



**FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC INC.**  
**QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN INC.**

**Brief**

*Turning Equality in Law into de facto Equality– Towards a Second Government Action  
Plan for Gender Equality*

Presented to the:

Commission des relations avec les citoyens  
National Assembly of Quebec

**Kahnawake, January 26, 2011**

## ***Our Organization***

### **Quebec Native Women Inc.**

Quebec Native Women Inc. (QNW) is a bilingual non-profit organization created as a result of grass-roots initiative in 1974. Our members are women from ten of Quebec's eleven Aboriginal nations, including the Abenaki, the Algonquin, the Attikamek, the Huron-Wendat, the Innu, the Eeyou, the Malécite, the Mig'maq, the Mohawk and the Naskapi, and from various Aboriginal groups from the rest of Canada who live in urban areas of Quebec.

QNW's mission is to advocate for the rights of Aboriginal women and their families, both collectively and individually, promoting the needs and priorities of its members with all levels of government, the civil society and decision-makers in general, in every sector of activity connected with Aboriginal rights.

At the political level, QNW works on behalf of Aboriginal women in Quebec to ensure that their right to equality is recognized both legislatively and constitutionally. QNW also supports the right of Aboriginal peoples to self-government, and encourages Aboriginal women to participate fully in the process leading up to the achievement of this goal.

From a socio-economic standpoint, QNW promotes and creates new training initiatives to help its members to improve the conditions in which they and their families live, thereby generating new opportunities for Aboriginal women to play a role in their communities and in the decision-making process.

QNW encourages and provides support to community initiatives that seek to improve the living conditions of Indigenous women and their families. In this context, QNW is actively involved in cultural sensitization, education and awareness and research.

QNW has undergone unprecedented growth in the last decade, and this is reflected in the ever-increasing volume and quality of the work it does and the tangible results it achieves. Supported by a solid organizational structure and 35 years of extensive experience, it is well-known today for its active involvement in every issue affecting the lives of the Aboriginal peoples.

## **Introduction**

Quebec Native Women Inc. (QNW) thanks the National Assembly of Quebec's Commission des relations avec les citoyens for its invitation to submit recommendations during the parliamentary proceedings leading to the proposed new government Action Plan presented in the consultation document (in French only) entitled *Pour que l'égalité de droit devienne une égalité de fait – Vers un deuxième plan d'action gouvernemental pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes*.

The purpose of this brief is to provide an overview of the Government's guidelines and primary areas for intervention, in order to identify future priorities for action in the field of equality.

In submitting the brief, QNW will be continuing its effort to raise awareness among Quebec's political authorities and the general public about the specific equality-related challenges faced by Aboriginal women. These issues are unfortunately all too often ignored by the authorities. It is high time to bring about a real improvement in the living conditions of Aboriginal women, and lead Quebec towards true equality not only between genders, but also between Aboriginal women and Quebec women in general.

## **Background and general problem**

As early as 2004, QNW had already begun to consider the problem of equality for Aboriginal women<sup>1</sup> during consideration of the Government policy entitled: *For a New Social Contract of Equality between Women and Men*. Its brief examined the systemic discrimination experienced by Aboriginal women for many decades as a result of legislation and policies – such as the *Indian Act* – aimed at colonization and assimilation, and the jurisdictional conflicts between different levels of government (federal and provincial) that led to a number of legal and social absurdities<sup>2</sup>.

These issues are still current from the standpoint of equality for Aboriginal women, but they are not reflected sufficiently in the Government policy, reformulated in 2006 with the title *Turning Equality in Law into Equality in Fact*, or in the first Action Plan covering the period 2007 to 2010. Today, Aboriginal women are still victims of many different forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin, income and so on. Indeed, in May 2010 the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously adopted a motion in

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<sup>1</sup> See Quebec Native Women Inc., *Brief on Equality: Aboriginal Women's Perspectives*, December 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Quebec Native Women Inc., *Supplement to the Brief on Equality: Aboriginal Women's Perspectives*, December 2004.

support of the Amun March, aimed at encouraging the Canadian government to correct discrimination in the *Indian Act*<sup>3</sup>.

The cross-sector nature of the discrimination faced by Aboriginal women is partly recognized by the Secrétariat à la condition féminine du Québec, which has this to say: “Aboriginal women are doubly marginalized, both as women in their communities and as Aboriginals in society. This makes them especially vulnerable to a number of issues, and separates them from the rest of the population”<sup>4</sup>.

