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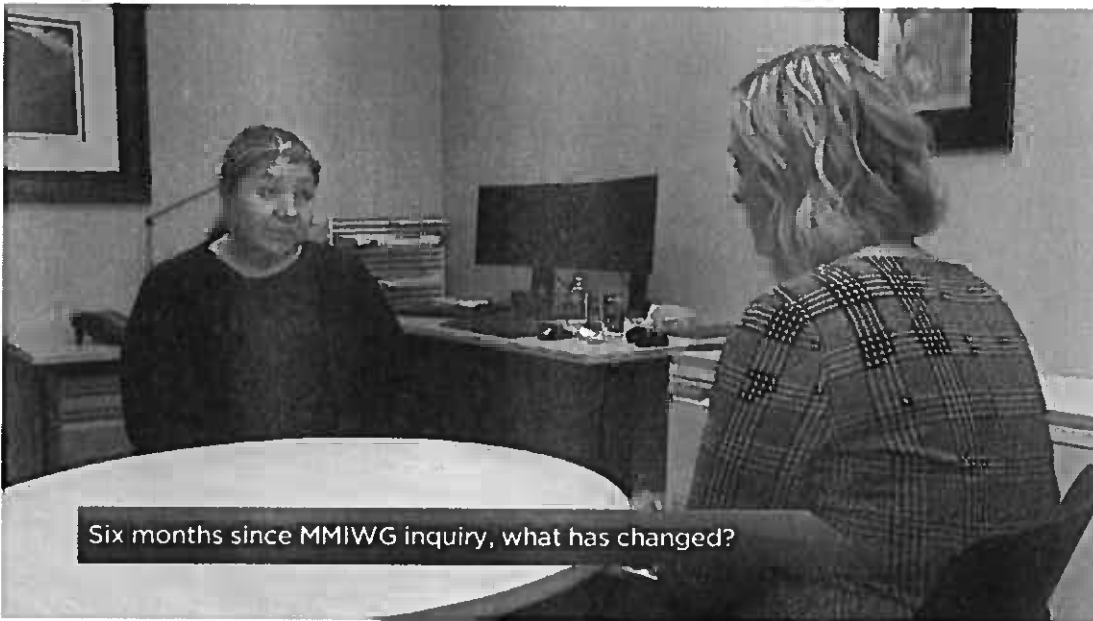
CANADA

## Stakes high for Indigenous women still waiting for action after MMIWG inquiry



BY MAHAM ABEDI AND MARYAM SHAH • GLOBAL NEWS

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Six months since MMIWG inquiry, what has changed?

— WATCH: Indigenous women still waiting for government action after MMIWG report



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Daleen Kay Bosse was a Cree woman from Onion Lake Cree Nation, Sask.

She was 25 years old, married and studying to become a teacher while raising her young daughter. She had grown up wanting to be a doctor or a

lawyer, but she ultimately picked teacher's college — just like her parents. You see their pride in a family slideshow.

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In photos, Bosse is the person perpetually smiling with her arms wrapped around friends and family. In headlines, Bosse is a missing woman and then a murdered woman. She's one of the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) in Canada, whose grieving loved ones have been calling for answers, and for justice.

When the long-awaited MMIWG inquiry report came out six months ago, it included 231 recommendations for Canada, meant to make Indigenous women and girls safe. It was also a chance for some families, like Bosse's, to feel heard.

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"The inquiry gave us a voice as family members," says Pauline Muskego, Bosse's mother. "So that our stories could be told."



— Mother of murdered Indigenous woman says government needs to act on MMIWG inquiry recommendations



based violence to the fore of the Canadian consciousness, putting women's rights and feminism under the microscope. Yet, 30 years later, to be a woman in Canada still means living with risk — to live knowing that, on average, a woman is killed every other day, that once a week a woman is murdered by her partner and that one in three women will experience some form of sexual violence over the course of their lives.

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That risk is even greater for Indigenous women, **Mother of murdered Indigenous woman says** reports — such as the one produced from the MMIWG inquiry — providing Canadians with clear roadmaps to address the structural forces, like colonialism, underpinning the violence. But last week, the federal government said it would be another six months until an action plan would be ready. That means families like Bosse's and thousands of other Indigenous people who've been offering and asking for solutions are left to wait — again.

Criticism is mounting for Canada to act faster.

"It's time for everyone to act," Muskego says.

"The time of action is now, the time of action was yesterday, it was before yesterday, it was long ago," says Luis Almagro, the secretary-general of the Organization of American States, who recently travelled to Indigenous communities across Canada.

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— Daleen Bosse, 25, was married with a young child and nearing completion of her teaching degree at the University of Saskatchewan when she was killed in May 2004. *Provided*

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For Indigenous women like Pamela Beebe from Kainai Nation in southern Alberta, the stakes are high.

