



FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC INC.
QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN INC.

Comments from Quebec Native Women

As part of:

The public consultation conducted by the City of Montreal (Commission sur la culture, le patrimoine et les sports)

Towards an intervention framework for recognition

June 23, 2021

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About Quebec Native Women

Quebec Native Women (hereafter QNW) is a bilingual, non-profit organization founded in 1974 that began as a community-based initiative. Since July 2009, QNW has had consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Quebec Native Women (QNW) is an organization representing women from ten (10) First Nations of Quebec: Abenaki, Anishnabe, Attikamek, Innu, Eeyou, Wendat, Maliseet, Mig'maq, Mohawk and Naskapi. We represent First Nations women as well as urban Indigenous women. In 2015, QNW was recognized by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada as an Indigenous Representative Organization (IRO).

QNW's mission is to advocate for the human rights of Indigenous women and their families, both collectively and individually, and to represent the needs and priorities of its members to various levels of government, civil society and decision makers in all areas of activity that affect the rights of Indigenous people.

QNW has contributed to restoring the balance between Indigenous men and women by giving a strong voice to the needs and priorities of women for more than 47 years. QNW brings the needs and priorities of its members to the attention of authorities and decision makers in all areas of our work: health, youth, justice and public safety, women's shelters and the promotion of non-violence, human rights, international law, as well as employment and training. In this context, we play a role in education, awareness raising and research, and provide a structure for women to be active in their communities.

1. QNW's Position

The events of the last few years have shown that the situation in which Indigenous women, girls and 2ELGBTQIA+ people find themselves absolutely must be improved. Indigenous people are disproportionately discriminated against, and this is even more obvious in the case of Indigenous women. An intersectional approach is necessary when discussing the discrimination experienced by Indigenous women. They are discriminated against on the basis of their gender, but also on the basis of their ethnicity, i.e., the fact that they are Indigenous. This is known as "double discrimination". Then there are the additional discriminations experienced by Indigenous 2ELGBTQIA+ people. These particular experiences are strongly tied to colonialism and a historical, political, and social context¹. The forms of violence experienced by Indigenous women are also disproportionately high when compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. The 2018 *Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces* states that 63% of Indigenous women have been physically or sexually assaulted as of the age of 15, as opposed to 45% of non-Indigenous women². The feminicides that have been rising in Quebec since the beginning of the year attest to this: to date, 13 women have lost their lives at the hands of violent men.

Indigenous women, girls and 2ELGBTQIA+ people are always at the centre of concerns as evidenced by the various commissions of inquiry, including the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (NIMMIWG). The place and visibility of Indigenous women must be recognized and emphasized.

1.1 The presence, recognition and contribution of Indigenous women in Montreal/Tiohtià:ke

QNW welcomes the consultation of the *Commission sur le patrimoine, la culture et les sports* aimed at gathering the opinion of the public on the *Cadre d'intervention de reconnaissance*. The City of Montreal, through its policies, advocates the importance of marks of recognition of

¹ Christine CORBEIL et Isabelle MARCHAND, April 5, 2007, « Penser l'intervention féministe à l'aune de l'approche intersectionnelle ». Retrieved online: <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/nps/2006-v19-n1-nps1615/014784ar/> (June 17, 2021).

² Statistics Canada, 2018, "Intimate partner violence among among diverse populations in Canada", in *Gouvernement of Canada*. Retrieved online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210519/dq210519c-eng.htm> (June 17, 2021).

the history of Montreal society. The values that emerge must be indicative of the city's multicultural identity. Canada's colonial history and government decisions regarding Indigenous populations have often been disregarded, but are finally beginning to be recognized. Although this recognition comes late, it is welcomed by QNW. However, it is imperative that the Indigenous perspective, particularly that of Indigenous women, be included in order to recognize their contribution to history, heritage and culture.

Artifacts discovered at several sites on the island of Montreal/Tiohtià:ke are testimony to the fact that: "The oldest traces of occupation found to date back approximately 5,500 years"³, not to mention the fact that 35,000 people identify themselves as Indigenous⁴. The City of Montreal has recently made a name for itself in its actions towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The creation of the position of commissioner of Indigenous affairs and the hiring of Ms. Marie-Ève Bordeleau, renaming Amherst Street "Atateken", as well as the unveiling of the 2020-2025 *Strategy for Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples* are proof of the City's willingness to move forward in terms of relations with Indigenous peoples. However, our organization believes that there is more to be done in this regard.