It is important to consider this distinct situation in which Quebec’s Aboriginal women find themselves, due to their history of colonization and oppression resulting from the assimilative legislation and policies that are still in force today. In the new Action Plan for equality, the situation of Quebec’s Aboriginal women should therefore be distinguished from that of the other so-called “vulnerable” groups identified by the Government (e.g. ethnic minorities, seniors and the disabled), with which Aboriginal women are normally categorized.

Unlike these other groups, the vulnerability of Aboriginal women stems directly from past colonization, which explains many of the problems still faced by the Aboriginal communities today, including lack of education, limited labour market access, poverty, violence and addiction. The Aboriginal problems identified by the Secrétariat à la condition féminine, such as early pregnancy, substance abuse and family violence, must therefore be regarded from a broader standpoint and addressed in a more holistic way.

Our general criticism concerning the Quebec Government’s approach to equality in both the first Action Plan and the proposed second Plan is that the distinct vulnerability, views and recommendations of Aboriginal women have not been taken into account throughout. Some actions such as the *Government Action Plan 2004-2009 on Domestic Violence* and the *Plan d'action gouvernemental 2008-2013 en matière d'agression sexuelle*, a component of which relates directly to Aboriginal women living on- and off-reserve, reflect a certain amount of progress, but the approach remains compartmentalized. In our view, actions such as these, if they are to respond effectively to the many different aspects of the situation in which Quebec’s Aboriginal women now find themselves, must be coordinated into a combined approach that reflects the structured nature of the inequalities experienced by Aboriginal women.

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<sup>3</sup> National Assembly of Quebec, May 11, 2010: “That the National Assembly support the Amun March, the aim of which is to encourage the Canadian government to correct gender-based discrimination in the Indian Act by adopting the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act. That, in particular, it congratulate the March instigators, Ms. Michèle Audette and Ms. Viviane Michel, who have joined forces with the thousands of Aboriginal women’s voices throughout Quebec and Canada to establish gender equality in the Indian Act’s provisions concerning registration.” (Translation)

<sup>4</sup> Secrétariat à la condition féminine du Québec, “Aboriginal” file, <http://www.scf.gouv.qc.ca/index.php?id=19>, 2011, translated from the original French.

Our principal recommendation for a second Action Plan on equality is therefore to incorporate the distinct situation of Quebec's Aboriginal women in a coherent and coordinated way, by differentiating them from the other "vulnerable" groups that do not share the same history of colonization.

Our specific recommendations for each guideline and question in the consultation booklet are set out below.

## **GUIDELINE 2**

### **ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ECONOMIC ARENA**

#### **SOME FACTS<sup>5</sup>**

- Generally speaking, the average Aboriginal income is 30% below that of the rest of the Canadian population.
- In 2001, 47% of Aboriginal women aged 15 or over had jobs, compared to 56% of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Aboriginal women were also less likely than Aboriginal men to be employed (47% versus 53%).
- Of all Aboriginal women, the highest unemployment rate was reported for the category living on-reserve. In 2001, 22% of active Aboriginal people living on-reserve were jobless, as were 17% of those living in small and medium-sized towns, 16% of those living off-reserve in rural areas and 14% of those living in the Census Metropolitan Areas.
- As for other variables, the income of Aboriginal women varies according to where they live. In 2000, those living on-reserve had the lowest median income of all Aboriginal women, at slightly under \$11,000, while those living in the Census Metropolitan Areas had the highest, at nearly \$14,000.
- However, a higher percentage of Aboriginal women's income is derived from Government transfer payments, including employment insurance and social benefits. In 2000, 27% of the total income of all Aboriginal women came from these sources, compared to 16% for Aboriginal men and non-Aboriginal women.
- A very high percentage of Aboriginal women have low incomes. In 2000, 36% of Aboriginal women were classified in the category of households whose income was below Statistics Canada's low-income cutoff. This was more than double the figure for non-Aboriginal women (17%), and also above that for Aboriginal men (32%).

