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Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget

Submitted By:

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak/Women of the Métis Nation

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List of Recommendations

Recommendation #1

That the government invest in distinctions-based transitional housing and shelter spaces for Métis women and their children fleeing violence, including an immediate \$20 million commitment to construct five (5) Métis Family Centres across the Métis Motherland to assist Métis women and children in greatest need of human safety and security.

Recommendation #2

That the government accelerate implementation of the 231 Calls for Justice outlined in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), as well as the 62 Calls for Miskotahâ as presented by the Métis Nation in Métis Perspectives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people by striking an independent oversight body or commission mandated to end this national tragedy, to address the ongoing lack of consultation and engagement on a distinctions basis with the Métis Nation women.

Recommendation #3

That government investments are made to recognize, respect and address the distinct health needs of Métis women, girls, gender-diverse Métis people and their families to ensure there is equal access to services related to Métis health and healing, including but not limited to issues relating to informed consent, forces/coerced sterilization, sexual and reproductive health, disabilities, equality in access to health and healing supports, mental health supports, and addictions treatment. 3

BODY OF SUBMISSION

Recommendation #1

That the government invest in distinctions-based transitional housing and shelter spaces for Métis women and their children fleeing violence, including an immediate \$20 million commitment to construct five (5) Métis Family Centres across the Métis Motherland to assist Métis women and children in greatest need of human safety and security.

Budget 2021 allocated funds to support the construction, repair, and operating costs of transitional housing and shelter spaces for women and children fleeing violence, and committed to expanding access to culturally relevant supports for Indigenous women and their children. With respect to Métis women specifically, Budget 2021 committed to supporting “new shelters and transition housing for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples across the country, including on reserve, in the North, and in urban areas.” (Government of Canada, Budget 2021).

As the global health crisis continues, it is more critical than ever for the federal government to make good on its shelter commitments to First Nations, Inuit, *and* Métis women and their families in urgent need of human safety and security – which is a basic, universal, human, and Indigenous right. Statistics Canada has noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous women and children are among some of the most vulnerable populations in Canada, as they are living with their abusers with little possibility of escape. “These unprecedented times are likely to have a considerable impact on victims needing to seek shelter and access victim services, as well as shelters needing to adapt their services.” (Study: Shelters for Victims of Abuse with Ties to Indigenous Communities or Organizations in Canada, 2017/2018”, Statistics Canada, July 22, 2020).

For many Métis women and their children during the COVID-19 pandemic, the directive to “shelter in place” equated to domestic violence, child abuse, injury, and death. Yet shelters specifically designed for Métis women and their children fleeing violence are non-existent. Even before the global health crisis, a 2013 Statistics Canada study noted that of the 593 shelters for abused women in Canada, 184 were located on reserve or served people living on reserve, while the remaining 409 shelters served Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations living off reserve. In terms of “culturally sensitive programming” for Indigenous women across the 593 shelters, Statistics Canada noted that “79% of shelters serving on-reserve populations, and 59% of shelters not serving on-reserve populations provided Aboriginal culturally sensitive services.” (Statistics Canada, “Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends”, February 24, 2013). However, the amount of Métis-specific culturally sensitive shelter programming in Canada remains negligible, and Métis women and their children find themselves lost between the two worlds of reserve-based shelter programming not available to them, and non-Indigenous shelter programming that offers no distinctions-based, culturally sensitive services that speak to Métis cultural approaches, values, and realities.

The result is that Métis women are often compelled to search for shelter services that are non-Indigenous or First Nations in focus. This denial of the distinct cultural differences and realities among First Nations, Inuit, *and* Métis women risks perpetuating ineffective programming and service responses. Therefore, in solidarity with and similar to Pauktutit Inuit Women of Canada’s recurring requests for distinctions-based shelters for Inuit women and their children fleeing violence, **Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak seeks an immediate federal commitment in the amount of \$20 million to construct five (5) Métis Family Centres across the Métis Motherland** (the Métis Nation Homeland) that would provide badly needed emergency shelter, childcare, 4

justice supports, and healing spaces, where the highest needs of Métis women and their families are identified.

