



# NOVA SCOTIA NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

29 May 2017

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## VIA EMAIL ONLY

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, Minister Bennett and Minister Wilson-Raybould:

### **RE: *Bill S-3* and Eliminating Gender Inequality in *Indian Act* Registration**

We have been following the hearings at the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples in regards to *Bill S-3* and the issue of ongoing gender discrimination in the *Indian Act's* registration provisions. We echo the concerns raised by the witnesses who testified to date, that the original bill did not address all remaining gender discrimination as promised by Minister Bennett. When we subsequently learned that the Senate Committee amended the bill to once and for all address the long-standing discrimination against Indigenous women and our descendants; we were very encouraged. We are writing to you today to ask that you support the Senate Committee's amendment.

I write to you on behalf of the Eastern Door Indigenous Women's Association, which is comprised of the Atlantic provincial Indigenous women's organizations. The Eastern Door

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Indigenous Women's Association was formed in September 2016 to bring a unified Atlantic voice to the range of issues affecting Indigenous women, their families and communities.

Our members acknowledge the long, hard road of Mary Two-Axe Early, Jeannette Corbiere-Lavell, Yvonne Bedard, Sandra Lovelace-Nicholas, Sharon McIvor, Lynn Gehl and many other Indigenous women who have spent decades fighting for equality for Indigenous women and their descendants. The fight for equality should have ended with the *Bill of Rights*, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, *Constitution Act, 1982*, and the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. There is simply no good reason for Indigenous women and their children to still be fighting for a basic human right enjoyed by Canadians. This is especially true given that gender discrimination in the *Indian Act* is one of the root causes of murdered and missing Indigenous women.

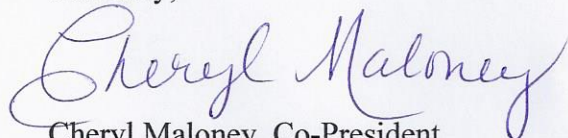
We know that the *Indian Act* is paternalistic and outdated legislation rooted in colonization and the goal of assimilating Indians. We also know that the *Indian Act* likely will not survive the many court challenges against its discriminatory registration, membership and governance provisions. Our path forward is one based on Nationhood and self-determination – a path where our sovereign Nations determine our own citizenship. However, we also recognize that for every day that the *Indian Act* continues, it is absolutely imperative that all remnants of gender discrimination be eliminated.

To this end, we are in complete agreement with the amendment referred to as “6(1)(a) all the way” which makes all Indigenous women and their descendants born prior to April 17, 1985 equal in status with all Indigenous men and their descendants born prior to April 17, 1985. It also eliminates the offensive and discriminatory hierarchy between 6(1)(a) and 6(1)(c) Indians. While this can't bring back our lost loved ones, nor undo all of the irreparable harms that exclusion from registration has caused, it is the least that can be done to address one of the most harmful acts of colonization: the targeting of our women for assimilation.

Prime Minister Trudeau; if you truly are a feminist Prime Minister, who sincerely means that there is no relationship more important than the one with Indigenous peoples; and you want the path forward to be based on Nation-to-Nation relations, then you must ensure that Indigenous women and our descendants are included in our Nations.

We urge you to remind your Cabinet members that the days of consulting on gender equality are over. All federal laws must be *Charter* compliant – and this includes *Bill S-3*. We urge you to support the “6(1)(a) all the way” amendment to *Bill S-3*.

Sincerely;



Cheryl Maloney, Co-President  
Eastern Door Indigenous Women's Association

c.c.

Senator Lillian Dyck, Chair  
Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples