

NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

Oral Submission

from Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada,
Saturviit Inuit Women's Association,
Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre,
AnânauKatiget Tumingit Regional Inuit Women's Association
Manitoba Inuit Association

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Ullaasakkut, good morning.

[In Inuktitut]

Thank you, Commissioners, for welcoming us here today.

I will start by acknowledging the Elders who are here, the families and loved ones of those who are missing or who have been murdered, and any young people who are also here.

I also thank the representatives from other Indigenous women's advocacy groups for sharing their findings and recommendations, and for their commitment to bettering the lives of Indigenous women and girls.

[In English]

I am going to start our presentation with a short video by Skye Uvliq Cory who is from Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, and I ask the technicians to play this video at this time.

Before and during the work of the Inquiry, Pauktuutit, Saturviit Inuit Women's Organization, and Manitoba Inuit Association held meetings about the crisis of violence against Inuit women. During these gatherings, we remembered those who we have lost by violence by lighting pink

candles. This has become an important symbol for the murdered and missing. Representatives from our standing partners are here with me,

- Elder Sarah Ponniuk representing AnânuKatiget Tumingit Regional Inuit Women's Association, Goose Bay, Labrador Nunatsiavut;
- Elder Jeannie Okalik representing the Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre; and
- Jeannie Nayoumealuk of Saturviit Inuit Women's Association.
- We also acknowledge Rachel Dutton of the Manitoba Inuit Association who is unfortunately not able to be here with us today.

Several of Pauktuutit's Board members are here:

- Anita Pokiak who represents Western Arctic, and the aunt of the young woman who made the video we just watched,
- Parniga Akeeagok who represents Iqaluit; and
- Martha Flaherty who represents urban Inuit.

We'll continue our presentation by lighting these candles.

As you know, this submission is being made by a group of five Inuit women's organizations. I am honoured to be making this oral submission on behalf of Pauktuutit, Saturviit Inuit Women's Association, Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre, AnânuKatiget Tumingit Regional Inuit Women's Association, and the Manitoba Inuit Association.

Our submission is about the victims and the families of missing and murdered Inuit women. But before talking about what we heard from the families at community hearings and statement gatherings, I want to say that some Inuit who wanted to be heard did not get a chance to speak. There are a few reasons for this, but we want to remind the Commissioners that we strongly advised that the Inquiry visit at least one community in each of the four Inuit regions.

Also, I thank the National Family Advisory Council for their advice and for ensuring that families were heard. And I also thank our legal counsel Beth Symes – who has been with us from the beginning of the Inquiry – for giving so much more than we asked for. She listened carefully during community hearings and was a big part of writing our recommendations.

The story from each family is unique. But by looking at the stories overall, there are many common threads.

- Abusers are often survivors of childhood trauma – physical abuse, sexual abuse, and witnessing domestic abuse and addictions within their homes.
- Several abusers were already known for being dangerous or had already been convicted of violent crimes.
- Inuit women had no shelter to go to for help, or to escape escalating domestic violence.

- Inuit women who are in danger don't know their options or rights.
- Inuit women must be able to trust police before they will report violence.

There is a fear or reluctance to reporting domestic violence because:

- living in a small community makes it harder;
- women fear that their children will be taken away into care;
- victims did not talk about escalating abuse because of fear or shame,
- women feared their abuser; and
- things like protective orders are 'just pieces of paper.'
- Families talked about suicide – by the women who were abused, their abuser, or their surviving family members.
- Attempts to find protection by the woman in danger and by their families failed because of poor or slow police services, a lack of shelters, and other reasons.

Some families talked about how they found out that their daughter, sister, or mother had been killed in ways that were cruel and traumatizing. Families have to be the first to know what *has* happened and what *is* happening. And they have to be told the whole truth. Some loved ones found out through the news. The media shouldn't know more than the families.

Healing is needed for us to tackle things like child abuse, addiction, suicide, poverty, mental health, and violence. If people don't heal from trauma like physical and sexual abuse in childhood, violence and fear continues and frequently repeats over generations. Several abusers were victims of abuse themselves and this reinforces that Inuit-specific healing programs for men and boys are desperately needed for Inuit women and girls to be safe.