Currently, work is underway by Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak to identify those communities across the Métis Motherland where Métis women's needs to escape violent victimization are greatest, to inform the location of each Métis Family Centre to ensure value-for-money and the greatest benefit to the largest number of Métis women and families in need.

Recommendation #2

That the government accelerate implementation of the 231 Calls for Justice outlined in the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and the 62 Calls for Miskotahâ (change) outlined in Métis Perspectives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, by striking an independent oversight body or commission mandated to end this national tragedy, in order to address the ongoing lack of consultation and engagement on a distinctions basis with the Women of the Métis Nation.

In Budget 2021, the government indicated its commitment to accelerate work on the National Action Plan in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls for Justice. On June 3, 2021, Canada's National Action Plan was released, which focused on the findings of the National Inquiry and examined the roots causes and forms of oppression which have contributed to the targeted, violent victimization of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ persons. However, in both the National Action Plan and the proposed National Implementation Plan (whose work is currently underway), insufficient consultation, inclusion, and co-development with the Women of the Métis Nation, on a distinctions basis, risks continuing to undermine this critical work.

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, through its 62 *Calls for Miskotahâ* (Change) as part of the National Inquiry process, and its *Weaving Miskotahâ* as part of the National Action Plan process, has consistently sought to infuse the dialogue and influence the direction of policy, programming, and service responses, through a Métis-specific, distinctions-based, gendered approach. Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak has shown through its interventions that federally-driven efforts at ending MMIWG are most effective if they support and uphold distinctions-based implementation and operationalization of tangible, grassroots measures already articulated or underway. The role of the federal government should be that of supporting existing distinctions-based solutions and providing an impartial mechanism outside of its own bureaucracy to ensure that the 231 Calls for Justice and the 62 Calls for Miskotahâ, and the distinctions-based efforts already championed by national, provincial, local and community Métis women's organizations, are brought to fruition. This cannot be accomplished unless the inconsistencies, exclusions and injustices embedded in the National Inquiry process, the National Action Plan process, and by all evidence to date, the National Implementation Plan process, are brought to light in an independent fashion.

For Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, it is critical that an independent oversight body or commission be established and mandated to receive complaints and compel the federal government to take concrete actions on commitments made to end the national tragedy of MMIWG. Dedicated funding on a distinctions basis should be committed to ensuring that national, regional, provincial, community and local Métis women's organizations are afforded place, space and voice to be directly involved in the co-design, co-development and co-implementation of this important oversight body. This includes the development of distinctions-, gender-, 5

and outcomes-based indicators of progress as defined by the Women of the Métis Nation for the Women of the Métis Nation.

Recommendation #3

That government investments are made to recognize, respect and address the distinct health needs of Métis women, girls, gender-diverse Métis people and their families to ensure there is equal access to services related to Métis health and healing, including but not limited to issues relating to informed consent, forces/coerced sterilization, sexual and reproductive health, disabilities, equality in access to health and healing supports, mental health supports, and addictions treatment.

Métis women and gender diverse people require Métis specific health services to ensure safety across the health care continuum. Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak identified the following Health and Wellness priority areas

- • Access to culturally competent and safe health care that is free from racism
- • Access to culturally competent and safe prevention and promotion initiatives such as self-administered pap test and HPV vaccinations
- • Recognize, respect, and address the distinct health needs of Métis women and girls and ensure there is equal access to services related to Métis health and healing, including but not limited to disability services, treatment for trauma, mental health services, addictions, and supportive recovery programs
- • Access to Métis-specific sexual and reproductive health care
- • Immediately implement measures to identify and close the gaps in healthcare outcomes between Métis women and other women in Canada

Holistic health and wellness must encompass Métis cultural identity. A whole of person culturally appropriate approach to physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health will build and support prosperity for the Métis women and gender-diverse people. Strengthening identity through Métis led specific health and wellness programming and services will ensure culturally appropriate and relevant approaches are used. Métis specific programming increases safety and encourages Métis women and gender-diverse people to come together to begin the healing process. Those who were disenfranchised and may be late to learning about their Métis identity, benefit from these cultural connections. Métis specific approaches must be supported to increase mental wellness and pride in identity as a unique Indigenous person.

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak seeks an immediate federal commitment in the amount of \$5 million annually to address the health care gaps of Métis women.