SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CENTRE

Bulletin janvier 2017

In Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka [Mohawk] territory



Le Centre communautaire des femmes sud-asiatiques

Inside this issue:	
Cover page	1
Greetings, letters, EC meeting, bulletin guide- lines	2
Year-end party	3
Public Inquiry in QC, Treatment of Indigenous people	4
Notre-Dame Basilica— racial profiling	6
Job posting, membership announcement	8
Cheryl Braganza, march video	9
Durga	10
Activities and calendar	11

Qu'en pensezvous?What do you think?

- Let us know your thoughts about the bulletin.
- Que pensez-vous de notre journal?
- We encourage you to send in your stories and articles for upcoming newsletters in any language by the 25th of every month to:
- sawccbulletin@gmail.com
- Écrivez -nous à

sawccbulletin@gmail.com



"If you're afraid of my anger, what can I say. You should be."

(By Farha Najah.) This art work is informed by lived experiences at the intersection of heteropatriarchy and systemic racism, and inspired by #Stoptellingwomentosmile.

For more information, please visit farha-najah.com)

CENTRE UPDATE



Centre Hours/heure d'ouverture

Monday & Thursday/lundi & jeudi 9am—9pm Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday/mardi, mercredi & vendredi- 9am-5pm

The Centre is wheelchair accessible

Le centre est accessible aux fauteuils roulants.

Volunteers— If you are interested in helping out at the Centre, please contact Juvaria (Ext. 104 or juvaria@bellnet.ca) to coordinate a meeting!

Bonne année à tous nos membres, amis et alliés Happy New Year to all our members, friends & allies

Letter to the Editor:

"Thank you again for a thrilling bulletin - so much information and a record of women's action in schools and on the street and in the communities of Montreal."

- Jennifer (Chew)

Next Executive Council Meeting: Monday 30th January 2017, 6pm. All are welcome.

SAWCC Bulletin -- submission guidelines:

SAWCC members are encouraged to send submissions to the Bulletin, to share items of interest with other members. Send submissions to: sawccbulletin@gmail.com

If using the post send to: SAWCC Bulletin, 1035 Rachel est, Montreal, Quebec, H2J 2J5

Submissions should reach by the 25th of the month.

Submissions may be original work or reprints (with permission) and can include --

art, reports, photos, information, opinion pieces, short fiction, poetry, announcements, recipes, etc.

Publication criteria are guided by SAWCC's commitment to not negatively discriminate on the basis of physical and mental ability, religion, colour, nationality, age, sexual orientation and identity, caste, and class. Publication is further guided by the feminist ethos of sis-terhood, and principles of intersectionality*, equality, equity, and transparency. As well, material that may compromise confidentiality of individuals without their consent will not be published.

SAWCC reserves the right to select, reject or edit submissions. When authorship identified, items reflect the views of the authors.

REMINDER -- Don't forget to renew your membership!! See page 8 for details.

We had a SMASHING YEAR END PARTY 2016

We held our annual Year-End Party on Sunday 11^{th} December. It was a great success. Everyone participated in the fun – activities, games, performances, dancing. And all had a great time!!! The photos testify to this!!!



QUÉBEC NATIVE WOMEN on Public Inquiry in Québec

Kahnawake, December 21, 2016 – Quebec Native Women (QNW) welcomes the decision of the Government of Quebec announcing the formal establishment of a Provincial Public Inquiry. After a year of difficult denunciations and relentless demands, QNW welcomes the magnitude of the mandate with hope.

First, it is important to highlight the courage of those women who spoke out in order to denounce a situation of injustice which has been going on for many years. "Although QNW welcomes the news, we must remain vigilant regarding the support offered to individuals who will be testifying during the course of this inquiry. Indigenous women are courageous, strong, and have a good network among themselves, but the government will be responsible for ensuring that all necessary and appropriate services will be available, **during and after** this inquiry," said Viviane Michel, President of Quebec Native Women.