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<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada, A Gender-based Statistical Report, Chapter 8: Aboriginal Women in Canada*, 2009, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2005001/chap8-eng.htm>

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According to a recent study measuring income differences between Aboriginal peoples and the rest of Canada, it will take 63 years for Aboriginal peoples (regardless of whether they live on- or off-reserve) to achieve the same income level as the rest of the population<sup>6</sup>. As the statistics cited above show, the dual discrimination experienced by Aboriginal women has already resulted in a certain “feminization” of poverty. Given that the unemployment rate for Aboriginal women is almost double that for non-Aboriginal women (although less than that for Aboriginal men), Aboriginal women are generally less likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to form part of the paid workforce.

The unemployment rate for Aboriginal women educated to high school level (those who studied at high school but did not necessarily graduate) is higher than that for their non-Aboriginal counterparts. This difference suggests that situational factors other than the level of education, such as discrimination, domestic violence and lack of family support, also have a major impact on the ability of Aboriginal women to enter the labour market.

The unemployment rate does not necessarily reflect traditional unpaid seasonal occupations such as hunting, fishing, trapping, crafts and looking after the children of friends and family members. These types of occupations are common in many Aboriginal communities, where traditional trades play a significant role but are not recognized by the Government.

Lack of infrastructures can also be a major obstacle to economic development and investment, especially on the reserves and in the remote Northern communities. We therefore welcome the forthcoming creation of a regional women’s entrepreneurship support agency (ORSEF) in Northern Quebec, which will encourage and support the projects of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs who contribute to the economic development of their communities. An agency such as this will help compensate for the lack of qualified labour and women’s entrepreneurship in the region.

However, we would like services such as this to be made available throughout Quebec, since the Aboriginal communities located further south, although closer to the cities, nevertheless encounter the same problems of poverty and lack of labour market access. Most of the education and employability funding policies and services that exist on the reserves are not available to Aboriginal women living in urban areas. This lack of suitable resources and services hinders the ability of Aboriginal women to achieve economic independence.

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<sup>6</sup> Wilson, Daniel & Macdonald, David. *The Income Gap between Indigenous Peoples and the Rest of Canada*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, April 2010, p.3. Online: <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/income-gap-between-aboriginal-peoples-and-rest-canada>

However, it is important that we stop regarding Aboriginal women simply as victims. They need to be recognized as credible, legitimate actors in their own development, and the value of their role in the development and well-being of Aboriginal communities should be reflected through the adoption of special measures to support Aboriginal women entrepreneurs, access to interesting jobs and access to credit.

In this respect, QNW would like to improve and extend its employment and training program, aimed mainly at women living in urban areas, in order to provide a more complete response to the needs of Aboriginal women in the fight against poverty.

**Question No. 2: What can be done to counter the economic inequalities experienced by women (in particular due to their role as mothers), and what can be done to support the various groups of women who face special problems in achieving autonomy?**

### **QNW'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Develop literacy and job preparation programs, as well as specific training programs and workshops for Aboriginal women, in order to eradicate poverty in the Aboriginal communities and improve economic and social conditions.
- Enable Aboriginal women to develop everyday skills, self-esteem, leadership, self-knowledge and entrepreneurship through training programs and workshops.
- Women should have access to the services of a guidance counsellor, and should be able to obtain educational and financial support as well as language upgrading services.
- Prepare Aboriginal awareness workshops for employers, to improve the possibility of employment.
- Improve access to communications, technologies and transportation for Aboriginal women living in remote regions, so that they are able to take advantage of economic development opportunities.
- Set up work/study/family balance programs for Aboriginal women living in the communities and in urban areas.
- These programs would touch on different subjects, including family support, childcare services in Aboriginal communities, and job search and back-to-school resources specifically for Aboriginal women (funding, training, education grants, etc.).
- Provide the Huron-Wendat labour and training development centre (CDFM) with a childcare service.

It is also important to develop qualified female Aboriginal trainers who would be responsible for training other Aboriginal women on issues relating to employment and education, with a view to building capacity.

### **GUIDELINE 3**

#### **ACHIEVING A BETTER BALANCE BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME AND AT WORK**

##### **SOME FACTS<sup>7</sup>**

- In all ethnic categories, women say they spend more time than men on housework. In all, 35% of Aboriginal women say they do at least 30 hours of housework per week, compared to just 15% of men.
- In particular, 32% of Aboriginal women living on-reserve say they spend at least 60 hours per week on childcare, compared to just 21% for Aboriginal women in general.
- Fifty-seven percent of Aboriginal women in the workforce in 2000 worked part-time or for part of the year only, compared to 54% of Aboriginal men and 49% of non-Aboriginal women.
- In the case of Indians living on-reserve, 19% of single-parent families are led by women, compared to 12% among non-Aboriginal people.
- The percentage of single-parent families led by women is even higher among families living off-reserve, at 25%.

