are only three women's shelters in the Yukon and five residential facilities for victims of abuse each in the Northwest Territories and in Nunavut, further exacerbating the geographical isolation of women from indigenous communities. Many of these shelters are small and accessible only by air or ice roads, and the lack and cost of transportation increases the cost of services.*¹³

In so observing, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women added the following:

*Of the 552 shelters for victims of abuse operating in Canada in 2017–2018, just 6 per cent served women and children in indigenous communities. The high rates of violence and the small size of communities make community-based shelters extremely important for women. There is, however, a lack of adequate shelters provided to indigenous communities that respect cultural and language diversities and that are led by indigenous women.*¹⁴

*Although the current number of shelters may appear impressive, Canada is a vast country and a significant percentage of shelters often lack capacity and services, resulting in hundreds of women being turned away on a daily basis with no other place to go, a situation that is made worse owing to the housing crisis affecting the country, which has made houses unavailable or unaffordable.*¹⁵

¹¹ Canadian Women's Foundation, 'Frequently asked questions about women and the COVID-19 pandemic' (Toronto, Canada): <<https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/women-and-pandemics/>> accessed 24 June 2020

¹² Sheltersafe, *Help Is Just A Click Away*: <<https://www.sheltersafe.ca/>> accessed 22 June 2020.

¹³ *Visit to Canada*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (UN Doc. A/HRC/41/42/Add.1), 4 November 2019 §44.

¹⁴ *ibid* §45.

¹⁵ *ibid* §44.

In the Concluding observations of the UN Committee against Torture in relation to Canada from December 2018 the UN treaty body also recommended that Canada ensures that survivors of gender-based violence are able to access shelters and receive the necessary medical care, psychological support and legal assistance that they require.¹⁶

An NWAC report from March 2020, based on extensive research and direct engagement with impacted Indigenous women, also distinctly revealed that Indigenous women need better shelter and transitional housing services.¹⁷ This recent report stated the following:

*Women report more access to emergency shelter services than transitional services, creating a critical bottleneck while trying to transition from homelessness or violence to secure housing. Not only do they not have enough services, they experience significant racism and cultural insensitivity in the shelters and transition homes they try to use. Much of the mismatch between shelter/transition services and Indigenous women's needs has to do with the fact that these services are ill-equipped to handle women living with severe trauma, especially those with significant and specific intersectional experiences. Transitional housing is physically built wrong, but Indigenous women find that non-Indigenous employees have little understanding of their housing needs. The most common requests to improve these services were to fund more of them, make them better suited for families/children, provide more culturally appropriate services with Indigenous staff, and better serve 2SLGBTQ+ individuals.*¹⁸

The findings of this report very much reaffirmed those of an earlier 2018 NWAC report, which focused on First Nations (as opposed to Inuit or Métis) women and their human right to housing. This research found that violence within the family is a reality for many Indigenous women and most shelter policies dictate that women may only stay in emergency shelters for specified periods of time. This factor, combined with the existing deficit of shelter spaces and the lack of sufficient transitional housing supports in First Nations communities means that many women are forced to return to abusive relationships.¹⁹

¹⁶ Committee against Torture, *Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Canada* (UN Doc. CAT/C/CAN/CO/7), 21 December 2018 §49(d).

¹⁷ Native Women's Association of Canada, *Indigenous Housing: Policy and Engagement Report to Indigenous Services Canada* (31 March 2020) 57 and 71-73.

¹⁸ *ibid* 57. See also: 53-56 and 71-73.

¹⁹ Native Women's Association of Canada, *First Nation's Housing Strategy Indigenous Women, Girls, and LBGQT2S: Engaging a National Framework for Housing Policy Final Report* (April 2018) 6.

NWAC's 2018 research characterized the very real challenges in this regard in the following terms:

*Establishing and maintaining women's shelters in rural, remote, and Northern communities is particularly challenging given the smaller populations in these areas and the high cost of construction. Funding and resources should be focused on attaining an equitable standard for shelters across Canada, rather than on a per capita basis. Indigenous women in rural, remote, and Northern communities should not be forced to stay with abusive partners or family members simply because a shelter is too far to access.*²⁰

Other secondary research undertaken by NWAC has reported that Indigenous women do not necessarily find such shelters safe spaces, even when accessible.²¹ It was also highly significant that the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girl's Final Report, published in June 2019, directly addressed the shortage of alternative accommodation, including the lack of emergency shelters. In this connection Call for Justice 4.7 stated the following:

