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First Nation Grandmother and Daughter Activists United in Call for Gender Equality on Mother's Day

Renowned and respected First Nations activist, mother and Grandmother Jeannette Corbiere-Lavell, C.M. and her daughter Dr. Dawn Lavell-Harvard, Director of the First People's House of Learning at Trent University and current President of the Board for the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA), are a mother and daughter committed to ending all gender-based discrimination and inequities that remain within the Indian Act.

This Mother's Day we would like all Canadians to recognize the unbelievable fact that in 2019, all mothers in Canada are not equal under the colonialist system that created the Indian Act.

We ask all fellow Canadians to stand beside us as we ask Canada to repeal this discriminatory law and be the human rights champions that we tell the world that we are.

On any given Tuesday, up until the last sitting of Parliament on June 21, Canada has the opportunity to right this wrong. This is the government's last opportunity to finally remove sex discrimination from the Indian Act that has been there for 143 years.

In 2017, when the Indian Act was being amended yet again, the Senate of Canada intervened to insist that sex discrimination should be removed. The Senate realized the profound significance of this change against the backdrop of reconciliation. They called for Bill S-3, which contains the provisions that would eliminate the discrimination once and for all, to be enacted.

Until the outstanding provisions are proclaimed, the Indian Act maintains the decades old sex-based hierarchy between Indian men and their descendants and Indian women and their descendants. This hierarchy has existed since 1876, and amendments to the Indian Act in 1985, 2010 and 2017 have not removed it. Indian women and their descendants still do not enjoy equality with their male counterparts with regard to entitlement to status or transmission of status to their descendants. This violates the right of First Nations women to equality and the right to pass their culture on to their children.

The current government has the ability to make history and positively impact the lives of First Nations women, girls and families for generations to come. We call on them to remove the sex discrimination from the Indian Act and enact Bill S-3. On that day, we would proudly stand united and celebrate with grandmothers, mothers, daughters and nieces.

The time for change is on any given Tuesday. True equality must be every day of week, the month, the year. After all it is 2019.

Jeannette Corbiere Lavell CM and Dr. Dawn Lavell-Harvard

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