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OFIFC

Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres

The vision of the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Movement is to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people living in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to and participation in Canadian society and which respects Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness.

**Response to Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Regarding Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National
Operational Overview**

May 2014

Introduction

As one of the largest urban Aboriginal organizations in Ontario, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) would like to provide a response to the recent publication *Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview* made public by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) on May 16th, 2014. The report, long overdue and requested by Aboriginal organizations, communities members, and families for more than a decade, does not do justice to the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women, nor does it address other forms of violence that as a continuum, end with women going missing or being murdered. Further, the RCMP has not provided any concrete steps in moving forward to address the alarmingly high rates of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and the connectedness to other forms of violence that are experienced at higher rates by Aboriginal women than non-Aboriginal women. The report diverts blame rather than address real issues facing Aboriginal communities both within and outside of RCMP jurisdictions.

Inconsistencies in Data: Questions still Unanswered

The data provided in this report remains inconsistent throughout. The use of the General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization is a poor indicator of violence against Aboriginal women. Although the data provided does highlight that Aboriginal women are more likely to be a victim of a violent crime; more likely to be victimized multiple times throughout their lives; and more likely to be sexually violated, the GSS remains statistically inaccurate in measuring Aboriginal victimization. It remains inaccurate because of its data selection techniques. As highlighted within the report, the highest percentage per capita of Aboriginal people in Canada are within the territories and yet the GSS is a province only survey of victimization. The data contained within cannot accurately capture Aboriginal victimization nor accurately use statistic predictors of victimization as it excludes 5% of the total Aboriginal female population and only 6% of the Aboriginal population participated within the survey. The information contained within the survey cannot be used as a predictor of the number of Aboriginal female victims of violet crimes.

The data presented highlights risk factors, trends, location, age, social status, and even occupation, yet, the data does not present trends on solved rates of homicide. The data provided shows that cases of Aboriginal female victims of homicide take longer to solve than those of non-Aboriginal victims and that while non-Aboriginal female homicide is in decline, Aboriginal female homicide is steadily rising. There remains little data on the unsolved cases of Aboriginal female homicide within this report and more questions than answers to this gap in data remains. When were those homicides that have yet to

be solved, committed? What happens to the unsolved homicides now? Are policing jurisdictions continuing to examine these cases?

Lastly, the report does not include the ethnic background of the offender in the cases of Aboriginal female homicide. Although the report highlights that in many cases the victim was related to the offender, that does not indicate to whether or not the offender themselves is Aboriginal. This data would assist in providing a more satisfactory account of missing and murdered Aboriginal women within Canada.

RCMP Use of Data and the Lack of Meaningful Data

When the RCMP compiled this report, it appears that the use of data from all jurisdictions was employed to ensure that the rate of closure of cases of homicide involving Aboriginal women was similar to that of non-Aboriginal women. However, if one views the data provided, by the RCMPs' own admission, the rate of successfully closing homicide cases of Aboriginal female victims falls well below the national average and well below that of other police jurisdictions. Stated in the report, the RCMP delivered statistics to the UN Committee for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in September 2013. The RCMP has now publically stated that the statistics they provided CEDAW were only those cases within their jurisdiction. Therefore, in September 2013 there were 327 cases of homicide within the RCMPs jurisdiction where the victim was known to be Aboriginal. In the report, of the outstanding homicide cases to be solved, 68 of them under RCMP jurisdiction. Therefore the RCMP has 68 outstanding homicide cases of the 327 cases within their jurisdiction suggesting that the RCMP only has a 79% closure rate in cases of homicide involving Aboriginal females. The RCMP is closing far fewer cases involving Aboriginal female victims of homicide than other police jurisdictions and steps that the RCMP will take to remedy this have not been included within this report.

Missing from this report is any substantial or meaningful reporting on missing Aboriginal women. There is no data included as to the rates of Aboriginal women going missing in comparison to non-Aboriginal women. The report lacks any and all information concerning steps taken within police jurisdictions to locate missing Aboriginal women. The report further has no comparative data when it comes to missing Aboriginal women.

The lack of data involving missing Aboriginal women is appalling. Any meaningful indicator of the number of Aboriginal women who have gone missing that have been recovered during the time period that this study encompasses, 1980 – 2013, is lacking. Families are in search of answers of their missing loved ones. Some of those answers could have been incorporated in this report, including statistics on the number of

resolved cases, length of time police engage in locating missing Aboriginal women, next steps in addressing the high number of missing Aboriginal women, and an opportunity for policing jurisdictions to share wise practices when it comes to locating and resolving missing persons' cases.

Many more questions now remain unanswered as a result of this report when it comes to missing Aboriginal women. There is no data available on when and how someone is reported missing. There remains gaps in information concerning process and protocol for missing persons, specifically Aboriginal women, nor an understanding of the possible risk factors associated with becoming labelled as 'missing'. Given that over 60% of the cases of missing Aboriginal women are of unknown circumstances or circumstances where foul play is suspected, additional data is required to understand policing and institutional response in locating missing Aboriginal women. The data that has been provided by the RCMP is negligent.

Additionally, in order to understand fully the data concerning missing Aboriginal women, it needs to be broken down by province and jurisdiction. Given the revelation of the rise of domestic human trafficking in Canada by means of UNICEF Canada's study highlighting that Aboriginal women, girls, and young boys are most likely to be trafficked within Canada, a greater understanding of the possible interconnection between missing Aboriginal women and human trafficking is required.

OFIFC Position

The OFIFC sees value in this report with the identification of the risk factors associated with higher rates of Aboriginal female homicide within Canada. The risk factors provide the beginnings of a full picture of Aboriginal female victimization within Canada.

Aboriginal women are not only represented disproportionately in the rates of missing and murdered women, but also in domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual violence, and incest. The report alludes to the interconnectivity of all forms of violence by highlighting that Aboriginal female homicide is not isolated. The report states that Aboriginal women are more likely to be sexually violated immediately preceding their death and are more likely to have been assaulted prior to the assault that resulted in their death. This highlights a larger continuum of violence experienced by Aboriginal women at far higher rates than non-Aboriginal women.

All forms of violence must be seen within a continuum with the most extreme being murdered or going missing, but they are not isolated. The risk factors that have been identified are issues and concerns that the OFIFC have been raising for more than four

decades. The systemic oppression of Aboriginal peoples has resulted in lower levels of educational attainment, higher rates of mental health issues, higher rates of unemployment, higher rates of substance abuse, higher rates of justice involvement, and higher rates of victimization.

The risk factors identified are not new nor are they unique to the instance of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Rather, they are the result of systemic oppression that requires systemic change.

Conclusion: Vision for the Future

The OFIFC is hesitant but hopeful that the RCMP will continue to work on addressing the higher rates of missing and murdered Aboriginal women, including providing additional data and understanding around the profile of offenders, and a more thorough understanding of missing Aboriginal women within Canada. The OFIFC asks that the RCMP examine the possible links between missing Aboriginal women and human trafficking within Canada.

In closing, the OFIFC asks the RCMP to take a lead in addressing systemic issues that affect Aboriginal people and impact their overrepresentation in justice involvement and victimization.