Our recommendations began from what we heard from families. Despite how hard it was emotionally, the lack of long-term supports, the lengthy travel and the financial costs for some and the other barriers people faced, families came forward to tell their stories. We know that it was hard for them and for those who wished to speak but were unable to. We know that the process was difficult for families, and we want you to know that we heard you and we tried to represent you the best we could. We also have a message for all Inuit who have *been* or who *are* being abused physically, sexually, or emotionally – you are not to blame.

Before I talk about our recommendations, I want you to know that we respect our First Nations and Métis friends. We share concerns about the safety of Indigenous women and girls and this includes LGBTQ2S people. When we speak about Inuit women and girls, we are not lessening the truths, experiences, or needs of First Nation and Métis. I think they will agree with us that culturally-specific solutions are needed and have the best outcomes.

Our written submission includes seven recommendations. I will not explain all of them today but will talk about them in general. They will be put on our website so people can read them. Our recommendations will come as no surprise to you. Inuit have known for a long time what the issues are and what needs to be done. Our communities cannot wait any longer for this knowledge and research to become action.

Recommendation 1: Counting Inuit

Data collection is important because governments use it to decide how and where to spend money on education, housing, health care and social services. We want all levels of government to immediately collect data about Inuit separately from Métis and First Nations and count Inuit in urban centres accurately. Inuit are getting 'lost' in the much larger number of First Nations people and this means we do not get the services we need.

Recommendation 2: All Inuit Women and Girls Have the Right to Feel and Be Safe

Part of this means that family violence should not continue to be hidden and not talked about because of embarrassment or shame. Inuit women and girls – *and men and boys* – should be encouraged to talk about family violence and get counselling.

Violence and sexual abuse must not become normalized as part of Inuit culture. Emphasis needs to be put on:

- preventing family violence;
- teaching about healthy relationships and parenting for all Inuit children and youth;
- Inuit-focused healing programs and services in Inuktitut in every community for people who were abused as children; and
- ending intergenerational trauma by having healing programming supported by the renewal of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and as recommended in your interim report.

Recommendation 3: The Root Causes of Inuit Family Violence Must be Addressed

This means:

- a realistic plan to end the housing crisis must be made and it must be put into action;
- quick and easy access to ongoing healing programs and services when they are needed;
- eliminating poverty;
- being able to get high-quality education, including a university in Inuit Nunangat so people who want to continue their education do not have to relocate to the south, and so things that are important to Inuit are taught and learned;
- ensuring meaningful work for everyone;
- every community having Inuit-specific health and addiction services; and
- having midwifery care in every community that uses the Inuit health model that was developed in Nunavik.

Recommendation 4: When Family Violence Happens

Research shows that Inuit women and girls in Inuit Nunangat and urban centres have the highest rates of violence in Canada. We are 14 times more likely to experience violence, and 10 times more likely to be sexually assaulted. More than 70 per cent of our 51 Inuit communities across Inuit Nunangat do not have a safe shelter for women and their children. This means many Inuit women and families have nowhere to escape violence and abuse. Travelling to another community to seek safety is not an option for most Inuit women. A plane ticket may cost thousands of dollars, which is out of reach for most, particularly in times of crisis. And for those who do flee, without proper supports they are vulnerable and can be exposed to additional safety risks.

The federal government only provides funding for safe shelters on reserves. Inuit communities are not reserves so Inuit women in the Arctic are disallowed from getting this funding. We recommend shelters or safe houses funded by Indigenous Services Canada open in every community where one is needed immediately. And that Inuit southern organizations be funded to provide Inuit-specific shelters or safe houses in urban centres like Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg, St. John's and Edmonton.

Radical changes to the criminal justice system are needed.

The police must have a relationship of mutual trust and respect with the community. RCMP officers often do not stay longer than two years. That means that the community has to restart building trust with new officers often.

