

**Written Statement to the UN Human Rights Council, and its session on Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples (A/HRC/50/48) – “Call for the immediate action to protect Indigenous people’s rights in Canada, specifically women and girls.”**

Fiftieth Session

13 June – 8 July 2022 Agenda items 2 and 3

Women’s Federation for World Peace International commends the work of the Human Rights Council on the rights of Indigenous peoples. Despite the progress, we find an issue of violence against Indigenous women in Canada, which has further exasperated during the pandemic very alarming. We welcome the important work done during the annual half- day panel, held by the Human Rights Council on 28th September 2021, covering the rights of Indigenous peoples which discussed the issues faced by Indigenous peoples during the pandemic, and the specific focus on the rights to participation. Also, we commend Canada and various United Nations agencies and entities for their efforts in helping Indigenous communities recover from the pandemic. However, we seek to highlight the negative consequences of the pandemic which elevates violence against Indigenous women very seriously. We appeal to you to continue to work directly with Indigenous women to enable their stories to be told and for them to become the agents of change. We strongly appeal for the security of Indigenous women, and their right to be free from any form of discrimination against their race or their gender. Indigenous women are still facing violence at a systematic rate so action made today by the council could break this cycle.

It is crucial to recognise that the pandemic has had a devastating effect on Indigenous communities increasing rates of domestic abuse. The Native Women’s Association of Canada found that in May 2020, 17% of Indigenous women experienced violence in the past three months, compared to 10% reporting violence from their spouse over the past five years, since 2014. We can see how the pandemic has increased the violence faced by Indigenous women and the continuing effects of Canada’s colonial past. Colonialism has created an intergenerational

trauma in Indigenous communities including barriers that prevent Indigenous women from seeking help post violent or traumatic experiences, which still prevails.

Indigenous peoples in Canada have systematically faced the effects of years of economic marginalisation and deteriorating socio-economic conditions. This includes poverty and homelessness, which has made women more vulnerable, especially to violence. The pandemic has exacerbated these pre-existing socio-economic inequalities and contributed to Indigenous women being at a higher risk of Covid-19 infection. Lifting these women out of dire socio-economic conditions is central to ensure their protection. We commend the panel for highlighting this increase by the pandemic of challenges faced by Indigenous peoples such as poverty, access to health, remote educational opportunities, food insecurity and discrimination. However, it is important to recognise the specific impact on Indigenous women and girls.

Gender plays a very important role in the experiences of Indigenous discrimination in Canada. Some important points were made by the panellist Ms. Megan Davis, Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, during the panel discussion. We commend Ms. Davis noting in the initial report the failures that have occurred in legal systems to help prevent violence against Indigenous women even before the pandemic. Also, how she recalls article 22 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which she notes affirms the duty of the state to take measures to

ensure that Indigenous women enjoy full protection, and guarantees, against all forms of violence and discrimination. We appeal to the council to work with the Canadian government to help enable the protection of Indigenous women and girls, especially during the pandemic.

Indigenous women are the hope for the future. Indigenous women must be recognised as agents of change and as key experts, advocates, and leaders in response to the pandemic. Therefore, it is important to involve Indigenous women in governance and decision making, both alongside the Canadian government and the international community.

We commend the media for having had a role to play in bringing attention to the cases of violence to spread awareness to the Canadian population. However, many of the experiences of violence by Indigenous women are often left out in media reports. Therefore, the media still has an important part to playing in continuing to highlight this gender-based violence.

We applaud the work that has been done in tackling the violence against Indigenous women however we urge for more steps to be taken. Even today Indigenous women are going missing with what happened to them unknown by their families and communities, therefore it is clear that disappearances are still prevalent in Canadian society. Additionally, it is evident that the pandemic has brought new challenges in ensuring the safety of Indigenous women. The universal access to security is essential in ensuring the prosperity of Indigenous women and protecting them from various forms of gender-based violence.

With all of this in mind, we strongly urge the consideration of the following recommendations for the UN Human Rights Council:

1.

Continual collaboration: Whilst important steps are being made by various NGO's and the Canadian government to help tackle this issue, it is important for the Human Rights Council and the international community to provide continual support. Countries still facing the aftermath of Colonialism must work together to help end this cycle of violence.

2.

Protection during the Pandemic: The Human Rights Council to support and urge for more funding by the Canadian government into safe housing and emergency shelters for Indigenous women and their families who have become victims of domestic violence. Additionally, further pandemic-response funding to tackle the health issues faced by Indigenous women which have been created or made worse by the pandemic.

3. The elevation of Indigenous women's voices: A UN led research project to be carried out by various leading Indigenous women in Canada who are working in various organisations seeking to tackle this violence. Through this report, the specific experiences of Indigenous women during the pandemic can be highlighted. This would involve collating data on how the pandemic has increased violence. Additionally, this report would be used to provide their own recommendations for the UN and for the Canadian government.

4.

Prioritisation of Indigenous women and girls: Whilst recognising the discrimination faced by Indigenous communities on a whole we urge for the specific focus on Indigenous women and girls in the continual work carried out by the Canadian government and the UN.

5.

Increase participation of Indigenous people, specifically women: We urge the council and the Canadian government to support Indigenous women experts, advocates and leaders as agents of change. These women and their organisations should also be invited to the table to help develop a long-term COVID-19 recovery plan.

6.

Creation of educational materials: Funding For The Creation Educational Materials, lectures, and workshops to educate the people of various states such as Canada and Australia on Indigenous culture and history. We recommend for this to be facilitated by various NGO's, specifically those ran by Indigenous women.

7.

The role of the media: It is important for the media to continue to highlight the cases of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada. Additionally, for the media to bring attention to the important work done by the Canadian government, NGOs, and the international community.