

Families await action by federal government  
By VIVIAN LUK, Vancouver Sun  
June 13, 2010 10:02 PM

In March the federal government promised \$10 million over two years to address the issue of murdered and missing women in Canada, but critics say they are still waiting for Ottawa to commit the funds to concrete action.

There have been 583 cases of native women who have been missing or murdered in Canada over the last four decades, according to Sisters in Spirit, a research project formerly funded by the federal government.

At least 18 disappearances and deaths of women have occurred along B.C.'s Highway 16 - also called the Highway of Tears. However, the federal government has yet to announce how the \$10 million will be used to address this matter.

NDP Status of Women critic Irene Mathysen asked in Parliament on Tuesday when Ottawa will "finally start taking this problem seriously."

Justice Minister Rob Nicholson replied, "We are moving forward on this file, over a wide range of solutions and proposals. We all have a stake in addressing this problem."

Ernie Crey, whose sister Dawn suffered from drug addiction and mental illness before vanishing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in 2000, was disturbed by Nicholson's response. Crey sent a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Thursday, urging the government to stop dragging its feet and to provide a definitive answer about the money.

"I think there's a lot of confusion about this fund," he said.

"Here we are, in the second week of June, and people are asking, 'What about the money you promised, where is it, what are you spending it on, how's it going to help?' If there isn't a plan yet, then just say so."

Nicholson was not available for comment Friday, but his press office insisted that the government will work with the provinces, territories, stakeholders and aboriginal people to "address this very pressing matter," and that "concrete action will be taken to ensure that law enforcement and justice system meet the needs of aboriginal women and their families."

Yet details will only be revealed "in due course."

"This is an urgent matter, I don't know why it's taking them so long," said Vancouver East NDP MP Libby Davies, whose riding includes the Downtown Eastside, where 64 women have disappeared from 1978 to 2001.

Davies argues that a criminal justice approach alone will not address the causes of violence against aboriginal women.

"There are underlying systemic issues of poverty facing aboriginal people and sex-trade workers in Vancouver," she said in an interview.

"There needs to be a public inquiry into Vancouver's missing women. The government

needs to work with organizations like Sisters in Spirit, and they need to get the community involved to investigate these issues."

Neither Davies nor Crey believe \$10 million is enough to produce substantial results.

"The budget for security alone at the G8 summit in Toronto is probably a billion dollars, " said Crey.

"I understand world leaders need security, but what about security for women who live in impoverished communities across the country? What about women who are suffering from addictions and mental illnesses?"

[vluk@vancouver.sun.com](mailto:vluk@vancouver.sun.com)