

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS HEARINGS IN YELLOWKNIFE

February 12, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I spent many hours a couple of weeks ago listening to the testimony of Northerners at the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls hearing that was held here in Yellowknife. I want to congratulate everyone who decided to speak in public. It gave those of us listening an opportunity to hear from families directly affected by the loss of their family members and about the scourge of family violence.

Here are some of my takeaways. When her father murdered her mother, Lesa Semmler became an orphan for all intents and purposes after her father went to jail. The same was true for Jayda Andre's nephew. The loss of parents always creates profound sadness, but imagine living with the fact that the death was deliberate and committed by a family member.

Mr. Speaker, the testimony of these two women made clear the second element: that their families helped them to the best of their ability, but the victims didn't or couldn't access counselling. Part of the issue is how interrelated the small communities are and how divisive this kind of traumatic event. Jayda Andre said that she didn't want to counsellors in Fort McPherson because they were related to the killer. That's understandable, and other counselling options are a long way away -- here in Yellowknife.

A third takeaway for me is about the importance of helping children. Lesa Semmler was eight when her mother died, and Joni Andre's son was two. They need special attention to process what has happened to them and targeted learning about positive ways to deal with anger in order to break the cycle of violence. To the best of my knowledge, this program is offered only in Yellowknife, so it wouldn't have helped either of these children.

Mr. Speaker, my final takeaway is about the status of women in the NWT. There is no escaping the fact that abusive men are tolerated, and violence against women is tolerated. Despite the fact that the NWT has the second highest rate of family violence in the country, no new resources have been allocated to prevention and eradication, except for the men's healing program. While many women support this program because they see benefits for themselves, it doesn't help keep them safe when they are being attacked, and it doesn't help their children who grow up in violent homes.

Mr. Speaker, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls hearing provided the first public conversation about family violence in the NWT in decades. It was an important experience for those who witnessed it, and I hope it was constructive for those who spoke. I'm disappointed that no one from Cabinet attended until the closing ceremonies. I hope that isn't an indication of their willingness to implement the Commission's recommendations when they come out later this year. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.