*We call upon all governments to support the establishment and long-term sustainable funding of Indigenous-led low-barrier shelters, safe spaces, transition homes, second-stage housing, and services for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people who are homeless, near homeless, dealing with food insecurity, or in poverty, and who are fleeing violence or have been subjected to sexualized violence and exploitation. All governments must ensure that shelters, transitional housing, second-stage housing, and services are appropriate to cultural needs, and available wherever Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people reside.*²²

In summary, NWAC's in-depth research unquestionably points to a reality where violence against Indigenous women is by no means an isolated phenomenon in Canada and the poor housing situation exacerbates the problem. The organization's 2018 study, for example, argued that significant investments in safe, affordable housing, infrastructure, services, and supports, are required in practice. Communities also need gender-based, trauma-informed, culturally appropriate services that are responsive to the needs of First Nations women leaving situations of violence. Policies to address violence against women must also actively engage with the underlying issues of social and economic inequality that have created the conditions that place

²⁰ *ibid* 6.

²¹ Dr. Keri Cheechoo, *A Literature Review Prepared for Native Women's Association of Canada – Identification and Highlighting of the Pathways (and Barriers) to Stable, Culturally Appropriate Housing Experienced by Inuit Women* (May 2020) 5. See also: Native Women's Association of Canada, *First Nation's Housing Strategy Indigenous Women, Girls, and LBGQT2S: Engaging a National Framework for Housing Policy Final Report* (April 2018) 6.

²² National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, *Calls for Justice* (June 2019) Call for Justice 4.7.

Indigenous women at greater risk of experiencing family violence.²³ NWAC's research published in 2020 similarly advanced a raft of broad recommendations aimed at addressing a lack of decent, affordable housing on- and off-reserve in Canada, an issue which will be briefly discussed below.²⁴

8. Please provide examples of obstacles encountered to prevent and combat domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

NWAC's extensive research in recent years, referred to previously, has unambiguously revealed that Indigenous women in Canada frequently struggle to effectively exercise the international human right to housing. In a word: housing insecurity is one of the most pressing issues impacting Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse peoples.²⁵

The right to housing is clearly anchored in international law as part of the wider right to an adequate standard of living, including Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and its General Comment 4.²⁶ Similarly, Article 27(3) on the Convention on the Rights of the Child foresees specific state provision in relation to this right, while Article 5(e)(iii) of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination anchors the same right, irrespective of a person's race, colour, or national or ethnic origin.²⁷ It is also highly significant that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples makes reference to the right to housing on at least seven occasions.²⁸

Notwithstanding the right to housing being secured in international law, in recent years multiple different UN treaty bodies and special procedures have expressed concern and have

²³ Native Women's Association of Canada, *First Nation's Housing Strategy Indigenous Women, Girls, and LGBTQ2S: Engaging a National Framework for Housing Policy Final Report* (April 2018) 6 and 18.

²⁴ Native Women's Association of Canada, *Indigenous Housing: Policy and Engagement Report to Indigenous Services Canada* (31 March 2020) 56-58 and 75-80.

²⁵ *ibid* 5.

²⁶ See: United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entering into force on 3 January 1976; and General comment No. 4: The right to adequate housing (art. 11 (1) of the Covenant), adopted at the Sixth Session 1991; and Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entering into force on 2 September 1990.

²⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entering into force on 2 September 1990; and International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted and opened for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX) of 21 December 1965, entering into force 4 January 1969.

²⁸ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Resolution 61/295 adopted by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007 §10, 21.1, 23, 26, 27, 28 and 32.

advanced recommendations in relation to the non-realization of this right in Canada.²⁹ It should also be noted that the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girl's Final Report from June 2019 issued multiple Calls for Justice in relation to the problematic provision of housing in Canada.³⁰ NWAC's own in-depth research from 2018 and 2020, referred to above, has revealed the extent to which Indigenous women struggle to secure decent, affordable accommodation.³¹

In conclusion, despite the initiation of a Canadian National Housing Strategy in 2017, much remains to be done to ensure that Indigenous women in Canada can effectively exercise their human right to housing and are able to lead lives free from violence, both during and beyond the current COVID-19 pandemic.³² During the current public health emergency various Canadian advocacy organizations have put forward different recommendations to address Canada's housing dilemma.³³ If during normal (non-pandemic) times, a lack of access to decent, affordable housing remains a major obstacle in preventing and combating domestic violence against Indigenous women, it should come as no surprise that the current COVID-19 pandemic and its related socio-economic stresses should have exacerbated this phenomenon.