QNW is satisfied with the fact that this inquiry will shed light on the systemic issues characterizing the relationship between Indigenous people and the police institutions of Quebec, as well as some of the public services in Quebec such as correctional, justice, health and social services, as well as the youth protection services. It is time to recognize the presence of racism and systemic discrimination in Quebec and for them to finally be brought to a halt.

QNW believes that this forum will allow the various parties concerned to express their views on the situation in order to provide solutions which will allow for better coexistence, knowledge and understanding between Indigenous peoples and Quebec society. Furthermore, over the next few months, there will be significant work to be done between the two inquiries, national and provincial, so that no account is left out.

Source:

Laureanne Fontaine, Communication Officer communication@faq-qnw.org |

Québec premier announces 2-year inquiry into treatment of Indigenous people

Announcement comes after months of public pressure

By Melissa Fundira, Jonathan Montpetit, <u>CBC News</u> Posted: Dec 21, 2016. Last Updated: Dec 22, 2016 10:59 AM ET

After months of public pressure, the Quebec government has confirmed it will launch a public inquiry into the treatment of Indigenous people in the province.

Premier Philippe Couillard announced Tuesday afternoon the inquiry will focus on how Indigenous communities across the province are treated by various public bodies, including the police, correctional services, youth protection and health systems.

"We propose a forum that will allow us to address these issues and to analyze, without prejudice, without complacency and independently, the actions that must be taken so that everyone can live in a climate of trust rather suspicion and worry, of openness rather than contempt ... of reconciliation and progress," Couillard said. "We are rejoicing this afternoon, we are savouring the moment.' - Edith Cloutier, executive director of Val-d'Or's Native Friendship Centre

The commission of inquiry will look at the last 15 years of Indigenous and provincial relations and hold audiences with Indigenous people, police and other affected communities in Val'd'Or and, if the commission deems it necessary, other regions in Quebec.

It is expected to be completed by Nov. 30, 2018.

Retired Superior Court justice Jacques Viens will preside over the commission of inquiry, an appointment that was made in consultation with First Nations, Couillard added.

The retired judge preferred not to comment on his appointment immediately, but indicated via news release that the next few weeks would be dedicated to assembling the commission and establishing a plan.

Viens notably dedicated 25 years of his career to the judiciary district of Abitibi, a region that encompasses the northern Quebec town of Val-d'Or, where a Radio-Canada investigation revealed allegations of police abuse against Indigenous women.

Initial calls for an inquiry grew louder last month after an investigation into the allegations concluded there was <u>no evidence to charge the provincial police officers</u> accused of wrongdoing.

Quebec's Indigenous leaders spoke with Couillard on multiple occasions to make their case for an inquiry.

Though Couillard initially resisted the pressure for an inquiry, he <u>appeared to relent last week</u> when the national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls said it wouldn't be able to study the problems in Val-d'Or in any depth.

Couillard said the provincial inquiry would not re-examine the allegations of police abuse in Val-d'Or, but would look into systemic relations in the region between police and Indigenous people, as well as complement the federal inquiry.

Women in Val-d'Or 'rejoicing'

The Crown's decision not to charge any of the provincial police officers mentioned in 37 complaints cast doubt on the Quebec government's ability and willingness to protect Indigenous women.

But on Tuesday, Indigenous women gathered at Val-d'Or's Native Friendship Centre to hear the announcement were "rejoicing."

"The mandate goes above and beyond relations [between Indigenous people] and police officers. We will address this whole sensitive and delicate question of systemic racism," the centre's executive director Edith Cloutier said.
"We're savouring the moment."

Ghislain Picard, chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, welcomed the announcement and applauded "the courage of the women at the centre of this process."



[Protests such as this one outside the courthouse in Val-d'Or, Que., have been held to call for an inquiry into allegations that police abused Indigenous women in and around the northern Quebec town. [Jaime Little/CBC)]

"It is thanks to them today that we have reached this stage of recognizing that discrimination and systemic racism is a priority and that measures must be put in place to combat them in Quebec," he said in a statement.