We recommend that police services within Inuit Nunangat:

- focus on proactive or preventative policing instead of reacting to violence. Police must get involved before violence increases. This includes investigating when family members, neighbours or others report suspected or known abuse. They must send a message that violence is not tolerated.
- We also recommend that police reflect the diversity in the community and speak the language of the community.
- Also, strong incentives to encourage officers to stay for a minimum of five years should be created and used. This includes making any necessary changes to policies that define how long an officer is assigned, if needed.

And we recommend that police, crown attorneys, defence lawyers, court staff, justices of the peace and judges have to take Inuit-developed and Inuit-delivered cultural education. It is irresponsible to put someone with so much authority and responsibility in our communities without first sharing our strengths, family structures, beliefs, and history. They must also learn how widespread domestic violence may be within the community and how childhood abuse impacts individuals and families.

As mentioned earlier, emergency protective orders are seen as ‘only pieces of paper.’ This is not enough. They need to be enforced to make Inuit women and children safer.

For their safety and wellbeing, Inuit women and their children must not have to wait for justice. More court dates in each community are needed so that trials happen in a reasonable amount of time and so that criminal charges are not dismissed.

We recommend that the impacts of *Gladue* principles in sentencing be looked at. Abusers are being released into small communities after short sentences without healing programs. This means more assaults, and women and girls living in fear.

Recommendation 5: The Child Welfare System is Failing Inuit Children and their Families

The current system is not working, and it is harming Inuit children. We are anxious to learn the details about the very recently announced child welfare legislation that the Government of Canada will introduce in the New Year. We cannot just hope that child welfare services will protect Inuit children and youth. They must:

- enhance family and community unity;
- rethink child protection and what families need to keep their children; and
- ensure that Inuit children receive no less than the same standard of health care as any other child in Canada.

We also want all Inuit children to be placed with Inuit families in their communities – be it in Inuit Nunangat or the south – and that they stay connected to their extended family, their Inuit language and their culture.

The system must relocate children as little as possible and work to reduce Inuit child and youth suicides. It must include Inuit-specific programs to help children when they leave the system. And we need funding for Inuit organizations in the south to speak for Inuit children in provincial care.

Recommendation 6: Urban Inuit

Over 27% of Inuit live outside Inuit Nunangat and this number is growing. More Inuit women and girls in urban centres means we need more culturally-relevant services and representation in the south.

Inuit-specific services must be available to all Inuit living outside of Inuit Nunangat. Services that are made by, or for, First Nations people do not work and do not have meaning for us. We see provincial Inuit organizations being the voice of Inuit living in the south to ensure services exist and to create Inuit-to-government relationships. And that they be supported by provincial and territorial governments.

When Inuit from the North move south, it is a very big change and is often because they have to, not because they want to. They leave for different reasons. Some of this can be called forced relocation. Some leave because:

- they are fleeing violence and there isn't space at an emergency shelter or there is no shelter at all;
- there is simply no housing available;
- they can't get the education or health care they need; and
- because there isn't employment for them.

Also, issues Inuit women have in their communities do not stop because they move south. Economic, health or family problems and responsibilities continue and are made worse by the stress and hardship of leaving home.

Recommendation 7: Canada and the Provincial and Territorial Governments Must be Held Accountable to Implement These Recommendations

We are calling for federal, provincial and territorial governments to:

- have action plans for each of our recommendations within a year; and
- appoint and sufficiently fund an independent ombudsman to oversee and report annually on how all the recommendations are being implemented.

We ask the Inquiry to recommend to the Government of Canada that it meet its responsibilities and commitments, including the Prime Minister's commitments to gender equality for *all* women and girls in Canada. And to do it in culturally appropriate ways... to do it from a place of reconciliation.

For changes to work, they must be done by considering the whole, not just the pieces. Everything – housing, justice, poverty, education, food security, health – is connected. It must be done for the long-term health and safety of Inuit women and girls. And these changes must not be at risk because of changing political interests. Healthy families and healthy communities must be the goal.

