



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

## **OPEN LETTER FROM QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN'S PRESIDENT**

### **PIERRE DUFOUR: IT IS HIGH TIME TO FINALLY RECOGNIZE SYSTEMIC RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION IN QUEBEC**

Kahnawake, May 29, 2023

Last December, on behalf of the First Nations women and girls across Quebec that Quebec Native Women (QNW) represents, I spoke at the National Assembly, when a petition was tabled with 4,000 signatures calling on François Legault's government to recognize the existence of systemic racism and discrimination in Quebec and to adopt Joyce's Principle.

On May 16, I learned that the CAQ MNA, Mr. Pierre Dufour, for the riding of Abitibi-Est, made contemptuous remarks about Aboriginal women during a municipal council meeting of the City of Val-d'Or concerning the homelessness issues that are rampant in the heart of this city. He said that the *Enquête* report on the abuse of Indigenous women by the Sûreté du Québec police officers was "full of lies" and that police officers were still suffering from the effects of the report and the Viens Commission because the municipality "did not defend police officers".

These facts illustrate, once again, the need to recognize systemic racism and discrimination, as have all previous reports and inquiries on Indigenous women and girls in Quebec, such as the Viens Commission, the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse du Québec, the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the report on imposed sterilizations.

The hurtful and offensive comments made by MNA Pierre Dufour are completely unacceptable and unacceptable to all Indigenous women and girls in Quebec. This "emotional" reaction, as he describes it, is rather an exacerbated expression of the systemic racism and discrimination that is alive and well at all levels of society.

Mr. Dufour should know that Indigenous women are often placed in difficult, even violent, socio-economic situations despite their willingness not to be caught in such situations. While some of them had the immense courage, in 2015, to denounce the abuses they suffered, his comments call into question their testimony and their integrity.

This "emotional outburst" has greatly undermined the hard work of QNW and so many other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations in building a solid relationship of trust with Indigenous women that allows them to find the courage to denounce such situations of violence.

Unfortunately, it was only a matter of time before such a situation occurred. These events occur when authority figures turn a blind eye to the problem and legitimize racist and discriminatory actions and words that consequently spread everywhere.

From this point on, the trust between Quebec Indigenous women and MNA Pierre Dufour has been broken. It will take a long time to rebuild trust with Indigenous women and it will require much more than a simple apology on his part.

Mr. Dufour's words must provoke a real examination of conscience on both an individual and government level when one of his representatives goes against the government's efforts for reconciliation. These words are causing collateral damage, not only to the Indigenous women of Val-d'Or, but also to other women from different nations in Quebec.

Our organization must above all ensure the protection of Indigenous women. I therefore reiterate the question I addressed to Minister Ian Lafrenière and Premier François Legault when we submitted our petition last December:

"What are you waiting for to listen to us and really be our allies?"

Our call for the recognition of systemic racism and discrimination and the adoption of Joyce's Principle still stands. Let's work together, once and for all, on the real source of the problem.

Marjolaine Étienne  
President of Quebec Native Women