



women against violence
against women

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December 3, 2007

Backgrounder

First Nations' and Women's Group Work Together to Heal BC Women

Significance of the Day

December 6 is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against women, each year across Canada events are held to remember victims of violence and to raise awareness of the serious violence faced by women in Canada and throughout the world. December 6th is a day of remembrance, reflection, healing, action and advocacy. Each year WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) hosts a special event in recognition of this day.

Why a Smudge?

In commemoration of the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women 2007, WAVAW, along with the Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil Waututh Nations, Aboriginal groups, multicultural organizations, and other women's anti-violence groups, has organized a Sacred Smudge Ceremony of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES).

A Smudge is a traditional healing practice of Aboriginal peoples, meant to restore health and give new and better life to the ailing. The long term daily violence against women in the DTES requires healing.

The conclusion of the trial concerning the Missing and Murdered women (Pickton Trial) reminds us of the reality of what women experience in the DTES as well as in all of Canada. 51% of women in Canada have experienced at least 1 violent incident as defined by the criminal code, women experience more severe forms of violence, are 3 times more likely than men to be injured by spousal violence and 5 times more likely to require medical attention, in fact each year, sexual and physical violence costs Canada 4.2 billion dollars. (Canadian Women's Foundation, "The Hard Facts: Violence Against Women in Canada") Moreover, roughly 50% of the Aboriginal population of the DTES is female and 70% of the women working as survival sex-trade workers in the DTES are aboriginal women, and their daily lives are shaped by experiences and fear of violence. (Marginalized Voices for the Downtown Eastside: Aboriginal Women Speak about their Health Experiences. C. Benoit and D. Carrol, 2001, York University)

I walk in fear. I always walk in fear. [Affidavit 062 at para. 16] (Pivot Legal Society report: Voices for Dignity pg. 16)

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It is difficult to go out during the day. It is sometimes scary to leave during the day because I feel like there is someone watching me. I feel this is not any way to live. [Affidavit 033 at para. 07] (Pivot Legal Society Report: Voices for Dignity pg. 16)

“It seems that no matter where in Canada I go, I hear of people who have lost someone on the DTES or know a girl who has been missing. All of our territories have been affected. This is an opportunity for our people to come together in unity to do our work in a Traditional way,” says Singing Thunderbird Child Twice Standing Woman Darla Laughlin, Aboriginal Outreach Counselor for WAVAW.

“Our Ceremonies have always been a way for us to make our lives better, to ask for new life. We know that our Traditional ways held our women as Sacred life givers and Clan mothers; we were leaders of our communities. It is time that we took back our inherent right, and time the rest of the world acknowledge our ways,” explains Laughlin.

Smudging the entire DTES will help to rid the area of the negative energy that has accumulated from years of experiences of violence.

Event Overview

The event will occur from 11am to 2pm within a four block radius of Main and Hastings. The vision for this event started as WAVAW has increased Aboriginal Outreach work focused on the women of the DTES, and it has grown to something larger than was ever imagined.

Forty Aboriginal ceremonial spiritual elders and leaders will conduct the smudge, while groups walk from Medicine Wheel’s Sacred Directions of East, South, West and North. Groups representing all four races of the earth, each represented by a direction on the Medicine Wheel, have been invited and will walk and pray in their own way from their sacred direction. All will meet on the corner of Hastings and Main and pray for all women to be honored as sacred life givers and clan mothers. Flags will be lifted in ceremony for the women of the world who suffer from violence and a call for support will be put out for all men to walk with women ‘in a good way’, that is, as a signal that men will no longer accept or tolerate violence against women.

Aboriginal leaders throughout British Columbia and across Canada are supporting this event. Supporters will include Frank Settee form the World Council of Elders, National Chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Patrick Brazeau, Grand Chief of BC Edward John, Squamish Chief Bill Williams, Musqueum Chief Wendy Grant-John, and Tsleil Waututh Chief Leah George Wilson. Gladys Radek, the spokesperson for the Highway of Tears.

Parallel Smudges are being held in Prince George and Prince Rupert to assist the healing process in their cities.

The women of the DTES affected by violence are all daughters, mothers, aunties, sisters, grandmothers, deserving of honor for their sacred spirits. This violence is not

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only happening to Aboriginal women but to women of all the four sacred races. "It is a time to honour Clan Mothers as leaders and sacred life givers, and pray for an end to violence against all women," says Laughlin.

The DTES Smudge Ceremony will assist the healing not only of the DTES but also continues the work towards an end of violence against all women.

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