



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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## **Sisters in Spirit Vigil 2009**

### **Last year Lethbridge had the largest vigil in Canada!**

On October 5, 2009, at 7:00 pm, the third Sisters in Spirit Vigil will be held in Galt Gardens, Lethbridge, Alberta. Last year, the vigil was held in forty cities across Canada, and the largest vigil (over 350 people) was held in Lethbridge.

This candlelight vigil is being held to bring attention to inaction on the part of the federal and provincial governments and police services, with respect to the serious situation faced by First Nations, Inuit, and Metis women.

Aboriginal women are 3.5 times more likely to be victims of domestic violence and sexual assault than non-aboriginal women. Young aboriginal women are five times more likely than other women to die as the result of violence.

In October 2004, Amnesty International released the *Stolen Sisters* report, calling on Canadian authorities to work with aboriginal women to develop a national plan of action to stop violence against aboriginal women. Such a plan has not been undertaken despite United Nations human rights bodies having called on the Canadian government to act.

In 2006, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police acknowledged the high levels of violence experienced by aboriginal women and called on police services across Canada to adopt missing persons policies that specifically addressed aboriginal people.

To date, most police services, including the RCMP, do not have specific protocols to ensure that their response to missing persons cases is consistent with the risks faced by aboriginal women. Aboriginal people have told Amnesty International that there is slow and ineffective action when they report a missing persons case.

No government agency has attempted to compile a comprehensive list of missing and murdered women for all of Canada.

There are huge disparities between aboriginal and non-aboriginal women in terms of access to health and housing. Poverty and marginalization have pushed many aboriginal women into situations where the risk of violence is greatly increased. The government must address the gap in the standard of living and quality of life for aboriginal women.

A national plan of action must be developed by the government in collaboration with aboriginal women and their organizations, including:

- Collection and publication of gender disaggregated data on health and social conditions for aboriginal people, including incidence of violence against aboriginal women.
- Standardized protocols for police handling missing persons cases that recognizes the particular risks faced by aboriginal women and girls.
- Equitable funding for aboriginal people, including culturally appropriate services such as shelters and victim services programs.

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*Sponsored by: Amnesty International, Native Women's Association of Canada, Aboriginal Council of Lethbridge, YWCA, KAIROS*

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