

The Honourable Kellie Leitch, M.P.  
Minister Responsible for the Status of Women

Dear Minister Leitch,

The tragedy of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada is one that deeply concerns Canadians, and the Executive of the Canadian Anthropology Society (CASCA) shares that concern. There are as many as 800 well-documented cases, and likely others that have not yet been documented. There is a desperate need for a national public inquiry into the situation, and we are writing to you in support of the call by the Native Women's Association of Canada for just such an inquiry.

This is a tragedy that touches all Canadians, for it diminishes us as a nation and indicates that there are serious flaws in the way that our society deals with the indigenous peoples of this country, and with women, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The Government of Canada has indicated in the Speech from the Throne and in other statements that it is committed to doing something about the violence that Aboriginal and other women suffer in this country. Furthermore, the CASCA Executive is aware that the Government has taken policy measures intended to address the situation. However, it has become clear that these are not enough, and the recent, tragic death of Loretta Saunders sadly illustrates this point.

We call upon the Government to act now to institute a public inquiry into the deaths of Aboriginal women to address the ongoing harm to women, their families and Canadian society. The time has come to identify the causes of this alarming trend, and to hold to account the institutions, policies and social actors that are responsible. The problem cannot be properly addressed without determining the root causes of this phenomenon and making them public. Only a public inquiry will allow Canadians, and particularly Aboriginal women and their families, to understand what is truly happening and provide ideas and solutions that make sense. An independent inquiry that is unbiased and inclusive will help to repair the damaged sense of trust that Aboriginal women feel towards those who are meant to protect them at all levels of government and in all public institutions.

Too many women have died or disappeared, too many families have been left to grieve without finding justice, and too many Canadians are unaware of the gravity and severity of the situation. As a pediatric surgeon, you have devoted yourself to helping those in need. As Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, you are in a position to lead the call for a public inquiry, and thereby leave a legacy of hope and potential progress towards helping those who are most in need of help. We urge you to speak to your cabinet colleagues and ensure that they understand that this is a national crisis that must be addressed publicly through an immediate, independent and unbiased inquiry.

On behalf of the Executive of the Canadian Anthropology Society, I thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Lorne Holyoak  
President, Canadian Anthropology Society