



FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC INC.
QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN INC.

Press release
For immediate distribution

Prejudice and discrimination against Indigenous women in the health and social service systems: the perpetuation of a colonial system

Kahnawake, May 18th 2021 — The articles in La Presse published on May 15, entitled "Giving birth with fear in the belly" and "After Joyce, freedom of speech", denounce the disproportionate reporting of Indigenous women to the Director of Youth Protection (hereafter referred to as the DYP) and highlight the fear of Indigenous women of health and social services.

These high reporting rates are unfortunately not a surprise to Quebec Native Women (QNW). These situations highlight what QNW has been denouncing for several years, namely the systemic discrimination suffered by Indigenous women in health and social services. QNW is disappointed to see that it still takes tragedies to raise the awareness of the media and the Quebec government.

Health care providers have, since the beginning of colonization, created an automatic and unfair link between Indigenous women and drugs and alcohol, a high-risk lifestyle that prohibits them from caring for themselves or their children. These prejudices and discriminations are at the root of many discriminatory practices related to health, particularly the sexual and reproductive health of Indigenous women. These preconceived ideas about Indigenous women are also omnipresent in the area of youth protection. Thus, targeted by the DYP because they are Indigenous, it is not uncommon for them to undergo non-consensual blood tests to verify the presence of psychoactive substances when they come to give birth in hospitals; for them to be spied on by the DYP because they are pregnant; for the birth of their child to be automatically reported to the DYP, etc.

These assumptions about Indigenous women outweigh the facts, and the child, sometimes before it is even born, is deemed to be in danger because the mother is Indigenous. Because of these prejudices, some Indigenous communities have the highest number of social workers per capita in Quebec, which is totally excessive.

QNW repeats once again that we are in the presence of a system of oppression, which is colonialism, which is perpetuated in other clothes, but which has the same objective.

It is shameful that we are not reacting to the many stories of Indigenous people who are terrified of going to the hospital and say they would rather die at home or give birth in the woods than go to the hospital. It is unthinkable

that Indigenous women have to choose between their safety and health or the possibility of being reported to social services.

Cultural and linguistic security in all public services, one of the recommendations of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (hereinafter referred to as NIMMIWG) and the Viens Commission, is essential. QNW does not want to continue to repeat the recommendations made by the commissions, but asks that their implementation finally begin. The Viens Commission and NIMMIWG have been calling for change for almost two years now, and our organization has been denouncing and fighting against such discrimination for 47 years.

Indigenous women want quality care where they can build trust with health care providers. It is imperative that the health and social services network revise its approach in order to restore the trust of Indigenous women. At the moment, the health and social services network is perceived as a place of insecurity, denunciation, and complicity with the DYP in the removal of Indigenous children from the communities or from their birth in the hospital.

QNW remains clear that this request is not for cases where there is evidence that children are actually at risk, but is for discriminatory practices that are related to prejudice rather than clear evidence of serious neglect or abuse.

There is an urgent need for culturally safe, anti-discriminatory policies and measures to be implemented in health and social services to address this targeted discrimination against Indigenous women. The government must act quickly, "*It is time to end this violence and restore the right of Indigenous women to safety and autonomy in their reproductive and sexual health. It is time to end systemic racism and discrimination!*", affirms Viviane Michel, President of QNW.

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Source:

Doreen Petiquay Barthold
Communication Officer

Quebec Native Women
Business Complex, River Road
C.P. 1989, Kahnawake (Québec) J0L 1B0
[514-757-1508](tel:514-757-1508) | communication@faq-qnw.org