



July 24, 2017

Dear Families, Survivors, and Families of the Heart,

We write to you to offer our support to you as family members and/or survivors; to share with you information about the work of the Coalition for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in BC; and to invite you to join with us as we continue working on this National Inquiry

To begin, we are the Coalition on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in BC, comprised of family members and survivors, and more than 40 entities including Indigenous Nations, Indigenous organizations, front-line service organizations, feminist and women's organizations, legal advocates, faith-based groups and provincial organizations. The Coalition was formed out of many years of deep-seated frustrations around the systematic failures from all levels of government regarding the dire situation surrounding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in our communities. For decades, family members, advocates, grassroots women's organizations, community groups, and Indigenous and public leaders have called for a full public inquiry into the missing women in BC. Of particular note, many Indigenous women and girl impacted were members of the DTES community or travelled along the Highway of Tears, a stretch of highway located between Prince George and Prince Rupert.

After many years of advocacy, the BC Government finally conducted a public inquiry into the worst serial murder in Canadian history. While the Province of British Columbia held the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) in October 2011, many of the groups who had advocated for the MWCI felt that there was no option but to withdraw from participating in the inquiry because of the deeply flawed and illegitimate inquiry process. In spite of this, the groups continue to find alternative means to advocate for and support family members and survivors.

Given our devastating experiences with the BC Inquiry, we feel very strongly that the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls must learn from the detrimental mistakes of the BC Inquiry. It is therefore with grave hearts and an ever urgent sense of purpose that we write to you today, in light of what has been happening with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

As you may be aware, the Inquiry has been riddled with challenges since the beginning. Already, a number of staff have resigned from the Inquiry, with the latest resignation being Commissioner Marilyn Poitras. Many family members, survivors, advocates and Indigenous and women's organizations have serious concerns regarding the mandate of the Inquiry, its structure and process, the lack of transparency, and the top-down approach that is not responsive to the needs of families and survivors.

Many family members have not been contacted about the work of the Inquiry. They have not been informed and/or invited to participate in the process.

The Inquiry is the result of decades of work and advocacy by families and survivors. We feel very strongly that the Inquiry must address these concerns and put the needs of families and survivors at the forefront.

Enclosed for your reference is the most recent open letter from the Coalition to Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Bennett. In addition to action that needs to be taken pertaining to the Inquiry, we have also identified a list of action items that the government can move forward on while the Inquiry is underway. There is no need for the government to wait for the Inquiry to be finished to do the work required to increase the safety and security of our communities.

We know that it is because of you that this Inquiry must do its work well. We also know that families, survivors, and families of the heart are those with the solutions, and the Inquiry must be focused in this direction. We therefore invite you to share with us your views of the Inquiry to date, and what meaningful action must the Commission take to ensure the success of the Inquiry.

Please write to us at [rachel@ubcic.bc.ca](mailto:rachel@ubcic.bc.ca), or call 604-684-0231 ext.246, or fax 604-6845726 or reach out through direct messaging on social media ([facebook.com/ubcic](https://www.facebook.com/ubcic) or [@ubcic](https://www.instagram.com/ubcic)) and share with us what are the needs that you feel must be met and respected for this Inquiry to be a success. As a Coalition, we will do our utmost to ensure the voices of all family members and survivors are not ignored.

We hope you will join us and add your voice and strength to our Coalition as we seek to honour the memory of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls by ensuring that this never happens again.

In solidarity,

The Coalition on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in BC, including:

Yale First Nation Social Development  
Vancouver Council of Women, Rosemary  
Mallory  
Union Gospel Mission  
Union of BC Indian Chiefs  
RainCity Housing  
Myrna Cranmer, February 14th Memorial  
March Committee  
Jenny Kwan, MP for Vancouver East  
Holly Jarrett  
First Nations Summit

Evelyn Youngchief, February 14th Memorial  
March Committee  
Downtown Eastside Power of Women Group  
Downtown Eastside Women's Center  
Christina Coad  
Carrier Sekani Family Services  
Butterflies in Spirit, Lorelei Williams  
BC Civil Liberties Association  
Battered Women's Support Services  
Amnesty International - Canada  
Aboriginal Women's Action Network, Fay  
Blaney

## **Information on The Coalition on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in BC**

### **History of the Coalition:**

For decades, family members of missing women, grassroots women's organizations in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver (DTES), community groups, and Indigenous and public leaders called for a full public inquiry into the missing women of the DTES and the Highway of Tears, a stretch of highway located between Prince George and Prince Rupert. Although the Province of British Columbia held the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (MWCI) in October 2011, many of the groups who had advocated for the MWCI withdrew from involvement due to denial of a just process, uneven funding for applicants granted standing to participate in the inquiry, discrimination against women and Indigenous groups, and violations of international human rights standards.

