

1,000 native women murdered, missing in Canada over 30 years: RCMP

The RCMP revealed Thursday that nearly 1,200 aboriginal women have been murdered or gone missing in Canada in the past 30 years



A vigil is held on Parliament Hill on March 5 for Loretta Saunders and to call for a national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women. Saunders, a young Inuk from Labrador, was found slain in February in Halifax. (Sean Kilpatrick / THE CANADIAN PRESS file photo)

By [Tonda MacCharles](#) Ottawa Bureau reporter

Thu., May 1, 2014

OTTAWA—The RCMP revealed Thursday a shocking number — nearly 1,200 aboriginal women have been murdered or gone missing in Canada in the past 30 years.

RCMP Commissioner Bob Paulson said most of those women — about 1,000 — are murder victims.

The rest, about 186, are disappearances, still logged in police files across the country, and in a majority of those — some 160 missing person cases — the RCMP says authorities “ought to” suspect foul play. The others have been determined to be disappearances for “reasons unknown.”

It's the first time the [RCMP has compiled statistics](#) across all Canadian police forces — federal, provincial and municipal — in the face of widespread concerns raised by native communities and Human Rights Watch. The Native Women's Association of Canada documented about 582 cases of missing and murdered aboriginal persons.

The data paint a disturbing picture that confirms the disappearance of aboriginal women in the population at a disproportionate rate, said Paulson.

It immediately fuelled calls for a national inquiry in Parliament — calls that the [Conservative government rebuffed](#).

Roseane Doré Lefebvre, the NDP MP on the public safety committee who demanded Public Safety Minister Steven Blaney call a national inquiry, was shocked.

“If it was happening to 1,000 women in Ottawa we would have a national inquiry on that subject, it's stunning to me that we don't.”

The issue has been gathering steam all winter, with each new report of a missing woman like [Loretta Saunders](#) — a young Inuk from Labrador found slain in February in Halifax — bringing new calls for an inquiry.

Aboriginal Peoples Television Network first reported it was tipped Wednesday the number might be as high as 1,000, but the Conservative government refused to say when grilled in the Commons by NDP Leader Tom Mulcair.

Paulson confirmed the greater number in brief comments to reporters after a committee appearance that was cut short by technical difficulties. By then, Public Safety Minister Steven Blaney, who flatly rebuffed calls for an inquiry, had left.

Paulson, who was among many federal officials who disputed the tallies put out last year by the Native Women's Association of Canada and Human Rights Watch, said this is the first comprehensive study to date, and a surprising revelation to him, too.

“Yeah, it was a surprise, I think what we can say is there was a misrepresentation or overrepresentation within the aboriginal community of missing and murdered women.”

“I think there's 4 per cent of aboriginal women in Canada; I think there's 16 per cent of the murdered women are aboriginal, 12 per cent of the missing women are aboriginal. So clearly an overrepresentation.”

The RCMP canvassed police forces over the life of the time they have been keeping records — about 30 years.

The full report and analysis of the data is not yet complete, and Paulson said it would be made public within a couple of weeks.

But Paulson disputed suggestions there was systemic discrimination or foot-dragging by police forces in these investigations,

“No, I can say the solve rate on the murders for example is exactly the same; assigning the perpetrator to a stranger in homicides — exactly the same between aboriginal and non-aboriginal women.”

He said “the problem” with numbers that were reported before “is that they were being held out as unsolved cases.”

On the contrary, Paulson said most of the 1,000 murder cases — 88 per cent — are solved. As for 186 missing cases, “we have an ability to determine that there’s foul play expected” in about two-thirds, or about 160, of the cases, while another third are determined as “missing-unknown reasons.”

“So they haven’t been under-investigated, they haven’t been improperly investigated, but clearly there’s some underlying issues as to why that’s there would be such a misrepresentation (sic).”

Paulson said the RCMP has been working with aboriginal communities “to get these numbers,” but he declined to say whether there should be an inquiry.

“Inquiry or not, that’s not up to me. What’s important that we get a firm understanding of what’s going on and I think that’s what we’re on the verge of doing, and we’ll obviously share that with Canadians when we have that.”

Asked if he personally felt it would help, Paulson hesitated: “I don’t know, inquiries are very . . . I’m not the guy to ask about inquiries, I’m the guy to ask about the facts.”

Blaney responded flatly to a call for an inquiry: “No, because I believe it is more effective to put in place real measures instead of simply studying the issue further.”