

The **Girlfesto** comes out of **Circles within Circles: Transnational Perspectives on Youth-led Approaches to Addressing Gender-Based Violence**, a gathering held at Montebello, Canada, from 8 – 11 July 2018. The participants drafted this **Girlfesto** on the final day of the gathering. The event brought together girls and young women along with researchers, representatives of national and international **NGOs** and policy makers from **Canada, South Africa, Kenya, Sweden and Russia**. It included presentations by girls and young women on what they are doing in their communities to address gender-based violence, as well as arts-based workshops, stakeholder sessions and an international exhibition, ‘**Speaking Back,**’ made up of images from 7 countries. The aim of this intergenerational, international gathering was for Indigenous and non-Indigenous girls and young women to engage with each other, share knowledge and practices, network, and learn from each other about participatory visual and other arts-based approaches to address gender-based violence. While gender-based violence is universal, and colonialism and patriarchy underpin discrimination and inequality, addressing it requires contextual approaches which also need to take account of sexual orientation and gender identities.

The **Sisters Rising** group of girls and young women illustrated the importance of their active participation in policy-making and program development. They highlight in their artistic piece the key role of creating bonds with other girls, sisterhood, making national and international connections, engaging in communication and knowledge-building methods that are also fun, and having opportunities for skills development and learning.

Contributors to the Girlfesto:

Indigenous Young Women's Utopia (Treaty 6 Saskatchewan, Canada) | Sisters' Rising (British Columbia, Canada) | Eskasoni (Nova Scotia, Canada) | Girls Leading Change (South Africa) | Young Girls Leading Change (South Africa) | Gender Activists (South Africa) | Social Ills Fighters (South Africa) | Leaders for Young Women's Success (South Africa) | Ange School (Sweden) | McGill University | University of Victoria | Mount Saint Vincent University | York University | Nelson Mandela University | University of KwaZulu-Natal | First Nations University | G(irls)20 | United Nations Girls Education Initiative | Canadian Women's Foundation | Pauktutit (Inuit Women of Canada) | Gorbachev Foundation (Russia) | Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights | Trudeau Foundation Scholars

We Want Freedom, Not Just Safety

Starting Point

The Girlfesto is premised on the belief that the inclusion of girls and young women as knowledge holders and leaders, with the mutual support of all stakeholders in addressing gender-based violence, is central to the changes required to make the dream of safer communities, where girls and women are treated equally and with respect, into a reality.

Vision

‘We want freedom, not just safety.’

Our vision for an ideal world without gender- based violence demands valorization of the principles of Equity, Equality, Justice and Dignity for all people. This vision is characterized by practices that celebrate diversity, using open communication and active listening. It is illustrated by the following image, created by a group of girls and young women participating in [Circles Within Circles](#), to show the kind of world that they are committed to creating.

To Realize This Vision We Need To:

- Learn to be uncomfortable
- Recognize and acknowledge the diversity of experiences
- Hear, not just listen, especially to girls and young women
- Recognize power and privilege within our communities
- Acknowledge and address the micro- aggressions and lateral violence in our communities
- Have an open heart and open mind coming into circles of dialogue
- Share counter-narratives (including stories of success and courage)
- Reflect continuously on how practices and behaviours that enable gender- based violence can be done differently
- Love and respect each other as individuals, and celebrate each other, our similarities and differences
- Adopt a Sisters’ Keeper attitude where we look out for one another, and support each other to ensure that we grow as individuals

- Recognize that boys and young men should be part of the conversations about gender-based violence

We Urge All Stakeholders:

(International, national, provincial and local policy-makers, community leaders and non-governmental organizations)

- To be curious, thoughtful, engaged, open, supportive, and generous in hearing the voices of girls and young women, and to be willing to engage in multilingual discussions
- To decolonize land, bodies, spirit, and nations, including Metis and their ancestral homelands: This means recognizing the connections of girls' and young women's experiences with land and water in the global context, restoring rights, land sovereignty, natural laws and freedom in order for girls and young women to exist as themselves
- To address shared and specific colonial histories and their impacts across different communities
- To create safe spaces for girls and women at various levels and in all ecologies
- To invest in resources (including resources to support arts-based methods) to support girls and young women to engage in cultural production
- To challenge and change unjust policies that enable gender-based violence
- To make policies accessible (through public digital and physical spaces and using language that is easily understood
- To track and monitor the outcomes of the work/collective efforts to address gender-based violence on individuals, communities and policies

- To foster political will from top-down and bottom-up to address gender-based violence
- To support programs and policies that help to ensure that communities are free from alcohol and substance abuse
- To ensure that culture and politics that support gender-based violence are not tolerated
- To support initiatives such as #Imnotafraidtosay (I'm not afraid to say) and #MeToo, and to not silence voices
- To create spaces, especially educational spaces for emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical wholeness for girls and young queer people
- To respond to the narratives of girls and young women about vulnerability and support their agency
- To explore means and methods that support girls and young women to construct and communicate their understanding of gender-based violence
- To promote projects that address gender-based violence in global contexts
- To develop more ways to share different initiatives and funding opportunities (both to support girls and young women and to raise awareness about the concerns of girls and young women)
- To commit to engaging more men and boys in discussions about gender-based violence

As Community Members We Commit:

- To insist on the importance of dignity
- To support girls and young women to take action
- To recognize the importance of initiatives that take account of the work on gender-based violence in a global context; in particular, support girls and young women to participate in this work at a global level through events like *Circles Within Circles*
- To increase girls' and young women's participation as partners in policy construction
- To include boys and young men in dialogue and activism to end gender-based violence
- To hold local, national and international leaders accountable for addressing gender-based violence

Conclusion:

This Girlfesto acknowledges the key role that girls and young women can play in conceptualizing, planning and facilitating events related to their lives and concerns. Above all, it recognizes the importance of listening to the voices of girls and young women and emphasizes the value of girl-led and young women-led dialogue and learning opportunities.

For more information, contact Claudia Mitchell: claudia.mitchell@mcgill.ca