On April 2, 2012, fourteen groups sent an open letter to Commissioner Wally Oppal advising that they would not be participating in the Policy Forums or Study Commissions aspects of the MWCI. Many of these groups began meeting as an informal, voluntary Coalition to discuss how to move forward in supporting children and families, and in pursuing justice for the murdered and missing girls and women. Some family members and community members also joined the meetings. In August 2012, the Coalition hosted a unity feast to honour missing and murdered girls and women and prepare for the work ahead.

### **What the MMIWG Coalition in BC does:**

Currently, participants at Coalition meetings discuss how to continue working together to address the ongoing crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. The Coalition has actively engaged with the provincial government and federal government on this issue, and continues to support family members, raise awareness, and advocate for a public and inclusive National Inquiry, developed in partnership with Indigenous women and communities, with a commitment to implementation of results.

Our vision is that the rights and lives of Indigenous women and girls are fully upheld, honoured and protected, and that Indigenous women and girls have the right to participate fully and effectively in all of the decisions that affect their lives.

Our mission is to eliminate systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls; uphold and demand justice for families of the murdered and disappeared; demand action and accountability from the provincial and federal government to stop the crisis of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls; and to influence the public consciousness.

### **We are guided by the following principles:**

- We do not speak on anyone's behalf
- We are inclusive and make space for people to share
- We respect both the individual and collective voice
- We remain flexible
- We recognize the strength in the diversity of our respective organizational and individual views and mandates
- We strive for collective direction on any shared project
- We focus on common ground

- We all have a choice to sign on to any communication
- We are a collection of voices
- The coalition is a collection of organizations, family members and individuals
- We work in and create a safe environment where women feel comfortable and secure

**Coordination of efforts related, but not limited, to:**

- Support to family members and communities of the murdered and disappeared Indigenous women and girls.
- Justice for murdered and disappeared Indigenous women and girls who are not attached to family members or communities.
- Implementation of Recommendations from the Missing Women's Commission of Inquiry
- Working with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and other international bodies including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to implement recommendations pertaining to murdered and disappeared Indigenous women and girls.
- Promote and empower Indigenous women's leadership roles in responding to violence against Indigenous women and girls, including within Aboriginal organizations.

**How the MMIWG Coalition in BC works:**

The Coalition operates using a holistic model that is flexible and responsive to the diverse backgrounds, goals, and capacity of its members. There is no permanently designated lead agency or individual, although an agency may take on this role from time to time at the agreement of members. All participants will have equal status. In recognizing the strength of bringing diverse groups with common goals together, the Coalition members recognize and respect each other's respective mandates to represent the interests of their respective memberships. The Coalition seeks to strike a balance between identifying and carrying out action items, while recognizing that participants have existing workloads and limited resources. The Coalition will work collectively in order to avoid diverting energy and resources from any one organization, unless the operational model shifts to that of a lead agency.

Membership IS open to organizations and individuals who align with the Coalition's purpose, as set out above. There are no membership fees. The Coalition makes decisions by consensus, striving to reach decisions that all members support. The Coalition recognizes that differences among members may prevent the Coalition itself from taking a strong position on a particular subject with divided opinions, but recognizes the immense strength and potential in organizations and individuals working together.

**Joining the MMIWG Coalition in BC:**

Please contact Rachel at 604-788-7545 or [rachel@ubcic.bc.ca](mailto:rachel@ubcic.bc.ca) to sign up for the mailing list. You will receive important updates and information regarding the Inquiry, as well as minutes and agendas for Coalition meetings. You are welcome to join our meetings over the phone, in person or simply receive the information by email.