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Written statement* submitted by Network of Women's Non-governmental Organizations in the Islamic Republic of Iran, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 February 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Status of Indigenous Women in Canada

Women, constituting half of the population of any country, have always faced serious challenges in realizing their rights in various social, political, and managerial domains within society. Despite the insistence and pretense of Western countries towards gender equality, numerous instances of gender disparities are still observed in Western societies without defense. Essentially, women, in adhering to certain ideological and religious frameworks, as well as their own capabilities and talents in benefiting from equal opportunities compared to men in different countries, still feel serious damages, which can be found in their statements and memoirs. From a divine religious perspective, women have unique spiritual rights distinct from men that should not be perceived as limitations and differences compared to men. On the other hand, the acquisition and extraordinary growth of women's capabilities in social positions lead to the expansion and acceptance of their greater responsibilities in society, and it translates into competition with men in acquiring positions, despite gender differences. Unfortunately, in Western countries that always advocate for equal attention to women's rights compared to men, women still suffer from the denial of their rights, some aspects of which are referred to below in the context of Canada, which has currently turned into a battleground in the twenty-first century.

Discrimination against Indigenous Women in Canadian Society:

Unfortunately, the Canadian government, despite its endorsements and commitments to Indigenous peoples for creating a better living environment, still perpetuates discrimination against them, paving the way for mental distress such as depression and suicide, and increasing unemployment rates compared to non-Indigenous Canadians.

Indigenous women often become victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and servitude after leaving their families, a phenomenon known as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). The Native Women's Association of Canada mentioned in a report the killing or disappearance of over four thousand Indigenous women in the past 30 years. This situation primarily stems from the racist perceptions of non-Indigenous Canadians towards Indigenous people as uncivilized individuals responsible for these issues. Unfortunately, the lack of regulatory policies and support for Indigenous rights by the Canadian government significantly contributes to this matter. In circumstances where there are no international tools defined for supporting the rights of women belonging to national minorities, governments also decide exclusively with the help of media facilitators who propagate negative racial and gender ideologies regarding Indigenous women.

Currently, despite the end of slavery, exploitation, and prejudice in the world for many years, the situation of Indigenous women in Canada still differs greatly from the high standards of Western society.

Furthermore, violence against Indigenous women and girls by Canadian authorities is not considered significant, and there is no attention given to programs related to discrimination against Indigenous women. For decades from 1880 to 1990, authorities in the country took thousands of Indigenous children (especially girls) from such families and sent them to Catholic schools.

Discrimination against Indigenous people even continues in Canadian prisons in the form of violence and coercion against them. Numerous reports have been published regarding unfair treatment by guards towards prisoners or group assaults on an Indigenous prisoner in Quebec, Canada, in 2021. The number of women imprisoned in federal prisons has significantly increased over the past three decades, with nearly 50% of them being Indigenous women. Indigenous women spend more time in solitary confinement and face harsher conditions for parole.

Indigenous people make up 4% of the total population of Canada, but in terms of prisoners, it must be said that more than a quarter of all federal prisoners in Canada are Indigenous. A study showed that Indigenous people are 40% more likely to be fined while driving compared to white people by local police.

Evidence of Discrimination in Canadian Society:

- 160 women and girls were murdered in Canada in 2020. This figure shows an increasing trend compared to the previous year, 2019.
- 5 million women in Canada live in absolute poverty.
- The amount of female workforce layoffs is approximately 10 times higher than that of male workforce layoffs in Canada.
- The average income of employed women working full-time in Canada is about 8 cents less per dollar earned compared to men.

Murder and Violence against Indigenous Women:

Traditionally, in Indigenous communities, women have been responsible for childcare, homemaking, and providing food for family members, thus having limited influence in social roles or involvement in decision-making processes. One of the duties of women was preparing medicines from plants and tree roots, providing clothing, sewing, and tailoring clothes from animal hair and skins, and later using sewing machines.

Indigenous people in Canada make up about 5% of the total population of Canada, with Indigenous women constituting 51% of this population. Often, younger individuals migrate to larger cities in Canada in hopes of finding better jobs and escaping poverty, living alone or with their children. In a modern world that recognizes women formally, they are still deprived of some of their simplest rights.

Violence against women has become so widespread that December 6th in Canada, the day when 14 women aged 6 to 90 were killed by men at Polytechnique Montreal, is commemorated as a National Day of Remembrance and action against violence against women. However, the issue continues, and according to statistics from the Canadian Femicide Observatory, a woman is killed every 48 hours in this country. This crisis is worse for Indigenous people, as between 2009 and 2021, the rate of murder of Indigenous women and girls from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities was six times higher, and later, the rate of missing or murdered cases was 12 times higher than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Unfortunately, this has resulted in fewer serious charges against the perpetrators compared to non-Indigenous individuals.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has called this crisis a continuous genocide, and the issue has been recognized at the United Nations level. Accordingly, 63% of Indigenous women have experienced physical and sexual abuse, and 56% of Indigenous women have experienced physical assault. Ottawa has therefore initiated negotiations to establish a public alert system called Red Dress Alert for Indigenous women and missing girls.

Nevertheless, murders of women solely based on gender in Canada are on the rise, and a women's rights advocacy group has called for the declaration of a national emergency in this regard. Recently, more than 50 cities and regions across Ontario, including Toronto, Sudbury, Hamilton, and Kingston, have declared partner violence and gender-based violence as a widespread epidemic. Out of 1125 gender-related murders reported by the police between 2011 and 2021, two-thirds were committed by partners, and 28% were committed by a family member, with only 1% of the murders being committed by a stranger.

Indigenous Women as Victims of Sexual Assault:

According to Statistics Canada, six out of every ten Indigenous women in the country have experienced physical or sexual assault at some point in their lives, with 60% of the victims being under the age of 17. Unfortunately, out of every 100 cases of sexual assault, only 6 are reported to the police. Therefore, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls has called on the Canadian government to immediately repeal all remaining discriminatory provisions in the Indian Act.

Forced Sterilization of Indigenous Women:

Another organized crime committed by the Canadian government is the implementation of projects to forcibly sterilize Indigenous women with the aim of preventing them from having children. From the 1970s to the present, approximately 12,000 Indigenous women have been subjected to forced sterilization. This is despite Canada's overarching policies towards non-Indigenous populations, which encourage them to have children and even provide ongoing financial assistance to parents! The UN Committee Against Torture has also called for an investigation and accountability from the Canadian government in this regard. Matters have escalated to the point where the 2022 report from the Canadian Senate confirmed that forced sterilization of Indigenous women and girls in this country is still ongoing.

The Phenomenon of Homelessness among Women:

Women make up 27.3% of the total homeless population in Canada. Approximately 96% of homeless women have experienced some form of sexual assault, theft, humiliation, or threats, while about 75% of homeless women also struggle with disorders such as anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia. Women in Canada are generally more vulnerable to homelessness due to factors such as poverty, low wages, intimate partner violence, sexual abuse, substance abuse issues, mental and physical health challenges, and childcare responsibilities.

Widespread Violations of Indigenous Rights:

Indigenous leaders in Canada claim that the activities of Canadian mining companies in their territories, without government oversight, have led to environmental destruction and violations of their human rights. In this regard, they have protested and filed complaints to the government of Canada, demanding that it fulfill its promise to support Indigenous rights and environmental protection. This issue has led to greater unity among Indigenous peoples in Canada, resulting in Canada's failure to gain a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2027.
