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## PUBLIC SAFETY

Missing and Murdered Aboriginal  
Women and Girls

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, March 25, 2014

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### PUBLIC SAFETY

#### MISSING AND MURDERED ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

**Hon. Claudette Tardif:** Mr. Leader of the Government in the Senate, as you know, we recently invited Canadians to submit questions they would like to ask the government. I would like to ask a question sent to us by Rowena Kirk, from Elliot Lake, Ontario. This is her question:

[*English*]

I cannot understand the ongoing Government's refusal to open a National Inquiry into our epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada. My question is:

How can we prove the Canadian government is not racially biased and prejudiced against Aboriginal women in their continued and determined refusal to address the shockingly high proportion of loss of so many Aboriginal women in Canada?

There is no adequate justification or explanation for denying a full National Inquiry into all aspects of our missing and murdered indigenous women.

Mrs. Rowena Kirk asks: "Why is the government rejecting appeals for a full National Inquiry?"

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Claude Carignan (Leader of the Government):** I would like to thank the honourable senator for her question and for being a voice for that individual. As I have already explained on behalf of the government, we continue to take meaningful action on the tragic issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.

For example, as part of our Action Plan 2014, we have committed an additional \$25 million over five years to continue efforts in this area. We have committed more than \$8 million over five years to create a DNA-based missing persons index, and we have passed more than 30 measures pertaining to justice and public safety, including stiffer sentences for murder, sexual assault and kidnapping.

We have created a national website for missing persons, developed community safety plans in partnership with Aboriginal communities and supported the development of public awareness materials. We also created a special committee, which studied the issue and produced a report containing 16 recommendations. I would invite those interested to consult the report and its recommendations, which include awareness campaigns, support for the victims' families, community support, police services, measures to curb violence against women and girls, other support measures and meaningful government action.

I would say that most of the recommendations begin as follows: "That the federal government continue strengthening the criminal justice system"; or "That the federal government maintain its commitment to develop... initiatives" on criminal justice matters and so forth.

I think this is a difficult and complex issue, one that calls for concrete action. That is what our government is doing and will continue to do.

**Senator Tardif:** The recommendations of the report you refer to provide a series of statements aimed at maintaining the status quo. As you know, the Native Women's Association of Canada was very disappointed in the final report of this committee. What is more, a dissenting report was written by NDP and Liberal members. Everyone is calling for a public inquiry, but the report makes no mention of one. Instead, the report mainly makes reference to existing government programs. This is what Claudette Dumont-Smith, Executive Director of the Native Women's Association of Canada, said about the report:

[*English*]

We continue to be, I find, treated as second-class citizens.... An aboriginal woman could be disposed of — and that's it, that's all.

There is no new action, just a continuation of what is in place. So what's that going to change, really?

[*Translation*]

Why does the government keep ignoring the general consensus that there should be a national inquiry?

**Senator Carignan:** Senator, I must disagree with you on the matter of status quo. Take for example recommendation 4 of the report, which reads as follows:

That the federal government implement a national DNA-based missing person's index.

That recommendation led us to include in the action plan, in the budget, the creation of this DNA-based missing person's index. It is an example among many that illustrates the concrete actions taken by the government and is far, as you say, from the status quo. We are taking the lead on this file.

**Senator Tardif:** Leader, Aboriginal women are three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be victims of violence. They also represent a disproportionate number of homicide victims. In addition, approximately 50 per cent of violent crimes against Aboriginal people are not prosecuted as compared to 24 per cent for the general population.

In light of these significant discrepancies, Ms. Kirk would like to know why you continue to refuse to set up a national inquiry.

**Senator Carignan:** As I said, we prefer to take concrete action on the ground that will have a direct impact. I mentioned a few examples earlier. I can also add to that list the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act, which gives women living on First Nations reserves the same real property rights as all Canadians, and access to emergency protection orders in violent situations. Unfortunately, the opposition parties voted against this legislation.