##### **ISSUES**

Based on these statistics, Aboriginal women, like their non-Aboriginal counterparts, are more likely than their spouses to be juggling work and family responsibilities. For example, a significant percentage of Aboriginal single mothers live in urban areas. They have specific employment, education and family needs (e.g. adapted and easily-accessible Aboriginal childcare services). Some of these resources are available in urban areas, but they lack visibility and can be difficult to obtain.

Women living in the communities have access to community-type services from their family members and friends. However, they often face similar problems to their urban counterparts. For example, they are often alone in coping with family responsibilities, because a significant percentage of families in the communities are single-parent units led

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<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada, A Gender-based Statistical Report, Chapter 8: Aboriginal Women in Canada*, 2009, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2005001/chap8-eng.htm>.



by women. There is also a large percentage of young mothers (under 18) with one or more dependent children.

QNW recently introduced a project to meet the specific job search needs of single mothers. The project, launched in December 2009, is designed to help single mothers who have faced or are still facing violence-related problems to join the labour market. Many training classes have been given in urban areas, including Montreal, Quebec City, Joliette, Val-d'Or, La Tuque and Sept-Îles.

Through this training, we hope to provide the women with real tools, and also help them to build their confidence. We want them to acknowledge their own capacities and their ability to support themselves and their children.

**Question No. 3: Based on current family policy, what can be done to encourage a better distribution of professional and family responsibilities between women and men?**

#### **QNW'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Set up work/study/family balance programs for Aboriginal women in urban areas and in the communities. These programs would touch on different subjects, including family support, childcare services in Aboriginal communities, and job search and back-to-school resources specifically for Aboriginal women (funding, training, education grants, etc.).
- Prepare Aboriginal awareness workshops for employers.

It is also important to develop qualified female Aboriginal trainers who would be responsible for training other Aboriginal women on issues relating to employment and education, with a view to building capacity.

#### **GUIDELINE 4:**

**ACHIEVING HEALTH APPROACHES TAILORED TO WOMEN'S SPECIFIC NEEDS**

#### **SOME FACTS<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>8</sup>Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada, A Gender-based Statistical Report, Chapter 8: Aboriginal Women in Canada*, 2009, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2005001/chap8-eng.htm>.

- The life expectancy of Aboriginal women is significantly less than that of non-Aboriginal women. In 2001, the estimated life expectancy at birth was 76.8 years for Aboriginal women, more than five years shorter than that of non-Aboriginal women, who could expect to live for an average of 82.2 years;
- In 2001, only 54% of Aboriginal women described their health as excellent or very good, compared to 59% of Canadian women;
- In 2001, 45% of Aboriginal women aged 65 or over and living off-reserve said their health was acceptable or poor, compared to 29% of Canadian women in the same age group;
- In 2001, 88% of Aboriginal women aged 65 or over had at least one chronic disease (such as arthritis or rheumatism). Chronic diseases were also diagnosed by health professionals in 74% of 45-64 year-old women and 32% of 15-24 year-olds. In all age groups, women were more likely than men to be diagnosed with a chronic disease.
- Diabetes rates are also much higher among the Aboriginal population living off-reserve than in the Canadian population in general. In 2001, 7% of Aboriginal women aged 15 or over and living off-reserve had been diagnosed with diabetes, compared to just 3% of Canadian women in general. According to the 2002 First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey, more adult Aboriginal women than men suffered from diabetes (16.4% compared to 12.5%)<sup>9</sup>. Diabetes is especially common among older Aboriginal women. In 2001, 24% of Aboriginal women aged 65 or over and living off-reserve were diabetic, compared to just 11% of older women in Canada. Older Aboriginal women were also somewhat more likely to be diabetic than their male counterparts, 20% of whom had diabetes.
- Aboriginal women are at higher risk than non-Aboriginal women to develop cervical cancer, mainly because they do not undergo screening, or are not screened on a regular basis<sup>10</sup>. Aboriginal women are also more likely to develop breast cancer. In 2002, 43.4% of First Nations women living in the communities had never performed a self-examination, and 60.6% had never had a mammography. The figures were respectively 37.4% and 33.6% for women in the 40 and over age-group, who are statistically more likely to develop breast cancer. In addition, fewer women living in isolated communities said they performed self-examinations<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission, *First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey, 2002. Report on First Nations Living in the Communities*. Online: <http://www.cssspnql.com/eng/recherche/documents/RHS2002-InCommunities.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Health Canada, online: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/diseases-maladies/cervical-uterus-eng.php>

