

January 23, 2018

The Honourable Jane Philpott
Minister of Indigenous Services
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Re: PBO Report on First Nations Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

Dear Minister Philpott,

The Canadian Federation of University Women is deeply concerned by the continued challenges faced in First Nation communities in accessing safe drinking water and sanitation, and by the findings of the December 7, 2017, report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO), that highlights insufficient funding allocation to end all on-reserve long-term drinking water advisories by March 2021.

Indigenous communities across Canada continue to experience disease and health problems attributable to poor water and sanitation and face the daily, time-consuming and stressful burden of having to boil, treat, and/or obtain bottled water in sufficient quantity for everyday use and consumption. On many First Nation reserves and communities, Drinking Water Advisories (DWA) have been in place for years, sometimes decades.

We welcome the government's recent announcement that it is expanding the number of water systems eligible for funding from Indigenous Services Canada. However, while 40 long-term DWA were lifted, 26 more were added as of January 23, 2018, underlining the need to broaden the scope of the plan to not only address current issues with infrastructure, but to take into account risks and prevent system failures.

The PBO report indicates that the monies allocated in the 2016 budget - \$1.8 Billion over 5 years to upgrade and maintain on-reserve water and wastewater infrastructure, and train water system operators, and \$141.7 million over 5 years to monitor and test drinking water reserves – are insufficient. According to the report, the planned investments cover only 50% to 70% of what is required as a first step toward securing access to safe drinking water and sanitation.¹

Water and wastewater systems must meet the needs of Indigenous communities. Underfunding in water system infrastructure, maintenance, and operations by previous governments has resulted in unsustainable or incomplete projects, leaving communities with the same fundamental problem: lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Moreover, complicated bureaucratic processes that are not adapted to the local context have made it challenging for communities to improve, repair and operate the water systems.

¹ According to the PBO report, between \$3.2 billion and \$4.7 billion in capital investment are needed as well as between \$361 million and \$419 million in operating and maintenance costs. The estimation varies depending on the source used for the population growth estimate.

The lack of enforceable regulations also places accessing water and sanitation on First Nation reserves in a juridical void. Water and sanitation are fundamental human rights, recognized in international instruments and in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals framework. First Nations, should have clear legal means to enforce this right.

We applaud the government's commitment to fully implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly Article 19, and we call upon the government to support First Nations-led approaches, leadership and organizations in resolving water-related issues.

Regarding the severity of the situation, CFUW members adopted in its 2017 AGM a Resolution on the *Right to Safe, Clean, Accessible and Affordable Drinking Water and Sanitation on First Nation Reserves in Canada*.

We request the government's immediate action to ensure that all First Nations in Canada have access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and urge the government of Canada to:

1. Provide sufficient long-term investments in five-year and ten-year plans of action for water treatment and sanitation infrastructure, operations, management and maintenance, including appropriate training and certification of Reserve and Community residents, and the necessary funding to retain these system operators.
2. Develop enforceable drinking water and sanitation regulations in close collaboration with First Nations.
3. Improve the complicated bureaucratic process and take into account the local context when planning water projects with the Indigenous communities.
4. Support First Nations-led leadership and initiatives in resolving water-related issues such as *the Safe Water Project*.
5. Develop a holistic approach to securing safe drinking water and sanitation that includes environmental norms, the protection of water sources and considers other needs in the communities, such as housing.

Sincerely,



Grace Hollett

CFUW National President - FCFDU Présidente nationale

<http://cfuw.org/>

The Power of Women Working Together

La puissance au féminin: ensemble pour réussir

About CFUW :

CFUW is a non-partisan, voluntary, self-funded organization representing over 8,400 women in every province in Canada. Since the founding in 1919, CFUW has sought to improve the status of women and girls, and to promote human rights, public education, social justice and peace.