



Women's Legal Education and Action Fund
Fonds d'action et d'éducation juridiques pour les femmes

The Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW) and the Women's Legal Education Action Fund (LEAF) Recommend Significant Changes to Alberta's Justice System in light of the Treatment of "Angela Cardinal" in *R v. Blanchard*

February 23, 2018, Edmonton, Alberta – In a [joint submission](#) to the Independent Review of Circumstances Surrounding the Treatment of "Angela Cardinal" in *R. v. Blanchard*, IAAW and LEAF draw attention to widespread systemic problems facing the justice system in Alberta that led to the inhumane treatment of Angela Cardinal. As their submission states, *"it is clear that the treatment of Ms. Cardinal occurred in a context in which relations between Indigenous women and the criminal justice system are in crisis."*

The submission details severe human rights violations against Angela Cardinal, a 28-year-old Cree woman, who was treated inhumanely throughout the Preliminary Inquiry by the Crown, defense, and the court. Ms. Cardinal had suffered a horrific sexual assault at the hands of Lance Blanchard and was subsequently treated with disdain by the criminal justice system. As Lise Gotell, LEAF Board Chair indicates, *"She was treated as a "problem," an obstruction to the smooth prosecution of a serial offender, and arguably as an object—an instrument to be produced to testify and then shelved for further use, regardless of her human suffering."*

IAAW and LEAF commend Alberta's Justice Minister, Kathleen Ganley for taking a serious, independent look at the unacceptable treatment of an Indigenous woman victimized by sexual assault. We echo her leadership in calling on the criminal justice system "to learn from the mistakes that led to Ms. Cardinal's incarceration, and to address the systemic problems that it has revealed." As IAAW and LEAF detail, *"the inhumane treatment of Angela Cardinal is not an isolated instance of injustice, but is instead symptomatic of the mistreatment of Indigenous women by the criminal justice system."*

IAAW and LEAF's submission details many of the important systemic changes necessary to address this system in crisis. The submission calls for an Indigenous-led Inquiry into the Alberta justice system, including working alongside an Indigenous Human Rights Commission and the creation of a monitoring body to ensure monitoring and implementation of necessary systemic changes. Such monitoring is needed in relation to Indigenous women experiencing violent victimization, as well as Indigenous women who are incarcerated or designated as "offenders" within the system. IAAW and LEAF's submission also called attention to changes that are needed to ensure that sexual assault survivors are treated with dignity and respect by actors within the Alberta justice system. It must not be forgotten that Angela Cardinal experienced such inhumane treatment within the context of a sexual assault trial.

As IAAW Research Advisor, Dr. Julie Kaye says, “*Alberta has an opportunity to now come alongside Indigenous and International laws, such as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, to direct widespread, systemic change and independent oversight to address this system in crisis.*”

The justice system has reached a watershed moment. In the words of Muriel Stanley Venne, President and Co-Founder of IAAW, “*This is an important, heart-wrenching moment in our country’s history. Tina Fontaine and Colten Boushie cannot be isolated from ‘Angela Cardinal’, Cindy Gladue, Barbara Kentner, Helen Betty Osborne, Pamela George and far, far too many others.*” In memory of Angela Cardinal, who demonstrated incredible resistance in the face of a system that persistently caused her harm, IAAW and LEAF will continue to work collaboratively to implement the systemic changes necessary to address the crisis state of this justice system and to ensure justice for Indigenous women and for survivors of sexual assault in this province.

About Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)

Since April 17, 1985, when equality rights were enshrined in sections 15 and 28 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, LEAF has worked toward equality for women and girls. LEAF intervenes in key cases to ensure that when courts interpret equality rights, there will be a systemic improvement in women’s lives. For more information about LEAF, visit www.leaf.ca

About the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Woman (IAAW)

For the past 20 years, IAAW has advanced the rights of Aboriginal women through advocacy, education, research and program development. IAAW is composed of First Nation and Metis Women dedicated to supporting other women in their journey to build individual and family capacity while supporting the development of healthy, safe and caring communities. For more information about IAAW, visit www.iaaw.ca

For media inquiries:

Lise Gotell, Board Chair, LEAF
780-297-0326, lise.gotell@ualberta.ca

Julie Kaye, Research Advisor, IAAW
306-880-2910, Julie.kaye@usask.ca

Muriel Stanley Venne, President, IAAW
780.887.3115, murielv@shaw.ca