



FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU QUÉBEC INC.
QUEBEC NATIVE WOMEN INC.

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**PUBLIC INQUIRY COMMISSION: LISTENING, RECONCILIATION AND PROGRESS:
Motion to cease representing**

Kahnawake, October 23rd, 2017 – Québec Native Women announces that it will no longer be represented by its lawyers at the hearings of the *Public Inquiry Commission on relations between Indigenous Peoples and certain public services in Québec*, due to financial realities limiting the organization's access to legal expertise. QNW is extremely disappointed by the lack of continued support from the *Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones* (SAA) and other ministries we have contacted, and is very preoccupied by the impact that this decision can have the process.

Since the beginning of this public inquiry, QNW submitted funding requests to the Québec government. QNW has expressed the necessity of its presence all throughout the process. A few days before the beginning of the hearings this fall, SAA offered an initial amount to our organization, allowing us to be present during the first weeks of hearings. On October 20th, the minister submitted a new proposal, clearly insufficient to allow the organization to continue to be represented until the end of the inquiry.

QNW reiterates the importance of this commission and the necessity for indigenous witnesses who will testify regarding the racism and discrimination they've experienced within public institutions to note the presence of a representative indigenous organization within the inquiry. It is these testimonies that will allow the inquiry to depict a complete picture of systemic problems existing within institutions. As soon as the inquiry was announced, QNW quickly informed the government that it was its responsibility to ensure a balanced legal representation, in order to fulfill the mandate of the inquiry. We are deeply disappointed that this fundamental right has not been assured for indigenous organizations.

QNW has maintained that it would actively participate in the hearings and, despite the irrefutable experience of the organization in matters of justice and defence of indigenous women's rights, it is unrealistic to think that we can do so without adequate legal representation. To this end, our absence in future hearings will evidently create a deep imbalance of representation, in comparison to the Ministry of Justice and other instances that are legally represented. This imbalance could be perceived by many as an additional factor contributing to the systemic discrimination against indigenous people in public services, the present case being legal services.

"We have mobilized for the creation of this public inquiry. We want to participate in the hearings without any constraints. The government must be fully committed, and this also means ensuring that indigenous people are represented in the same way as public services. It is difficult to believe that the inquiry will fulfill its mandate without the assured presence of a legal expertise defending our rights", states Viviane Michel, president of QNW.

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Source :

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