

Address to

**Awo Taan Native Womens' Shelter
Second Annual "Mending Our Sacred Circle" Ceremony**

Olympic Plaza
2005 October 17

Deputy Mayor Diane Colley-Urquhart

Thank you for including me in this very special ceremony. I am very moved by our purpose in being here today.

The tragedy of violence against Canadian aboriginal women is heart-wrenching, and it touches me deeply. Just over a year ago, the United Nations called Canada to account for its treatment of aboriginal women. A report called *Stolen Sisters* said that Canadian aboriginal women face a higher threat of violence than other Canadian women. Aboriginal women are murdered at a rate five times greater than that of other women. The United Nations report also said that the government of Canada should have done more to protect these women.

A year later, and it remains the same. Aboriginal Canadian women are still facing unusual threats of violence. Money promised to address the problem still has not been delivered. Violence against aboriginal women, including an alarming trend toward abductions, should be a national priority. During this summer just past, another six aboriginal women in Canada were reported as missing. The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations is so concerned that they have released an official warning about the risk of abduction. The notion that such an advisory is needed in Canada is appalling.

You may already know all of this. But I understand that to each of you, these facts are not just statistics and news releases. This issue is not about angry questions and indignant denials in the House of Commons, nor is it about United Nations reports. For you, each one of these statistics represents a person. A person who was loved and valued, but who has been taken away. Or a person who has survived the kind of suffering that most of us – fortunately – do not know from firsthand experience.

For the dedicated staff who run the Awo Taan Shelter, you are doing something every day to help women and children who are suffering from family violence or any other kind of

abuse. Your work makes a difference. You are appreciated. To the victims of violence, and to the families who have suffered loss, my heart goes out to you.

In my other career, I am a nurse. That profession brings one close to pain and suffering of all kinds, but it never shields you from it.

Awo Taan means, I understand, “shield” in the Blackfoot language. That word is appropriate to the safety and security and healing that is offered at the shelter. But no word can shield us from the tragedy of violence against women and children. No word can take away the pain of loss. No word can shield us from fear, when we do not feel safe. No word can undo the hurt, but we can help one another to recover, and that is why we are here today. Ceremonies such as the one today are a way that we can help one another to heal our wounded spirits.

I am honoured to be included in this “Mending our Sacred Circle” ceremony. Honoured to pay tribute to the victims and the survivors of violence. And honoured indeed to acknowledge the families who have lost a family member to violence or murder. It is also my privilege today to bring greetings from His Worship, Mayor Dave Bronconnier and my City Council colleagues.

I believe I also speak on behalf of all Calgarians in offering heartfelt hope that one day, shelters like the Awo Taan will have many vacancies. That fewer women and children will need such a shield from violence or abuse. Until that day, I commend you so highly for the work you are doing. Since 1986, you have offered a refuge in a uniquely aboriginal environment that heals both body and mind. This shelter makes a difference to Calgary women and children. It is making a difference today for the victims and their families.

Thank you for allowing me to join you and to share in your healing.