Beebe grew up seeing and experiencing violence from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The decades of thick reports and subsequent recommendations unfulfilled means she has to teach her teenage daughter that she is more at risk as an Indigenous woman.

**“I have conversations with her about how to stay safe, how to be safe. What happens at a bus stop if a man approaches you? What happens if a vehicle approaches you and opens the door?”**

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Those conversations appear now in the poetry her young daughter writes, says Beebe, who works as an Indigenous cultural education specialist at the University of Calgary.

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“She’s young, she shouldn’t have to have this on her shoulders,” Beebe says. “I wish she didn’t even have to know about it, but she does.”

There is no one single solution to such a complex issue. Beebe knows that. And yet, she says, Canadians aren’t even having the right conversations at the right times.

“General Canadians are still learning what happened to our communities, so when the word genocide comes up, they don’t see it because it’s not visible,” Beebe says. “But the conversation has been ongoing in Indigenous communities.”

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**Canada needs a plan to ensure indigenous rights: O**

— Canada needs a plan to ensure indigenous rights: OAS secretary-general

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Beebe wishes Canadians had talked about genocide against Indigenous Peoples years ago so that the conversation could — then and now — focus on ending the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Genocide is one word in a report whose extensive recommendations include that the Criminal Code be amended to consider violence against Indigenous women and girls an aggravating factor at sentencing and that the government fund and support programs that teach Indigenous children and youth how to deal with threats and exploitation.

It also recommends that Canadian media decolonize coverage, which means taking measures such as addressing negative stereotypes of Indigenous people and increasing the number of Indigenous people in media.

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"Those 231 calls to action, they should have been addressed," Beebe says. "It shouldn't just be about whether we agree or don't agree that genocide happened. It should be, 'Where do we go from here?'"

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Almagro, the secretary-general whose organization represents 35 independent states of the Americas, has been pushing for six months for Canada to create a panel to look into the MMIWG inquiry report's finding that the country carried out genocide against Indigenous Peoples.

Canada's responses to the idea have been "evasive," he says. That's not acceptable, says Almagro, calling Canada's treatment of Indigenous women and girls worse than just a "double standard."

"They are not equal in any sense at all," he says. "Native women, they are below whatever standard of rights there is in the country. ... These are basic rights that are assured to most Canadians, so why are they not assured to the native people?"

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By the time the government's action plan comes out, a year will have passed since the report's release. Twenty-four years will have passed since the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples told Canada it needed to focus on the root causes of violence and address the perpetuation of stereotypes.

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The Liberal government still says it's "working to end the ongoing national tragedy of murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls and LGBTQ2S people."

While the government develops an action plan to implement the inquiry's recommendations, rates of violence against Indigenous women seem stuck at high levels. Indigenous women were five times more likely than other women to die a violent death, according to 1996 figures.

While homicide rates for non-Indigenous women have since gone down, a 2014 RCMP report revealed they did not decline for Indigenous women.

The actual rate could be even higher than anyone knows. Per the inquiry's investigation, "no one knows an exact number of missing and murdered" Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people because thousands of deaths have "likely gone unrecorded."

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Heightened rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls are not new. Nor are the attempts of resilient Indigenous women and girls trying to make their communities safer.

"Trying to grab the attention of policymakers and decision-makers has been around for a really long time," says Naomi Sayers, an Indigenous lawyer from Garden River First Nation in Ontario.

**READ MORE: [Action plan on missing, murdered Indigenous women inquiry to be released in June, says minister](#)**

Sayers would like to see the government take action sooner rather than later, but she won't hold her breath — especially since the government said it needed a full year after the report's release to come up with an action plan.

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"One year is too late," she says.

**"They were waiting for this report to come, they knew it was coming, and it's almost as if they're just doing more reports and there's more waiting."**

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Part of the problem, she says, is how little Canadians seem to question long-standing "policies and practices of long-standing institutions, like policing agencies and the court systems, and how they create that risk."

In that gap, Sayers says, there is a tendency to view Indigenous women and girls as "at risk, meaning they shoulder the responsibility of keeping themselves safe."



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### Throne Speech: Government committed to improvin

— Throne Speech: Government committed to improving relationship with First Nations

Indeed, it's troubling how Indigenous women are often portrayed "through this kind of criminal or victim paradigm," says Sarah Hunt, an assistant professor at the Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies and the department of geography at the University of British Columbia, who is Kwakwaka'wakw from the Kwagu'ł people of Tsaxjís.

"So often, in trying to talk about people's victimization and trying to talk about the violence, there is a removal of the important role of Indigenous women and families and communities in speaking up to the justice system, speaking up to power, creating change."

Muskego will keep speaking loudly for her late daughter, Daleen Kay Bosse.

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She remembers her daughter's kind heart and her laughter.

"She was described as wearing rose-coloured glasses," Muskego says.

**"She always saw the good in people. I want the public to see her as a person."**

TWEET THIS

—With files from Jasmine King and the Canadian Press

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