Nakuset, executive director of the Montreal Native Women's Shelter, echoed her approval of the "amazing" news, but said that the success of the inquiry would largely depend on whether the commission's front-line workers understand the effects of colonialism, residential schools and trauma.

"If you have someone who comes in and has a clear understanding, that would be much more helpful and you would actually get the information. It's about an inquiry, let's see what they have to say," she said.

The inquiry's focus on the Val-d'Or area is "definitely needed," Nakuset said, but the lack of certainty over whether systemic racism in other parts of Quebec would be looked into was disappointing.

"It's definitely happening here in Montreal," she told CBC News. "We see it every single day."

'What we want is accountability'

In the aftermath of the Crown's decision, Indigenous leaders and community members expressed their unwavering support for the dozens of women who felt their trauma went unacknowledged.

Meanwhile, the Sûreté du Québec, the province's police force, continues to deny any wrongdoing and is suing Radio-Canada for \$2 million in damages for airing allegations of abuse.

Quebec Justice Minister Stéphanie Vallée emphasized that the nearly two-year long inquiry would be informal, so as to "allow Indigenous women, members of Indigenous communities, police officers and other stakeholders to express their experiences and concerns under a less strict framework."

Vallée reiterated more than once that the inquiry's goal wasn't "to find the culprits."

"We are looking to listen, to reconcile and to progress, not to place blame," she said.

For Nakuset, the government's resolve not to point fingers makes it impossible for the women of Val-d'Or to feel vindicated.

"It's almost like they're silenced again," she said.

"What we want is accountability."

Notre-Dame Basilica Security Guards & Bold Display of Racist Profiling

Well, I can tell you from my experience in Montreal yesterday (Saturday 12 November 2016) that discriminatory attitudes are as alive and well in Canada as in the United States, despite romantic beliefs to the contrary held by US liberals. The ongoing horrific effects of the notorious discriminatory Indian Act of 1876 hardly ever enter the public discourse in the USA, but we attendees at the convention were reminded of these practices and resistances to them through the many interventions and presentations of First Nation feminists such as the keynote speaker Leanne Simpson, cultural activist, musician, theorist, professor and member of the Alderville First Nation.



I was here as a participant at the National Women's Studies Convention with over 2,000 delegates from across the USA and Canada attending. Saturday afternoon after a late lunch 4 of us brown South Asians and one senior Ghanaian scholar went to visit Notre Dame de Bonsecours as it is a known tourist site and especially after the death of Leonard Cohen whose song Suzanne was supposedly inspired here [Fauzia and friends made the understandable error of going to Notre-Dame Basilica on Notre-Dame street, which was close to the conference site and very similar in name to the church of Cohen fame, which is on rue St-Paul. Eds], we wanted to pay our respects. Anyhow, when we got to it the time was 5 mins past 4 pm and there was a very tall imposing white female guard standing at the entrance turning visitors away and she repeated the same mantra to us when we asked to go in just for a few minutes: "We close at 4 PM to prepare for a 5-6 pm mass; come back at 8 am tomorrow when we reopen or if you wish to attend Mass you can

come back at 4:45 PM. You will have to stay for the whole ceremony which is in French" As she said this she gave us all a look that was disdainful, conveying to us in particular, that she didn't expect we would be capable of sitting through Mass. Why? Because there was an assumption on her part (communicated through her body language, the asking her incredulously, how was she behaving in this disrespectful and discriminatory way toward another human being in a House of God? Her answer came quickly. "Now I am not going to let you in at all. You should leave." Suddenly, a male guard emerged from inside the church to join her so I turned to him in my shocked state at what had just transpired and said, "Do you see what your colleague is doing? She is refusing to let me in when I've been waiting patiently here in the cold, for almost an hour!" Before he could reply to me, she smirked and said "You wanted to come in to just see the church, I told you the church is closed to tourists, it is only open for those who want to come in and stay for the whole Mass."