<sup>11</sup> First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission, *First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey, 2002. Report on First Nations Living in the Communities*. Online: <http://www.cssspnql.com/eng/recherche/documents/RHS2002-InCommunities.pdf>

- In 2002, 6.5% of First Nations women living in the communities had never undergone a cytology (vaginal examination with sampling) in their lives, and only 49.3% had been examined in the 12 months preceding the Survey<sup>12</sup>.
- In 2002, only 42.7% of First Nations women living in the communities had undergone an HIV screening test in their lifetime<sup>13</sup>.
- Although the Aboriginal people make up only 3.3% of the total Canadian population, in 2002 they accounted for between 5% and 8% of existing cases of HIV and between 6% and 12% of new cases in Canada.<sup>14</sup> Aboriginal women are affected to a much greater degree by the HIV epidemic (HIV and AIDS) than non-Aboriginal women. In the Aboriginal population, women account for nearly half (45.1%) of all positive HIV tests, compared to 19.5% for women in the general population. Prior to 1992, women accounted for just 13.8% of all declared AIDS cases in the Aboriginal population (11/80), but in 2002 this figure had risen to 25.8% (8/31)<sup>15</sup>.

## ISSUES

Aboriginal women live in a specific context, shaped by the social, historic and legal conditions that are reflected in their current living conditions and health. Although the life expectancy of Aboriginal women has increased considerably, it nevertheless remains below the Canadian average. The determinants of health that hinder the healthy development of Aboriginal women include economic conditions that are inferior to those of the rest of the population, a high rate of poverty, a level of education below that of the rest of the population, housing-related problems and so on. In addition to the many barriers faced by Aboriginal women, which hinder their ability to climb the social ladder, their ability to maintain their health is compromised by poor housing and sub-standard accommodation, both of which place stress on individuals, families and sometimes even communities.<sup>16</sup>

Diabetes has reached epidemic proportions in Canada's Aboriginal populations. Health Canada reports that diabetes is a major concern for the Aboriginal population because of "early onset, greater severity at diagnosis, high rates of complications, lack of accessible services, increasing trends, and increasing prevalence of risk factors for a population

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<sup>12</sup> *Idem*

<sup>13</sup> *Idem*

<sup>14</sup> Health Canada, online: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/diseases-maladies/aids-sida/index-eng.php>

<sup>15</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada, online: [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/epiu-ae/epi\\_update\\_may\\_04/9-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/epiu-ae/epi_update_may_04/9-eng.php)

<sup>16</sup> Quebec Native Women, *Femmes autochtones et santé: un état de la situation, Rapport et recommandations*, August 2001.

already at risk”.<sup>17</sup> Aboriginal women are also more vulnerable to cancer of the cervix, bladder and kidneys, exhibiting rates for all three that are well in excess of the Canadian average. We have also observed that a social environment life with physical and sexual violence, substance abuse and high suicide rates is a risk factor for both physical and mental health, among other things because all these elements increase individual vulnerability and hence lifestyle habits and the ability to adapt.<sup>18</sup>

HIV and AIDS also have a significant impact on Aboriginal women. Although the number of new HIV cases has fallen among the Canadian population, it is increasing steadily among Aboriginal women, who are at higher risk for a number of reasons including social, economic and behavioural factors such as poverty, addiction, sexually transmissible diseases and limited access to health services, all of which increase their vulnerability.<sup>19</sup>

**Question No. 4: How can health care and social services be better adapted to the needs and the specific situation of women?**

#### **QNW’S RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Provide financial support for Quebec Native Women Inc., to cover the activities of the health coordinator;
- Provide financial support for Quebec Native Women Inc.’s health promotion activities, and for the development of awareness tools;
- Support initiatives by Quebec Native Women Inc. to publicize the health-related needs, concerns and priorities of Aboriginal women so that they can be reflected in Government and community policies and programs;
- Support the creation of an Aboriginal “women and health” network;
- Provide support that will enable Quebec Native Women Inc. to prepare training programs aimed at developing health-related expertise in the communities;
- Provide financial support that will enable Quebec Native Women Inc. to carry out research into the health of different groups of Aboriginal women.