1.2 QNW's proposition

QNW would like to see Indigenous identity and culture better represented in the City of Montreal. For a long time, the history of Canada and Quebec has been taught from the point of view of the settlers. To this day, history is taught from a non-Indigenous perspective. As Indigenous peoples have long stated, their stories must be told from their perspective, by them and for them. Our organization is of the same mind. We believe that there are several processes for giving visibility to Indigenous peoples that encompass both their history and their issues. The objective of this process is to recognize their presence on their territory.

³ Mémoire des Montréalais and Roland TREMBLAY, January 13, 2016. « La présence autochtone à Montréal ». Retrieved online: <https://ville.montreal.qc.ca/memoiresdesmontrealais/la-presence-autochtone-montreal> (June 17, 2021). See also: City of Montreal, « 2020-2015 Strategy for Reconciliation ». Page 21. Retrieved online: ([https://portail-m4s.s3.montreal.ca/pdf/reconciliation_strategy_2020-2025_vdm_en_2.pdf\(montreal.ca\)](https://portail-m4s.s3.montreal.ca/pdf/reconciliation_strategy_2020-2025_vdm_en_2.pdf(montreal.ca))) (June 17, 2021).

⁴ City of Montreal, *Ibid.*

Representing a significant population, First Nations and Inuit individuals are an integral part of Montreal's identity. As explained in the *Intervention Framework for Recognition*, the City of Montreal is particularly indebted to the First Nations in terms of culture and development. "This historical depth etched into its territory makes the quality and significance of its heritage even more palpable, and gives Montreal its special character"⁵.

During this National Indigenous History Month, we must honour the presence of Indigenous women in the City of Montreal through various commemorations and significant events. We propose to organize periodic commemorative ceremonies to honour, among others, the missing and murdered Indigenous women and the survivors of Residential Schools. In keeping with the City's values of recognition of heritage and Indigenous identity, these events would serve as a reminder of the importance of the place and contributions of Indigenous people in Montréal/Tiohtià:ke, particularly Indigenous women. These ceremonies could be held in places that are significant to them and where they are present in large numbers. In addition, the installation of temporary arts structures would allow for the valorization of Indigenous art and artists. We also propose to install a permanent intervention to commemorate missing and murdered Indigenous women. QNW would like to see concrete commemorations organized with the City and the stakeholders concerned. The issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women is an old and worrisome phenomenon. We need to take action and create a permanent space for commemorations and gatherings, promoting cultural safety and the safety of Indigenous women. The location chosen would be a landmark for Indigenous women. Further details will be discussed in section 2.2.

1.3 The situation of the colonial statues

Our organization is concerned about the dominance of the colonial statues already in place. As mentioned above, QNW believes that the City of Montreal should create a safe space for Indigenous women. The current presence of colonial statues, such as that of Christopher

⁵ Division du patrimoine, Direction de l'urbanisme et Service de l'urbanisme et de la mobilité, May 28, 2021. « *Cadre d'intervention en reconnaissance, cérémonie commémorative, cérémonie matérielle, toponymie, identification et citation* ». Page 9.

Columbus, contributes to the perpetuation of the City's colonial history. It minimizes the presence and contribution of Indigenous women. We recognize that these people may have contributed to the founding of the City and the province in which we live, but this contribution was undoubtedly at the expense of Indigenous peoples. The events surrounding the John A. Macdonald statue last August demonstrate society's dissatisfaction with the racism experienced by minorities. While QNW does not support the actions that led to the removal of the John A. Macdonald statue, we believe that we must question how appropriate it is to preserve statues of historical figures who have undermined the rights of Indigenous peoples, particularly those of Indigenous women. Our organization is therefore asking the City of Montreal to analyze the symbolism of these statues to ensure that their presence does not perpetuate colonial history.

1.4 Guarantees offered by the City of Montreal

Over the years, the City of Montréal has adopted several declarations aimed at promoting the rights of women and Indigenous people: the Montréal Declaration for Cultural Diversity and the Montréal Declaration on International Women's Day are among them. The Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities guarantees several rights, including the right to dignity, non-discrimination and fulfillment, applicable to Indigenous women. The Charter guarantees a territory where everyone can live in dignity, in inclusion and without discrimination.

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The City of Montreal must be more inclusive and represent Indigenous history and culture

⁶ City of Montreal, February 5, 2020. « Montréal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities ». Articles 1 and 2. Retrieved online: (https://portail-m4s.s3.montreal.ca/pdf/montreal_charter_of_rights_and_responsibilities_0.pdf) (June 22, 2021).

through commemorative ceremonies and the displaying of Indigenous art. As a shared community, the living environment offered by the city must allow Indigenous people to fully develop their potential, culturally, socially, personally and communally. The cultural heritage and history of Indigenous women must be promoted as an integral part of Montreal's identity. In doing so, the City supports Indigenous women in their development, quality of life and cultural safety.