I was shaking now, very upset that she had refused to accept my word that I was here for the duration of the Mass, and I said



as much, loudly exclaiming, "This woman has not heard a word I've said, she is wrong and unjust!" The guy now sternly rebuked me, "My colleague said you were being aggressive, and she is right. Move back." Oh! My God. I couldn't believe it. "I will not move back" I shot back, enraged at the injustice of the situation that had developed. A third guard, another woman, now materialized, and flanked by the other two on each side, she too asked me to step to the side. At that point, seeing the all-white crowd streaming past me into the Church, I cried out "This is racist behavior-you are letting in white folks but keeping me out and treating me disrespectfully!"

Things really escalated after that. The male security guard's face contorted with

rage, and he stepped right into my face/my space, yelling "Racisme? Racisme? How dare you accuse us of this? No one can say that! Get off the church premises immediately." Despite the threat of imminent physical violence communicated by him thrusting himself in my face, I stood my ground, shaking, but turning to the parishioners streaming by I asked them, "Can you see what's going on?

Can you see? Why am I being prevented from entering? What kind of church is this? Look at how this man is threatening me" At this, the second female guard, sensing her male colleague was going too far with bodily intervention in my space, started to pull him back. Then the three guards formed a human wall in front of me, and the second woman who was in the middle raised her hands in a gesture akin to pushing me backwards. All of them--the man the loudest of all--demanded I leave the "Church's private property" immediately; the man also threatened to call the police.

I fell back as the parishioners ignored me and the ruckus going on, pretending nothing out of the ordinary was happening despite my pleas for them to do something to stop this violent and unjust behavior unfolding before their eyes. I felt so humiliated and angry. I fumbled in my bag till I found my iphone, whipped it out and quickly started trying to take some photos of my three assailants, because that's what this episode felt like in my body and soul--an assault. When they realized I was trying to snap pictures of them, the tall woman who had started the ball of aggression rolling, immediately pulled her jacket hood over her head and turned her body and face away quickly from the camera. The second woman put up her two hands, trying to cover my camera lens, and the man became ever more enraged and started shouting "You are not allowed to take photos, get out, get away," threatening again to call the police on me.

Having taken a few wobbly photos of three angry white Canadians flexing their authoritarian muscles at me on the steps of a holy site to prevent me from going inside it, I left in a cab for the convention center, and started to break down in tears and sobs as I explained to the Black cab driver what had just happened. He just shook his head in empathy, repeating all the while, "Je suis desolé," "I'm so sorry Madame."

I cannot describe how difficult the next several hours were as I tried to process what had happened, and sought out my compassionate kindred feminist sisters at the convention. The women who had accompanied me to the church and returned earlier were aghast at my story. My wonderful Ghanaian friend and colleague, after consoling me, made practical suggestions to seek redress involving writing a letter to the archdiocese to ensure a full inquiry take place into the appalling behavior of its employees as well as doing an accounting of its own policies of inclusion/exclusion.

I then attended the annual South Asian Feminist, Women of Color and Lesbian-Caucus sponsored Open Mike event where, at the suggestion of my colleagues, I described the incident and the fear it had provoked in me for what lay in store, what was already happening to people of color, to Muslims, to women and to LGBTQ identified folks in the USA following the election this past week of the racist, sexist, Islamophobic xenophobe, Donald Trump. Canada was not much different.

At the Open Mike event I felt becalmed by the waves of empathy I could feel as folks listened to my story; once they'd heard, I was heartened by the solidarity that my colleagues offered in suggesting we get together early the next morning, before my return flight to NY, to march in protest to the Church in question, and get the info out there in the public domain. Two local South Asian feminist activists (Dolores Chew and Sarwat Viqar) volunteered their expert services in getting the word out to other local progressive organizations and news media such as CBC, who called and spoke to me and a few others of the 10 or so brave women -- white, black, brown, straight and queer, Muslim, Christian, Atheist, who stood in the cold early morning hours outside the Church this morning [Sunday 13 November]holding aloft signs and banners proclaiming "House of God Should Be Open to All", "Feminists Against Discrimination", "Love Not Hate", "No More Walls".