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<sup>17</sup>Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada, A Gender-based Statistical Report, Chapter 8: Aboriginal Women in Canada*, 2009, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2005001/chap8-eng.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Quebec Native Women Inc., *Femmes autochtones et santé: un état de la situation*, Rapport et recommandations, August 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada, online: [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/epiu-aepi/epi\\_update\\_may\\_04/9-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/epiu-aepi/epi_update_may_04/9-eng.php)

## **GUIDELINE 5**

### **ACHIEVING RESPECT FOR WOMEN'S PHYSICAL INTEGRITY AND THEIR SAFETY IN ALL SPHERES OF LIFE**

#### **SOME FACTS:**

- Aboriginal women are three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be victims of violence.<sup>20</sup>
- Fifty-four percent of Aboriginal women report more serious acts of violence likely to put their lives at risk: beatings, strangulation, attacks with firearms or knives, and sexual assault. The rate for non-Aboriginal women is 37%.<sup>21</sup>
- These higher rates are due in large part to the higher level of risk. The Aboriginal population is younger than the Canadian population in general, earns less money, has a higher rate of alcohol abuse and is more likely to live in common law partnerships as opposed to marriages. Other factors also have an impact, including the destruction of family life by the boarding schools and the effects of colonialism on traditional values and cultures<sup>22</sup>.
- A recent study of Aboriginal children found that Aboriginal parents are involved in 38% of known or suspected cases of spousal violence, compared to 25% of non-Aboriginal parents (Tourigny, Domond, Trocmé, Sioui, Baril, 2007).
- A disproportionate number of Aboriginal women and girls disappear or are killed in Canada. Between 2000 and 2008, 153 murders were entered into the NWAC Sisters in Spirit database. These cases account for approximately 10% of female homicide victims in Canada, even though Aboriginal women make up only 3% of the country's total female population<sup>23</sup>.
- The risk of sexual assault in Quebec's Aboriginal communities is two to three times higher than in small urban centres and rural villages. Other types of sexual offences are four times more likely to occur in Aboriginal communities than in other similar communities<sup>24</sup>.
- Although it is a generally accepted fact that Aboriginal women are over-represented in human trafficking, there is very little documentation on this subject, and no official statistics. However, research carried out at the request of Canada's Department of Justice shows that most Canadian victims are Aboriginal women and young girls<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Statistics Canada- No. 85-002-XIF in the catalogue, vol. 26, no. 3, Victimization and offending among the Aboriginal population in Canada

<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada – No. 85 – 570 in the catalogue, Measuring Violence Against Women, 2006

<sup>22</sup> IDEM

<sup>23</sup> NWAC, Sisters in Spirit,

[http://www.nwac.ca/sites/default/files/reports/2010\\_NWAC\\_SIS\\_Report\\_FR.pdf](http://www.nwac.ca/sites/default/files/reports/2010_NWAC_SIS_Report_FR.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> QNW, Global Strategy, [http://www.faq-qnw.org/documents/Strategieglobale\\_fr.pdf](http://www.faq-qnw.org/documents/Strategieglobale_fr.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Department of Justice Canada, [http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2006/rr06\\_3/p3.html](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2006/rr06_3/p3.html)

- Research has shown that Aboriginal children and youths are over-represented in sexual exploitation, which is a form of human trafficking. In some Canadian cities, up to 90% of youths who are sexually exploited in the streets are of Aboriginal origin. Most are between 15 and 18 years of age, and some are as young as 10 to 12 years of age. (*Sexual Exploitation of Aboriginal Children and Youth*, NWAC)

## **ISSUES:**

QNW has initiated family violence interventions and actions in the Aboriginal communities for more than 30 years. Its aim has been to solve violence-related problems in Aboriginal families, thereby improving the living conditions of Aboriginal women and fostering their development in society.

An aspect that is particularly worrying is the fact that although there is general agreement on the urgent need for action, spousal violence, family violence and sexual violence continue to be taboo subjects in society. There are very few resources available to meet the needs of victims of violence. In Quebec, excluding the Inuit, there are only 12 Aboriginal shelters for battered women, whereas the non-Aboriginal community has more than 90. Not only that, but very few of these resources are able to meet the needs of Aboriginal families, because of the intervention methods used and certain cultural differences (e.g. language). The Aboriginal resources, including the shelters, therefore face the significant challenge of helping families to break away from violence and raising community awareness of non-violence, even though they have very few means at their disposal.

