

FIRST NATIONS WOMEN LEADERS DEMAND AN END TO INDIAN ACT SEX DISCRIMINATION BEFORE THE ELECTION, April 9, 2019

Ottawa, April 9th - "The sex discrimination in the Indian Act must be eliminated before the election is called," said Sharon McIvor, who filed a successful petition with the UN Human Rights Committee, challenging the sex discrimination. "First Nations women and their descendants still do not have the same right to Indian status and to transmission of status as their male counterparts. I do not have the same full Indian status as my brother, and that is only because I am a woman. This discrimination is a disgrace to Canada, and the Government of Canada knows it has to end."

Today in Ottawa First Nations rights advocates, Sharon McIvor, Dr. Pamela Palmater, and Jeannette Corbiere Lavell joined with Francyne Joe, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), Dawn Lavell Harvard, President of the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) and Viviane Michel, President of the Quebec Native Women's Association (QNW) and with Senator Lillian Dyck, to call on the Government to end the discrimination before the election. They also released an open letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, and Ministers Bennett, Lametti, and Monsef, signed by over 600 organizations and individuals, calling for an end to the discrimination.

Because of the insistence of the Senate of Canada, the latest amendment to the Indian Act, Bill S-3, includes provisions that would eliminate the core sex discrimination, but these provisions are not in force. They can be brought into force by Order-in-Council, that is, by a Cabinet decision, any Tuesday. "We are calling on the Government of Canada to do this, now, before the election," said Senator Lillian Dyck. "The Senate of Canada unanimously supports this. The discrimination must end."

Francyne Joe, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada, said, "First Nations women have waited and waited for it to be our turn, for our lives and concerns to be important enough to grab the attention of Government. The Government must show their concern for us, especially before the election. Stop our treatment as second-class human beings, just let us be equal in law."

"We want the immediate implementation of the United Nations Human Rights Committee's ruling on Sharon McIvor's petition," said Dr. Pamela Palmater. "The UN Committee ruled on January 11, 2019 that the sex discrimination in the Indian Act violates the rights of First Nations women to the equal protection of the law and to the equal enjoyment of Indigenous culture. These rights are guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," said Dr. Palmater. "They are also guaranteed by UNDRIP. We recall Prime Minister Trudeau's words to the UN General Assembly in

September 2017. He said 'the world expects Canada to adhere strictly to international human rights standards, including UNDRIP, and that's what we expect of ourselves too.' That's what First Nations women expect of Prime Minister Trudeau now."

"This sex discrimination has done terrible harm to First Nations women, their children and their communities over decades," said Dawn Lavell Harvard. "Because my mother, Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, lost her Indian status by marrying out, I have watched this damage through my own life. Women have been tossed out of their communities, from their places, languages, and cultures, and families are torn apart. Women have been deemed to be lesser parents, unable to pass on status in the way men can, and branded as traitors for 'marrying out'. Communities themselves are forced to discriminate against

their own people because they are only provided with financial transfers to support those with status. Surely it is time to begin to heal this harm. That can only begin by finally entitling First Nations women to the same status as their male counterparts."

"Soon the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls will release its report" said Viviane Michel. "The Government of Canada needs to respond to their report quickly to show us that Indigenous women are not second class, not disposable, and to demonstrate that the Government understands that treating Indigenous women as lesser human beings, in law, has deadly results. Both the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights have found, in their investigations of murders and disappearances in Canada, that Indian Act sex discrimination is a root cause of the violence. One thing the Government of Canada can do immediately to respond to the crisis of murders and disappearances is to eliminate the discrimination from the Indian Act."

"I have been fighting this sex discrimination for fifty years now," said Jeannette Corbiere Lavell. "Before I join my ancestors, I think I should have equal Indian status with Indian men. I stand for justice for First Nations women now."

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Contact information:

Sharon McIvor: [250-378-7479](tel:250-378-7479)/bearclaw@shaw.ca;

Pamela Palmater: ppalmater@politics.ryerson.ca;

Dawn Lavell Harvard: contact Andre Morriseau, Communications Manager, 647-970-7661/amorrisseau@onwa.ca;

Francyne Joe: contact Director of Communications, Lucy Juneau, 343-997-3756, ljuneau@nwac.ca,

Jeannette Corbiere Lavell: lavelljeannette@gmail.com

Senator Lillian Dyck: contact Nicholas1.Salahor@sen.parl.gc.ca

613-995-4318 (office) 613-761-0600 (cell)

Shelagh Day (FAFIA): 604-872-0750/shelagh.day@gmail.com For further information, see: <http://fafia-afai.org/en/solidarity-campaign/#tab-3>