



March 5, 2014

A Call to Action to Honor Loretta Saunders

Station 20 West

Saskatoon Saskatchewan

Speech by Senator Lillian Eva Quan Dyck

1. Acknowledgments and condolences

- Thank you all for being here tonight
- Thank you Elder Ethel Ahenakew for the opening prayer
- Thank you Mr John Noon for the memorial, honor and victory songs
- Our deepest sympathies are extended to the family and friends of Loretta Saunders.
- Loretta was a 26 yr old student at St Mary's University in Halifax
- She was writing an honors thesis on MMAW
- Most sadly she herself was made missing and murdered
- Her body was found last week after she had been missing for 2 weeks
- The roses are for Loretta; the baby's breath in the bouquet remind us that she was pregnant.

- Like many Aboriginal women, Loretta Saunders was trying to make a better life by going to university and she had plans to go to law school.
- Loretta's tragic circumstances were broadcast on CBC, CTV, APTN and in the national papers.
- She has become a nationally recognized face in the nearly 900 cases of MMAW
- Today - March 5th - her family has requested that Loretta and the other 900 MMAW not be forgotten and that we hold vigils across Canada.
- I think we all hope that Loretta's tragic death will galvanize all Canadians to demand that the federal government and in particular, Minister Leitch, Status of Women, agree to launch a national inquiry into the issue of MMAW

2. Context of the situation today - the proof that a national inquiry is needed

- Amnesty international, the Stolen Sisters report 2004 brought the issue of MMAW in Canada to the world stage
- 2005 the Native Women's Association of Canada, initiated the Sisters in Spirit work on MMAW
- 2005 our local group, Iskwewuk E-wichiwitochik, formed to help
- 2010 the federal government stopped funding Sisters in Spirit and told them not to use the Grandmother Moon logo
- Regardless many organizations continue to push for a national inquiry
- Regardless there is an increasing awareness of the problem of missing and murdered aboriginal women across Canada
- Unfortunately there still are increasing numbers who have been made missing and murdered or disappeared, and SK is a hot spot.
- In the fall of 2013, James Anaya the special rapporteur from the United Nations called upon Canada to hold a national inquiry
- In 2013, many political leaders joined the grassroots push for a national inquiry
- This includes the premiers of all the provinces and territories, the Federation of SK Indian Nations and the Assembly of First Nations
- So you could see how important this issue has become that our national leaders are calling for federal government action

- Yet the federal government continues to refuse to launch a national inquiry into the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women
- Instead we had a special parliamentary committee which is supposed to release its report tomorrow
- Despite the pressure from grassroots groups like IE and from political leaders within mainstream and aboriginal organizations, the federal government has refused to hold a national inquiry
- Despite more and more reports documenting the increased numbers of aboriginal women who go missing and murdered compared to non-aboriginal women the federal government has refused to launch a national inquiry
 - (for eg., Human Rights Watch in BC, Maryanne Pearce's PhD thesis, Loretta's thesis)
- Why, why has the federal government steadfastly refused to do so? Why have they painted themselves into a corner?
- From my perspective, it appears to be a deliberate denial, a deliberate blindness to the facts, a deliberate denial of Abor women's realities
- It is clear that aboriginal women are 4 to 5 times more likely to be victims of violence
- It is clear that Aboriginal women are 2 to 3 times more likely to be victims of homicide
- The report from the CHRC noted:
 - that Indigenous women face systemic racism in cities and feel they are victims of a double-standard.
 - “Collectively, they expressed distrust of police and judicial processes intended to protect all Canadians equally.”
 - One Indigenous woman told the roundtable: “Everything about me is violated, my identity, my culture, roots. Racism is embedded in the system.
 - Another Indigenous woman told the roundtable: “We don’t cry anymore...Nothing fazes us. We grow accustomed to racial discrimination.”
- What more proof is needed to show the Minister of SOW and the federal government that we have a real problem?

3. A different perspective - we have enough proof

- However, due to comments I heard last night from David Kirton, from CKOM radio - I now see the issue from a different perspective.

- He conjectured that the federal government may be protecting the RCMP.
- We have enough proof that a national inquiry is needed and the federal government can't deny it,
- So we have to ask:
 - what is the federal government afraid of?
 - what is it that they don't want Canadians to find out?
 - what are they trying to hide?
 - who is the federal government trying to protect? the RCMP? the SOW department? the Minister?
- AND just as importantly, we have to ask:
 - why are they enabling the further victimization of Aboriginal women and their families?

4. A renewed call to action for a national inquiry

- Thankfully the majority of Canadians no longer are indifferent to the plight of aboriginal women
- Yesterday the head of the Canadian Human Rights Commission again called upon the federal government to launch a national inquiry into the national tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women
- Their report tabled in parliament just a few months ago stated that :
 - the fact remains that there has been little concrete action so far.

5. A call for an all nation women's coalition

- This week we are celebrating International Women's Day
- It's time for all women - Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal- to stand together as sisters and respectfully together voice our reasonable demand that the Status of Women Minister, Kellie Leitch, launch a national inquiry into the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women
- Let us honor the memory and legacy of Loretta Saunders by calling upon all women's organizations to stand together to push the federal government and Minister Leitch to launch a national inquiry into MMAW.