

Attention: Le Devoir
Wednesday, March 8, 2023

Subject: Open letter

Afeas and QNW are launching a call for concerted action: Demanding respect for the rights of Indigenous women!

Since 1975, International Women's Rights Day has highlighted the advances and shortcomings to attain equality for ALL women. On this March 8, 2023, the [Association féministe d'éducation et d'action sociale](#) (Afeas) and [Quebec Native Women](#) (QNW) are joining forces to highlight the inequalities and violence that continue to plague Indigenous women and girls in Quebec.

Rights recognized, yet denied and violated

In spite of the [commissions of inquiry](#), the amendments to the [Indian Act](#) and the [action plans](#) unveiled over the past ten years, it is clear that the situation of Indigenous women and girls is still very different from that of their non-indigenous counterparts. In order to reverse this persistent condition, structuring actions **MUST** be implemented at the local, regional, provincial, federal and international levels.

We therefore call for the respect and implementation of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). This declaration aims to support the efforts of UN member governments and Indigenous peoples to end discrimination, particularly against women and girls. Closer to home, the current government's refusal to acknowledge systemic discrimination and racism in Quebec is preventing institutions working with Indigenous communities from truly addressing and resolving the problem in Quebec is preventing institutions working with Indigenous communities from truly addressing and resolving the problem.

More specifically, let's touch upon the following issues:

- the difficulty for women to regain their status and pass it on to their children and grandchildren, compared to the men in their community
- the ever-increasing number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls
- the high prevalence of domestic and family violence on and off reserve
- the low rate of employment and remuneration
- the impacts of climate change on health and food security, for which women are responsible
- lack of access to health care and education
- lack of respect for customs and language essential to the transmission of culture within the various communities

Discriminatory and even vexatious services

More than anything else, health and its services are at the heart of the needs and demands of all women, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, as emphasized by QNW and Afeas. When it comes to health services, it is women who are primarily affected because they are the ones who accompany children, Elders and their spouses to be treated. They are the first line, the ones who take care of health in their daily actions, detect

problems, provide treatment or seek appropriate services. They are the link between all parties involved, families, communities and health and social services. Unfortunately, these women, more specifically Indigenous women, are too often betrayed by these institutions that MUST provide them with the care and services necessary to ensure their health and that of their family members.

The cruel, preventable death of Joyce Echaquan has dramatically shown us the systemic racism and discrimination that prevails within the Quebec health care system. The [report of the coroner's inquiry](#), Me Gehane Kamel, showed that "the racism and prejudice that Ms. Echaquan faced certainly contributed to her death." This is why, since the fall of 2020, [QNW](#) and [Afeas](#) have been calling on the Quebec government to adopt the [JOYCE PRINCIPLE](#) to establish health care and services without discrimination towards Indigenous communities.

Another glaring example of the treatment of too many First Nations women over the decades is the [practice of forced sterilization](#). The last known forced sterilization was in 2019, yet many remain undocumented. Something that makes no sense at a time when free and informed consent is one of the essential basic criteria for any intervention in medicine.

To rebuild the connections, let's listen to them!

While the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation is a step towards building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, the groundwork must be laid by initiatives at various levels in Indigenous communities across Quebec and Canada.

Afeas President, Mrs. Lise Courteau, says that: *"Afeas and QNW are taking advantage of this day to call upon the different levels of government, the institutions that depend on them, as well as civil society and each and every one of us to act together quickly to put an end to this discrimination. Together, we owe it to ourselves to recognize it, to assert the rights of Indigenous women and girls and to ensure that they can live in safety and respect like any other citizen."*

Thus, in order for Indigenous women and girls to obtain the same rights as all other women in Quebec and Canada, we must listen to them and put into action the changes they suggest.

"On this International Women's Rights Day, Quebec Native Women is delighted to be partnering with the Association féministe d'éducation et d'action sociale. The joint mobilization of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women is essential for our demands to have a greater impact. Together, we can fight against systemic racism and discrimination", adds Ms. Marjolaine Étienne, QNW President.

Source: Afeas

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