For QNW, the *Strategy for Reconciliation* presented by the City last November is the ultimate tool that advocates for the recognition of Indigenous history, their contribution and the cultural security to which they are entitled. The different axes of the Strategy are representative of the project we are proposing: to improve the visibility of the Indigenous presence, to support the Indigenous community, to improve the feeling of security of the Indigenous people in Montreal/Tiohtià:ke and finally, to support the cultural development of the Indigenous people in urban areas. First, recognizing that colonial history causes Indigenous identity in public spaces to fade, our project to commemorate missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls fulfills the City's commitment to support projects that promote cultural safety and Indigenous history. Second, recognizing the intergenerational trauma of residential schools and the culture shock resulting from Indigenous people moving to a larger centre, the City recognizes the importance of listening to Indigenous organizations having expertise. By providing a safe, free and accessible space specifically for Indigenous women, our project also addresses this aspect of the Strategy. Finally, as Indigenous artists are given a prominent place in the City's 2017-2022 *Cultural Development Policy*, the proposed commemoration of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and the installation of a permanent work of art addresses another of the City's concerns.

2. Recommendations

In 2019, Quebec Native Women was mandated by the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality, the Ministry of Crown-Aboriginal Relations and the Ministry of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada to commemorate missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

We are proposing a joint project with the City of Montreal and an Indigenous artist to honour and commemorate missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We are proposing

one-time commemorative events and the erection of a statue in honour of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. As well as being a commemorative ceremony and physical commemoration as defined in the *Intervention Framework for Recognition*, this event will promote Indigenous culture through art and speak out against the historical oppression experienced by Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous women. As an addition to the City of Montreal's public art collection, this permanent artwork would be a collaboration between an Indigenous artist and the City, marking the beginning of a new artistic era. The inauguration of a permanent statue would be dedicated to Indigenous women and girls, their families and their communities. The statue would honour all those who have died as a result of violence and abuse, as well as those who are still missing. It will allow Indigenous women and girls to reclaim their power and their place.

It would also bring Montrealers and Indigenous people of all Nations living in the city closer together. It is essential that the non-Indigenous population learn about the real history of the creation of Canada, the province of Quebec and the city of Montreal. This colonial, assimilatory and paternalistic background is at the root of the situation in which the Indigenous peoples find themselves. The public must become aware of this and be involved in the reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples.

Our proposal for a commemorative event is also part of a series of actions stemming from the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Reclaiming Our Power and Place* and the *Complementary report for Quebec*. Montreal/Tiohtià:ke is a large urban centre and many people leave their communities to settle there. Between 2001 and 2016, the Indigenous population increased by 211% compared to the rest of the Montreal population, which only increased by 7%.⁷ This is about 30 times higher than the non-Indigenous population. Furthermore, the City of Montreal is known as the "hub" of the trafficking in women network. In this sense, it is unfortunately very likely that many Indigenous women and girls have the City of Montreal in common as a place of disappearance. To this day, many Indigenous women and girls have gone missing or have been murdered, but the cases remain unsolved.

QNW feels that the ideal location for this statue would be Cabot Square, as it is extremely

⁷ City of Montreal, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

popular with Indigenous people. As you probably already know, Indigenous people face many prejudices regarding addiction, homelessness and trafficking in women, and these must be destroyed. Pierre LePage's book testifies to this: it is through ignorance and misunderstanding of difference that prejudices continue to be perpetuated over the years. The non-Indigenous society of Montreal/Tiohtià:ke must learn to deconstruct prejudices towards First Nations and Inuit so that reconciliation can truly begin. Because of its large Indigenous presence, Cabot Square is unfortunately steeped in these prejudices. Our organization maintains that many people do not want to spend time in this place because of these prejudices. This is why we are targeting this particular location: we want to deconstruct all prejudices towards Indigenous people, especially towards Indigenous women, by erecting a statue.

Our organization would like Cabot Square to become a place of gathering and cultural safety for First Nations people, especially Indigenous women. It is essential that our Indigenous women and girls reclaim their cultures and traditions in order to begin their healing process. The disappearance and murders of our Indigenous sisters leave traces that require a return to their roots so that they can begin to heal. QNW wishes to offer all Indigenous women a permanent place where they can feel safe and connected to Mother Earth.

Merci, Thank you, Nia:wen, Migwetc, Tshinashkumitin, Wela'lin, Wli Wni, Tiawenhk