

July 11, 2017

Statement from Marilyn Poitras

My name is Marilyn Poitras and this is my truth. I am a Metis, born and raised in Saskatchewan. I am a mother, wife, daughter, sister, cousin, and friend. I have served as a Commissioner on the National Inquiry for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBTQ2S people since August 2016.

When I accepted the call to do this work, I believed the Commission was gifted with the opportunity to find a new path- one that supports healing and transformation of badly broken relationships in Canada, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

I had imagined the chance to put Indigenous process first; to seek out and rely on Indigenous laws and protocols. I wanted to travel to as many places as possible: rural, urban, and remote- holding meetings in community halls and kitchen tables. I was committed to speaking with people who are housed and who work in institutions, including prisons, jails, and transition houses.

I looked forward to being welcomed into communities and wanted to participate in traditional ceremonies and even feasts- because as Indigenous people that is who we are. And most importantly, I was honoured to work with dedicated families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, survivors of violence, and our Elders.

The message that I hear again and again is that we, as Indigenous Women, Girls, and LGBTQ2S people all deserve the same rights and opportunities that every other Canadian has access to. Based on your words and truths, I hear that our sisters (and brothers), including our children, are dying at alarming rates and going missing in violence. I've heard many of you say that a colonial approach is a deficit-based model of looking at Indigenous women, when they are in need, affected by poverty, racism, and marginalization.

I am here to say, this is not the whole picture of who we are. This is why it was so important to work with you to address this situation by looking at the systemic violence and its root causes.

There's a whole resiliency piece that no one is talking about. I am here to remind you, that your courage and dedication got us here. Your truths, experiences and decades of fighting are what got this National Inquiry.

After serving on this Commission for the past 10 months, I realized the vision I hold is shared very few within the National Inquiry- with the status quo colonial model of hearings is the path for most.

Because of this, I strongly feel the Terms of Reference that we were set out to achieve have not been met. This is why; it is with great regret and a heavy heart that I resign my position as Commissioner, effective July 15, 2017.

I hold my arms up to each of you and I honor the strength of all the people: families, survivors of violence, Elders, advocates, front line workers and Indigenous organizations who have come forward to date. Thank you to those of you who talked to us and offered us insights and teachings concerning your truths and experiences. I carry each of you in my heart. Always. While I will no longer be a part of the National Inquiry, I must say that your words have stayed with me. Your lives have impacted mine.

It is because of you that our stolen women, girls, and LGBTQ2S people are finally being honoured. I remind you that even though I am no longer with the National Inquiry, that each of you needs to continue to be the strong women warriors that you are. Continue speaking your truth because the rest of the country needs to know the truth and more importantly, to understand it too. We need to create a space, to heal together.

I believe part of the solution is to draw on our strengths and resiliency as Indigenous people- because if all we ever talk about is “the Indian problem”, then we’ll only ever be “the Indian problem.”

We’re so much more than that, each and every one of us. We are the original stewards of this land; we are the midwives, the caregivers, medicine keepers and so much more.

We are all here because of the women who came before us. We remain here because of the ones who stand with us now. And our future remains hopeful because the young girls and those yet to be born will be armed with the strength, knowledge and courage they were meant to carry with pride.