



FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC INC.
QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN INC.

Press release
For immediate distribution

Provisional assessment of the Viens Commission: QNW welcomes actions taken but expects more

Kahnawake, September 17, 2021 — The Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Ian Lafrenière, presented today an interim report on the follow-up regarding the 142 Calls to Action issued by the Commission of Inquiry on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Quebec (*Viens Commission*).

Of the \$200 million allocated in the budget for Indigenous people, \$125 million has already been committed or spent. However, Quebec Native Women (QNW) has not yet received any of this money for the safety of Indigenous women and girls.

The prioritization of the previous actions was mainly focused on the improvement and sustainability of public services funding, the improvement of the quality of public services offered and cultural security. Thus, the implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is clearly not one of the government's three priorities. QNW hopes that the discussions the Minister intends to have with the federal government regarding its implementation will not change the very principle of the Declaration, principle passed unanimously by the National Assembly in October 2019.

Although the issue of the well-being of Indigenous women is a government priority, nothing has been said about the denunciations of women in Val d'Or against police abuse. Yet the *Viens Commission* was set up following these denunciations but during his press conference, no comments have been made on it. Also, the Minister has now simply decided to present things without really acknowledging systemic racism and discrimination. QNW reiterates its position on the importance of recognizing the problem before addressing it.

However, Mr. Lafrenière recognized and understands that it is impossible to take concrete action on all Indigenous issues. He has therefore asked First Nations leaders to identify priorities in this regard. Thus, QNW welcomes the fact that issues concerning Indigenous women are among the actions to come. The well-being of women will finally be part of the discussions, hoping that the issue of their safety will also be considered.

Finally, QNW emphasizes the government's desire to provide ongoing training to all employees of the Joliette hospital and to export this model to all hospitals and the health care sector throughout Quebec. QNW is pleased that the government has decided to train all staff, not just nurses, and to repeat this training on an ongoing basis.

However, it is very important that these trainings be developed and given by Indigenous organizations. These specific trainings must be done on the realities of Indigenous women in Quebec, which are still different from the realities of men. These trainings must necessarily address systemic racism, the legacy of colonization, cultural security and must adopt an intersectional and feminist approach.

"QNW is pleased to note that several actions have been taken in response to several recommendations and our organization is fully committed to working with the government to stay on the right track towards reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the government. But to do so, it is essential that the government recognize the existence of discrimination and systemic racism in Quebec," said Viviane Michel, President of QNW.

About QNW

Founded in 1974, Quebec Native Women is a non-profit organization that represents First Nations women in Quebec as well as urban Indigenous women.

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