

Walk to remember

Murdered and missing women honoured in journey

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A group of 16 walkers from Prince George, Prince Rupert and Terrace gathered Monday morning in a Quesnel parking lot across the street from Season's House.

"We left Vancouver May 29 and we're walking to Prince Rupert," Mabel Tood said, who at age 74 is the oldest of the walkers.

The group, Walking-4-Justice, travel with a solemn purpose.

"We want to educate and create awareness that women are still going missing and being murdered," co-organizer of the Walk-4-Justice Bernie Williams said.

The number of women that have disappeared or been murdered in British Columbia in the last 30 years is growing.

"We now have the names of 3,044 murdered and missing women," Williams said.

"And 65 to 70 per cent of the women are First Nations."

The walk is personal for Williams.

"I lost my mother and two of my sisters, they were murdered in downtown East Vancouver," she said.

First Nations and community organizations in British Columbia and across Canada have called for action.

A letter, signed by the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and the United Native Nations, was sent to Premier Gordon Campbell, Solicitor General John van Dongen, and Attorney General Wally Oppal in early March.

The letter called for an inquiry into the workings of the social and justice systems, some feel, have led

to the disappearance and murder of more than 3,000 women over the last 30 years.

Since then two men have been charged with the disappearance or murder of women.

Denis Ratte of Prince George was charged with the murder of his wife, Wendy Ratte who disappeared August 1997. His trial begins soon in Prince George.

Robert Pickton was recently convicted on six counts of second-degree murder. Pickton has appealed.

"We need to look at the judicial system," Williams said.

"It's obviously not working."

The missing and murdered women have touched many northern communities, including Quesnel.

September 25, 1999, Deena Lyn Braem, a Quesnel teen went missing, two days shy of her 17th birthday. Although the RCMP suspect foul play, the case remains open almost 10 years later.

The walk is also personal for co-organizer Gladys Radek.

In a press conference held May 20, Radek said the walk came to her in a vision September 2007 while she was walking down the Highway of Tears on the second anniversary of the disappearance of her niece Tamara Lynn Chipman.

Chipman was last seen September 21, 2005 just outside of Prince Rupert.

"She was my brother's only daughter, she had a two-and-a-half year-old boy," Radek said.

Radek is not only walking for her niece, she is walking to give a voice to those families that have lost a loved one.

"To speak out for the families of the murdered and missing," she said.

The group of walkers expect to reach Prince Rupert June 22.