



Red Dress Day

stqa?tkw̓niw̓t, Westbank, Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory: Red Dress Day is our day to remember, to rise, and to fight back. The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) honors our Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ relatives across Turtle Island. We carry them with us, and we refuse to stay silent while our living relatives face violence, erasure, and injustice from a Canadian justice system that keeps failing us.

The 2019 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIWG) Final Report *Reclaiming Power and Place* named this violence as genocide. Seven years later, our women are still being murdered, our girls are still being locked up, and our families are demanding justice that never comes. Our people want to be listened to and heard. They want accountability and action over silence. **Survivors have told us: "Silence is harm."** Silence protects failing systems, deepens trauma, and leaves Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people to carry violence alone.

This is willful blindness fueling an epidemic of violence, erasure, and incarceration. They know our women are dying and our girls are being locked up, but they choose to look away. That choice stains our homelands with our people's blood. Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people are far more likely to go missing or be murdered than non-Indigenous women in Canada. From 2015-2024, Indigenous women and girls were killed at a rate **12 times higher** than non-Indigenous women and girls. At the same time, Indigenous girls now make up 60% of female youth in custody in British Columbia. **The system fails our women in life and fails our girls in childhood.** That is the shameful reality we name today.

Despite clear warnings, these outcomes were predicted—and preventable. **The National Inquiry warned governments our women would keep being harmed by systems where victims aren't believed,** victim services don't exist, police and Crown responses fail, and justice processes strip away dignity. After countless reports and recommendations, nothing has changed. Our survivors are still disbelieved, defenseless, fighting to be heard and seen. **These are not abstract failures—they are violent lived realities such as the following:**

- **Judicial minimization:** In the Don Ashley matter with multiple Syilx women, Canada reduced their harm to one count of "common assault" and gave probation. The courts failed so completely that Syilx Okanagan Nation Chiefs had to banish him from all our lands using our own jurisdiction.
- **Administrative erasure:** Jordan Ned, a Syilx survivor who told ONA "**say my name,**" was erased when the Crown "forgot" to notify her of her attacker's sentencing. She couldn't face him or reclaim her dignity. The system made her invisible.

- **Systemic leniency:** Nathan Chasing Horse, a known predator of Indigenous women and girls, evaded Canadian justice until a U.S. court gave him 37 years to life. His Canadian charges against Syilx woman and children still sit unresolved. Canada lets predators walk while our women pay the price.

Survivors are still coming forward. Their voices continue to surface despite years of silence, fear, and systematic barriers. Some have shared they were told by law enforcement that pursuing justice would not be easy, a reality that discourages reporting and deepens mistrust in the system. Yet despite these obstacles, they are speaking out. This reflects a pattern where Canada allows predators to evade accountability while Indigenous women and girls bear the consequences.

Even "reforms" prove the pattern. Bailey's Law only came after Bailey McCourt was stabbed to death in Kelowna in July 2025. **Bill C-16** promises victim rights after decades of demands. These changes only happen after our women are gone. That's not justice. That's too late. **These failures aren't mistakes. They are deliberate, repeated, and unacceptable.** Our women, girls and families shouldn't have to suffer to access accountability. Our communities shouldn't have to scream to be heard. Our girls deserve protection, not prison cells. The time for silence is over.

The time for action is now. ONA calls on the Federal and Provincial Government to implement the recommendations provided in the MMIWG final report and to work with our Nation as we develop and deliver our Nation Justice Strategy.

For the Syilx Nation, protecting our women and girls is our sacred duty. This is affirmed by the Okanagan Nation Declaration, Syilx Unity Declaration, and siwᑭ Declaration. When the justice system fails, **we step up.** Our jurisdiction protects what Canada won't. **The Chiefs Executive Council is committed to uphold these sacred duties expressed in our Syilx Okanagan declarations.**

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