QNW, for its part, faces the unique challenge of coordinating, unifying and mobilizing Aboriginal women from different communities and nations scattered throughout Quebec and often located several thousand kilometres apart. Aboriginal women face some extremely difficult social problems, often leading to the erosion of structure.

We note the progress made in some sectors, as witnessed by the *Bilan de l'action gouvernementale en matière d'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes 2007-2010* with regard to gender equality, the *Government Action Plan 2004-2009 on Domestic Violence* with regard to domestic violence, and the *Plan d'action gouvernemental 2008-2013 en matière d'agression sexuelle* with regard to sexual assault. In the latter case, some of the measures are aimed specifically at Aboriginal women living both on- and off-reserve.

As part of these action plans, QNW intends to launch a sexual assault awareness campaign in March 2011, aimed at members of Quebec's Aboriginal communities. It has been preparing the campaign since January 2010, and has developed awareness tools that are tailored to the situation and needs of Aboriginal women.

**Question No. 5: To continue to counter the various forms of violence against women, what can be done to prevent sexual exploitation of women and help those who wish to escape prostitution?**

**QNW'S RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Renew the Aboriginal component of the Action Plan 2004-2009 on Domestic Violence in order to maintain current awareness and educational campaigns relating to spousal and domestic violence.
- Expand the range of services available in the shelters, so that they address the needs and situation of Aboriginal women who are victims of domestic and spousal violence and are better adjusted to Aboriginal cultures and traditions. For example, allow the shelters to provide nature-based recovery sites, and allow sharing circles, healing circles and so on.
- Implement services aimed specifically at men who are perpetrators or victims of violence. Male victims should take part in the healing process for the Aboriginal nations.
- Introduce second stage shelters for Aboriginal women who are victims of domestic and spousal violence.
- Raise awareness inform the Quebec population and its organizations about the true situation and history of Aboriginal peoples.
- Provide a safety net for Aboriginal women who are victims of domestic or spousal violence by offering a choice of services adjusted to their needs and situation.
- Introduce appropriate tools and resources to help Aboriginal women and children.
- Carry out research into the trafficking of Aboriginal women in Quebec, focusing on the different types of sexual exploitation.
- Use methods such as awareness campaigns to raise awareness about the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women.
- Develop tools that can be used by the various organizations working with Aboriginal clients, so that they are better able to detect and help Aboriginal women who are at risk for or victims of sexual exploitation.
- Develop activities to strengthen self-esteem and self-assertion among young Aboriginal women.
- Develop tools to raise awareness and inform the various people working with Aboriginal clients, so that they are better able to meet the needs of Aboriginal women who are victims of sexual assault.

## **GUIDELINE 6**

### **ACHIEVING GREATER PARTICIPATION BY WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING BODIES**

**Question No. 6: What can be done to speed up the progress of women in political and economic decision-making positions and circles of power at every level of the public and private sectors?**

#### **QNW'S RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- That QNW become a full partner in the various issues and action plans affecting the living conditions of Aboriginal women.
- That QNW become an integral part of ministerial committees with an interest in the living conditions of Aboriginal women.
- That the work done by QNW be acknowledged by granting adequate basic funding to cover its cost of living.
- Ensure that a percentage of the *Equal Access to Decision-Making* program be set aside every year specifically for Aboriginal women in Quebec.
- Enable QNW to carry out research into the relative participation of men and women in decision-making authorities.

#### **Conclusion**

In what is supposed to be an era of “post-colonialism”, we need to reverse the impacts of the colonial system on Aboriginal women. The recommendations made today constitute a very small step towards a remedy for the injustices of the past. For QNW, it is vital that the funding paid to organizations working specifically to promote equality for women be renewed, and that funds be made available to help solve the particular problems facing Aboriginal women.

With funding such as this, Quebec Native Women will be able to continue to advocate for equality by progressing towards positive community activities. As indicated in 2004, Aboriginal women:

... want core funding to continue community-based activities like research, capacity building and advocacy. They do not like the fact that women's organizations have been forced to compete with each other for limited and ad hoc funding for far too long. This is over and above their ongoing competition with men<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup>Aboriginal Women's Roundtable on Gender Equality, Roundtable Report, March 2000, p. 8-9.