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Canada

Indigenous women and girls lack critical government support

The Native Women's Transition Centre supports the most marginalized women in Winnipeg, Manitoba, according to Executive Director Lucille Bruce.

Founded more than 27 years ago by a group of Indigenous women activists and non-Indigenous supporters, the centre filled a major gap in crisis support services for the growing numbers of Indigenous women and children moving into Winnipeg who had nowhere else to turn.

Today, the centre continues to serve women and girls who have become uprooted from their own families and communities while facing systemic racism within non-Indigenous society. Some deal with the pressures they face by resorting to alcohol and drugs. Others are forced into the sex trade or into gangs because they have no other way of making money.

The many challenges they face often place Indigenous women and girls outside the limits of the services supplied by other organizations in the city. No other organizations offer culturally specific services that recognize and honour the unique needs, experiences and values of Indigenous women.

By contrast, the Native Women's Transition Centre focuses on nurturing and reinforcing Native identity and cultural values while helping its residents to be self-sufficient.

"Our greatest success is that we remain consistently in tune with the needs of the Indigenous women that we serve," says Lucille Bruce, Executive Director. "They define their needs and we support them in making decisions and taking steps to become what they want to become. The women we work with are incredibly courageous and brave."

The centre is one of the few of its kind in Canada. Currently, it is only just able to meet the needs of its residents. But like other organizations that provide support to Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and children across the country, its work is being jeopardized by the failure of the government to provide consistent funding on a long-term basis.

[Call to action]

Write to the Canadian authorities asking that they establish a comprehensive plan of action to stop violence against women, with particular attention to the specific needs of Indigenous women.

[Sample letter]

Dear Minister Prentice,

Indigenous women in Canada experience extremely high rates of violence and discrimination. This is, in part, the result of a long history of discrimination and marginalization. Your government must act now to stop the violence and discrimination.

I urge you to ensure that the government works with Indigenous women's organizations to establish a comprehensive plan of action. This must include effective measures to:

- Help Indigenous women escape from abusive relationships and dangerous situations by ensuring adequate, sustained funding to shelters and frontline organizations providing culturally appropriate services.
- Ensure coordination of federal and provincial policies, programmes and services.

This appeal is part of Amnesty International's worldwide campaign to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November, focusing on shelters for women who suffer domestic violence.

Yours sincerely,

[Target contact details]

The Honourable Jim Prentice

Minister for Indian Affairs and Northern Development

House of Commons

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