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Releases

BCFED joins MMIWG Coalition partners to weep for Tina Fontaine

Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver--BC Members of the Coalition on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in BC are heartbroken and appalled that on February 22, 56-year-old Raymond Cormier was found not guilty in the murder of Tina Fontaine, a 15-year-old girl from Sagkeeng First Nation in Manitoba. Our hearts and prayers are with her loved ones at this time of pain and sorrow.

Fontaine's 72lb body was found in the Red River on August 17th, 2014, while she was purportedly under the care of Manitoba Child and Family Services. Cormier was charged with Fontaine's murder in December 2015, and his trial began in January, 2018. The Crown had no forensic evidence or eyewitnesses, and Fontaine's cause of death remains undetermined.

Fontaine's murder sparked outrage and demands for a national inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in Canada. On September 1, 2016, a National Inquiry into MMIWG, led by Chief Commissioner Marion Buller began its work.

The Inquiry is mandated to inquire into and report on the systemic causes of all forms of violence – including sexual violence – against Indigenous women and girls in Canada. In the case of Tina Fontaine, the child welfare system, the police system, and the criminal justice system all failed her. Systemic racism, sexism, misogyny, and colonization are at the core of this tragedy.

So far, the Inquiry has held family and community hearings, gathering stories and statements that have been bravely shared by loved ones and survivors. Fontaine's story, and all of the stories, share a common thread – the sincere wish that this never happen to another woman or girl again. What does "justice" mean, if the same injustices carry on, day after day, year after year?

To work towards a systemic and societal change where Indigenous women and girls are valued, the Inquiry and the federal government must do far more than hear stories and share the truth, though those stories are the foundations for change. Comprehensive and in-depth hearings must be held to investigate the systems that repeatedly fail Indigenous women and girls. The police, child welfare services, schools, and health care services must be thoroughly cross-examined and analyzed. The Inquiry has stated that these hearings will be held in Parts II and III of this Inquiry, yet with a mere 9-months until the final report is due there is not sufficient time, nor has the Inquiry demonstrated that it is capable of carrying out this demanding work.

The calls of "No Justice, No Peace" are sounding as Indigenous people mourn yet another failing of this country and its cruel colonial systems. There must be accountability for these injustices.

Aboriginal Women's Action Network

BC Assembly of First Nations

BC Federation of Labour

Butterflies in Spirit

Carrier Sekani Family Services

Downtown Eastside Women's Centre

February 14th Memorial March Committee

PACE Society

Poverty and Human Rights Centre

Union of BC Indian Chiefs

Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter

West Coast LEAF

WISH Drop-in Centre Society

Sophie Merasty

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