

Minute for Reconciliation

On June 30, 2002, Lisa Marie Young, a 21-year-old Indigenous Canadian woman, disappeared from Nanaimo, British Columbia. Twenty-four years later, Lisa Marie has never been found, and her family is still waiting for her to come home.

In 2010, Métis artist Jaime Black displayed 100 empty red dresses around the University of Winnipeg campus to symbolize the lives lost and the "presence through absence" of missing Indigenous women. Jaime wanted this visual display to call attention to the startling high rates of violence that Indigenous women experience. The first Red Dress Day in 2010 resulted from Jaime's art installation, May 5th was chosen because it was the birthday of Lisa Marie.

Why red? Red was chosen because, the spirits that have passed see bright colours the best, red in particular. Hanging the red dresses helps lost spirits find their way home to their loved ones

The red dress represents someone who is still missing. It represents a family who is still waiting, a home with an empty seat, a name that should still be spoken in the present tense. When you see a red dress hanging in public remember that space is being held for someone who should still be here today

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 41 directly initiated the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls that began Sept 1, 2016. In June 2019, the inquiry issued their final document titled Reclaiming Power and Place containing 231 Calls for Justice. 220 out of the 231 Calls for Justice are directed at Canada's Government. In the six years since those calls were released, TWO have been completed. Two out of 220, six years.

The Federal Government's national action plan is called the "Federal Pathway". Their annual progress report is due in June 2026 and will probably still show only 2 calls as completed.

The Calls for Justice are required because of colonial systems that continue to place Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people at risk. Canada's government will continue to do nothing unless pressured by the Canadian public to make REAL CHANGE backed by REAL RESPONSIBILITY.

Are you aware that eight of the 231 Calls for Justice are calls for All Canadians?

Here are the eight, we call on all Canadians to:

Denounce and speak out against violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

Decolonize by learning the true history of Canada and Indigenous history in your local area. Learn about and celebrate Indigenous Peoples' history, cultures, pride, and diversity, acknowledging the land you live on and its importance to local Indigenous communities, both historically and today.

Develop knowledge and read the Final Report. Listen to the truths shared, and acknowledge the burden of these human and Indigenous rights violations, and how they impact Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people today.

Using what you have learned and some of the resources suggested, become a strong ally. Being a strong ally involves more than just tolerance; it means actively working to break down barriers and to support others in every relationship and encounter in which you participate.

Confront and speak out against racism, sexism, ignorance, homophobia, and transphobia, and teach or encourage others to do the same, wherever it occurs: in your home, in your workplace, or in social settings.

Protect, support, and promote the safety of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people by acknowledging and respecting the value of every person and every community, as well as the right of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people to generate their own, self-determined solutions.

Create time and space for relationships based on respect as human beings, supporting and embracing differences with kindness, love, and respect. Learn about Indigenous principles of relationship specific to those Nations or communities in your local area and work, and put them into practice in all of your relationships with Indigenous Peoples.

Help hold all governments accountable to act on the Calls for Justice, and to implement them according to the important principles we set out.

May 5 is dedicated to honoring victims, supporting families, and raising awareness about the disproportionate violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

You can support Red Dress Day

- By wearing red or hanging red dresses in trees, windows, and public spaces to make the "invisible visible" and to honor the victims, their families, and communities.
- By learning the facts so you understand that this crisis is a result of colonialism and systemic racism.
- By reading the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
- By donating to local Indigenous-led organizations working on the frontlines of this crisis.
- By following, sharing, and listening to Indigenous activists, family members, and community leaders so you can amplify Indigenous voices.
- By calling on elected officials to implement the Calls for Justice, and
- By participating in marches, rallies, and vigils in your community.

This information was compiled by Regina Native Outreach Ministry, a ministry within the United Church of Canada. If you would like more information, please email reginanativeoutreachministry@gmail.com.