²⁹ See: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Canada (UN Doc. E/C.12/CAN/CO/6, 23 March 2016) §19 and 39-46; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, James Anaya - The situation of indigenous peoples in Canada (UN Doc. A/HRC/27/52/Add.2, 4 July 2014) §15 and 24-28; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Canada (UN Doc. CEDAW/C/CAN/CO/8-9, 25 November 2017) §46-47d; and Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Concluding observations on the initial report of Canada (UN Doc. CRPD/C/CAN/CO/1, 8 May 2017) §41-42 and 45-46.

³⁰ National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, *Calls for Justice* (June 2019) Calls for Justice 4.1, 4.6, 4.7, and 12.4.

³¹ Native Women's Association of Canada, *First Nation's Housing Strategy Indigenous Women, Girls, and LGBTQ2S: Engaging a National Framework for Housing Policy Final Report* (April 2018) 4-5, and Native Women's Association of Canada, *Indigenous Housing: Policy and Engagement Report to Indigenous Services Canada* (31 March 2020) 5-9.

³² Native Women's Association of Canada, *First Nation's Housing Strategy Indigenous Women, Girls, and LGBTQ2S: Engaging a National Framework for Housing Policy Final Report* (April 2018) 3.

³³ See: Naheed Dosani, 'COVID-19 has proven Canada can cure homelessness' Policy Options (13 May 2020): <<https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/may-2020/covid-19-has-proven-canada-can-cure-homelessness/>> accessed 24 June 2020; Homelessness Hub, 'How the Youth-Serving Sector is Coping with the Crisis' (Toronto, Canada): <<https://www.homelesshub.ca/coh-awh-youth-survey-covid19-2020>> accessed 24 June 2020; and The Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network, *Recovery for All Campaign: Building towards housing justice for women in Canada* (22 June 2020): <<http://womenshomelessness.ca/recovery-for-all-campaign-endorsement/>> accessed 24 June 2020.

Final Remarks: The Need for Canada to Focus on Domestic Violence Beyond the Covid-19 Pandemic

It is hoped that the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women will find the previous responses to questions 1, 2 and 8 useful for the purposes of her future report to the UN General Assembly. As was stressed in the introduction to this submission, Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people have historically experienced high levels of violence in Canada, including in the home. The National Inquiry Final Report issued multiple Calls for Justice which directly referred to the dire need to counter domestic abuse in the country.³⁴ Simply put, domestic abuse predates the current COVID-19 pandemic by many decades, even though the current upsurge in such cases, as highlighted in this report, gives cause for considerable concern.

More generally, much remains to be done by the Canadian government to address violence commonly perpetrated against Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people in the country. As is widely known, in recent years multiple recommendations have been issued to address violence in wider society, including by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 2015³⁵ as well as in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls from 2019.³⁶

Sight should also not be lost of the rather depressing fact, however, that recommendations of past independent inquiries into the treatment of Indigenous women and girls in Canada date back decades, not just a handful of years. Perhaps most notable of all were the key findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Inquiry from 1996.³⁷ Thus, despite the commissioning of multiple high-level inquiries in Canada, a great deal remains to be done to ensure that the many hundreds of recommendations contained therein are acted on in practice by the Canadian authorities.

It was therefore with considerable concern that NWAC learned of Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett's statement from 26 May 2020 indicating that the federal government would not publish its National Action Plan by 3 June 2020, the first anniversary of

³⁴ National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, *Calls for Justice* (June 2019), Calls for Justice: 4.7, 5.3, 5.5 iii, 5.6, 5.7, 5.9, 5.18, 5.19 and 5.25.

³⁵ *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* – Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015).

³⁶ Please see: *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (June 2019) and National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls – *A Legal Analysis of Genocide, Supplementary Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (June 2019).

³⁷ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Highlights of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Inquiry - People to People, Nation to Nation* (Minister of Supply and Services Canada 1996) <<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597/1572547985018#chp8>> accessed 16 January 2020. See also: *Interim Report – The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Our Women and Girls are Sacred* (2017) 10.

publication of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Unless there is swift, concrete and meaningful action on the part of the Canadian government to ensure follow-up to the National Inquiry Final Report, the chances of any semblance of justice ever being served on behalf of Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people in Canada will remain exceedingly slim.