The net result of our collective efforts was that the Director [of Tourist Activities, Josée Benoit] of the Church called and asked me to describe what had happened, and after listening to my story narrated in the presence of my transnational feminist sisters, apologized to me for the shameful behavior of the guards. She reaffirmed the Church as a place that is or should be open to all who wish to enter, as visitors or as worshippers. To bar anyone's entry goes against the very core of the principles of justice and equality the Church professes to believe in. We all carry the divine spark within us.

My fierce feminist allies gathered at the Church today even got the male guard at the Church this morning (not the same one from yesterday but clearly allied to his co workers)--to admit just as we were about to disband, that indeed, his colleagues yesterday had, at the very least, "overreacted" and thus behaved inappropriately.

The incoming NWSA President, Black feminist scholar Barbara Ransby, who was present at the Open Mike last night and who read out a statement of protest by feminist scholars of NWSA on the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States, also pledged to write something about the incident that might serve our collective endeavors for a resistant feminism that must always speak truth to power, even and perhaps especially when you feel viscerally exposed and hurt.

Fawzia Afzal-Khan, Phd. Professor of English, Montclair State University, USA. Fulbright Visiting Specialist. (13 November 2016)

Short videos from the demo

Position available—SAWCC seeks a Tamil-speaking community

Application deadline 15th January 2017. 25 hrs / week @ \$12 per hour

Skills: Excellent communication and listening skills; organizational and motivational skills; confidence in talking to people in groups and one to one basis; patience, tact and ability to earn trust; creative thinking and problem solving; ability to handle general administrative duties; can take initiative; cemonstrate ability to be a team player and work as part of the team

Requirements: Canadian citizenship or permanent resident status; fluent in Tamil, English, and French; functional knowledge of Sinhalese an asset; have knowledge of social services in Montreal; understanding community needs and issues; motivation to provide services to all age groups

Task and responsibilities for community worker: responsible for phone calls and appointments with women and families who communicate mainly in Tamil and Sinhalese; responsible for offering one-on-one support, accompaniment services, translation services, support and filling out paperwork as well as offering counsel and advice regarding social services within the city. The community worker will be expected to do some administrative work. The community worker will be supported [daily] by the Centre coordinator as well as her colleagues.

Please send your CV and a cover page, addressed to the Hiring Committee via email to sawcc@bellnet.ca

For further information, please contact: (514) 528-8812 ext. 104

The South Asian Women's Community Centre is dedicated to the empowerment of women. We are guided by the international Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Canadian and Quebec Charters of Human Rights. We are informed by a feminist ethos and sisterhood, and we are guided in our work by principles of intersectionality, equality, equality, equality, and transparency.

Membership Renewal

It's that time of year! **Please renew your SAWCC membership** to ensure you get all the mailings and can participate fully in the organization.

Changes to your information (address, phone number, etc. email, etc.)? Download the membership form from our website, insert the correct information and send it along with your membership dues. http://www.sawcc-ccfsa.ca/EN/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Membership-form.pdf

Please mail cheque to: SAWCC, 1035 Rachel est, Montréal, Qc., H2J 2J5.

Make cheque payable to: "South Asian Women's Community Centre".

Indicate in the note section: "membership".

Making a donation to SAWCC at the same time? Donations of \$20 or more will receive a tax-deductible receipt (for 2017 tax year). If including a donation indicate as well the amount towards "donation".

Membership dues:

\$15.00 (for salaried); \$7.00 (for non-salaried)

BOOK EVENT

Montreal launch of *Resilience and Triumph: Immigrant Women Tell their Stories* (Second Story Press), a collection of writings by over 45 women from diverse cultural, linguistic, religious and national backgrounds. Edited and compiled collectively by a group of seven women, it is first in the series published by the Feminist History Society to "document and preserve women's stories and activist history in the time frame of the second-wave feminist movement in Canada (1960s to the present)."

