

Each year on International Women's Day, I find myself thinking of the women in Canada who still don't have a voice, in spite of the progress our nation has made in gender equality. I think about the hundreds of missing and murdered aboriginal women, whose stories are so rarely told, and whose strife garners so little public attention.

I am encouraged that the theme that the Government of Canada has named for this year's Day is *Working Together: Engaging Men to End Violence against Women*.

The basic facts are shocking: indigenous women living in Canada are five times more likely to die a violent death than other women, according to a recent Statistics Canada study. Studies have also shown they are three and a half times more likely to experience violent victimization, and three times more likely to be victims of spousal violence than non-indigenous women.

Between 2000 and 2008, Indigenous women and girls represented approximately 10% of all female homicides in Canada, though they make up just 3% of the female population in Canada.

What is particularly tragic is that most of these cases involve young women and girls – more than half of the victims are under the age of 31, and 17% are girls under 18.

It is with a great deal of emotion that I am writing about this topic – both as a woman, and as a representative of the West. We know that the preponderance of these cases occur in Western provinces. A total of 16% of the over 600 missing and murdered aboriginal women come from my home, Alberta – a rate exceeded only in British Columbia, where 28% of the cases originate.

You will notice that I say "over 600", but do not cite an exact figure. The fact that the number cannot be verified with any certainty demonstrates exactly what is so shameful about this national crisis – we have not even been able to quantify the problem. We know that women are disappearing and are being murdered by the hundreds, but we have no idea exactly how many.

It is past time to get serious about addressing this.

The efforts of determined community members across the country are inspiring. But communities organizing to raise awareness and combat stereotypes are only half of the equation. The partnership of government is needed if we are to have any hope of addressing this crisis in a meaningful way. Government action brings resources, legitimacy, and ultimately, hopefully, real change.

We need a National Inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women, to develop comprehensive, action-oriented solutions.

On International Women's Day, and every day, I want to see this ongoing tragedy to occupy a much more significant space in the realm of our collective public awareness.

The Honourable Claudette Tardif
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