The cycles of child abuse, partner violence and family dysfunction that contribute to violence towards Inuit women and girls must be broken. And to make that change happen *all* of us have more work to do. It doesn't end once the final report from this inquiry is released. We are offering our help. After the Government of Canada reviews the recommendations from us, other Inuit organizations, and the final report from this Inquiry, we want them to consult with Inuit to set out priorities and timeframes. We can help, and we welcome and encourage any chance to work with others to improve the lives of Inuit women and girls.

For many years, our organizations – Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, Saturviit Inuit Women's Organization, Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre, AnânuKatiget Tumingit Regional Inuit Women's Association and the Manitoba Inuit Association – have been listening to what Inuit women from

the Inuvialuit, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut, Nunavut regions, and those outside of Inuit Nunangat, have to say. That work will continue. Inuit women can count on us to support them... to represent them... to work for them... to advocate for them... And we will continue to work so that our knowledge, worldview and concerns are respected and protected.

When we think about missing and murdered women, we know that without services that make sense to Inuit, women and girls are at greater risk of sexual exploitation and violence. We will continue to repeat that Inuit-designed, Inuit-specific solutions are the answer. We already know current police and government methods are not working or not doing enough. The proof of this are the shocking rates of sexual abuse and rising rates of violence in Inuit communities versus the dropping crime rates in non-Inuit communities.

There have been successful community-based healing programs in Inuit Nunangat. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, before it was forced to close in 2014, funded innovative and successful programs for Inuit. And because of dedication, determination and resourcefulness, there are healing programs that are making a difference. Despite a lack of resources, they are finding a way to help Inuit and they can be looked at as models for other communities to adapt.

We have talked a lot about healing services. I'm going to now speak briefly about those who spoke to this inquiry. We heard from some people that they tried to access follow-up support services, but their calls were not returned. And we are telling you that supports and counselling must be available for them when they need it to prevent more trauma. That means support immediately after they've given their stories or years later.

To all levels and departments of government: we must get rid of barriers. We must work together quickly and not be slowed down by bureaucracy or politics. How many Inuit women and girls have been hurt during the term of this inquiry? How many more Inuit women and girls will be harmed and killed waiting for help to come? We are thinking about, and are concerned about, the women and girls who are and who will be in unsafe and sometimes life-threatening situations.

We know that not all the questions will be answered and that not all the solutions will be found because of this inquiry. And like many others, we will be closely watching the remaining work of this inquiry and the release of its final report. We will also hold government accountable for the work and change that must come after this inquiry ends.

The Inquiry has asked for Inuit advice, needs and recommendations. We ask you to think about the many failures that families spoke of and the resulting tragic outcomes. And to take the advice that has been given because it has come at a very, very high cost. It is now your responsibility to take that knowledge – as it has been given – and strongly direct government to make systemic changes now and for the long-term. We also ask that the data and information shared by organizations and institutions be fully studied and that research results be shared.

Home should be a place of safety... a place of love, and family, and refuge. But for so many years we've known that home is the most dangerous place for an Inuit woman and her children. The Inquiry has heard from families of the fear and violence our women faced in the past and live with now. This must change, and that means we must change.

Inuit are strong. We come from strong ancestors. We come from strong culture and have strong values. And some of our strength comes from always being able to adapt. Right now, we need to grow and change – to not be silent when an Inuit woman and her children are in danger... to live our belief that our children are loved and protected... and that the community comes together to care for one another.

'We' means everyone – individuals, communities, governments, institutions, and Canada. Inuit must speak up when they know a woman is being abused or threatened. We cannot be silent. The entire community is affected, and Inuit-specific education and prevention programs are the only things that work – and they are desperately needed now. Government and institutions must act to protect Inuit women and their children – including funding emergency shelters in all 51 communities in Inuit Nunangat, funding community-based healing programs, and funding affordable and healthy housing for Inuit in the North as well as urban centres.

The cycle of abuse and violence towards Inuit women and girls has got to stop. 'We' cannot wait any longer.

[Inuktitut]

Thank you for listening.