Thursday, January 26, 2017, 5:00-7:00 pm, Concordia University, John Molson Building, 2nd floor, room 130 (Floating Box), 1450 rue Guy. Some of the Montréal-based authors will be present and will read. **All welcome!**

(Sponsored by the Simone de Beauvoir Women's Studies Institute of Concordia.)

Cheryl Braganza 1945-2016: Mother, Artist, Genius, Friend, Teacher, Cancer Survivor, Warrior

For the last twelve years, while our mother fought bone cancer, a handwritten quote from Goethe has rested on top of her easel: "Rest not. Life is sweeping by; go and dare before you die. Something mighty and sublime, leave be-

hind to conquer time."



Little did we know how much she would take this to heart. In the last 5 years, she produced more artwork and published more writing than she ever produced in the previous 20 years. When asked why, she answered "I'm in a race against time. I have so much to say and so much more to bring into the world..." And her effect on people across the world is evident in the hundreds and thousands of awe-inspiring emails she got from fans of her work everywhere.

She lived longer than anyone in the history of medicine with myeloma cancer in the brain, and refused painkillers because she didn't want her senses affected. All she wanted was to experience every moment in living color until her last breath.

Our mother believed that in order to enjoy true happiness, she should live each moment as if it were her last. Today will never return. We may speak of the past or of the future, but the only reality we have is that of the present instant.













Confronting the reality of death actually enabled her to bring forth unlimited creativity, courage and joy into each moment of her life. The more broken her body became over the years, the more she painted soaring images of birds, and butterflies, and dancing women. And even when the cancer paralyzed her body, she painted tapestries of colour and love with her face, her voice and her mind.

She died peacefully in her sleep this morning after seeing her three children; her soul soaring to the beautiful places reflected in her art. We could not have wished for a more beautiful and meaningful farewell.

Andre, Carlos, Miguel (Cheryl's sons)

SAWCC mourns the loss of Cheryl. We had benefitted from Cheryl's creative genius. To celebrate SAWCC's 30th anniversary, we had a 2011 calendar, with the art of Cheryl. The proceeds from the sale of the calendar went to support SAWCC. For more on Cheryl and her art go to http://www.cherylbraganza.com/

SAWCC at the march against militarization and war...

In our December Bulletin, we carried a report about a demonstration against militarization, occupation and wars of aggression that SAWCC participated in. Here is a link to vimeo footage of SAWCC speech at demo. on Nov 26th 2016

- https://vimeo.com/194288430



"Rest not. Life is sweeping by; go and dare before you die. Something mighty and sublime, leave behind to conquer time." -Goethe

Durga

Astha Agarwal

This poem is inspired by the Hindu tradition of worshipping pre-pubescent girls as a manifestation of the goddess Durga during the Navratri celebration of nine forms of goddess. Durga represents strength, motherhood, and the victory of good over evil.

Every year

I waited

For that one day

When Mummy Papa got out of bed

Before I left for school.

That one day

When my feet were the only thing

Their hands touched.

That one day

I was Durga.

Then one year

I lost that day too.

When Mummy called

Swati Aunty's little girl

To be her Durga.

"Mummy

Did I do something wrong?"

"Mummy

I'm sorry."

At some point

That night

It hit me.

"Mummy

Is it the blood?"

"Mummy

I'm sorry."

"I don't know

why this is happening."

"Make it stop.

Make it stop. I want to be your Durga again."

www.sawcc-ccfsa.ca

REMINDER -- Don't forget to renew your membership!! See page 8 for details.

January 2017 Wed Sun Mon Tue Thu Fri Sat 3 1 5 6 7 4 8 9 10 12 11 13 14 16 18 19 20 21 15 $17_{\text{Tenant's}}$ 22 23 24 Health 25 26 $27_{\tiny Potluck}$ 28 30 EC meeting $31_{\it Women\ group}$ 29 activity