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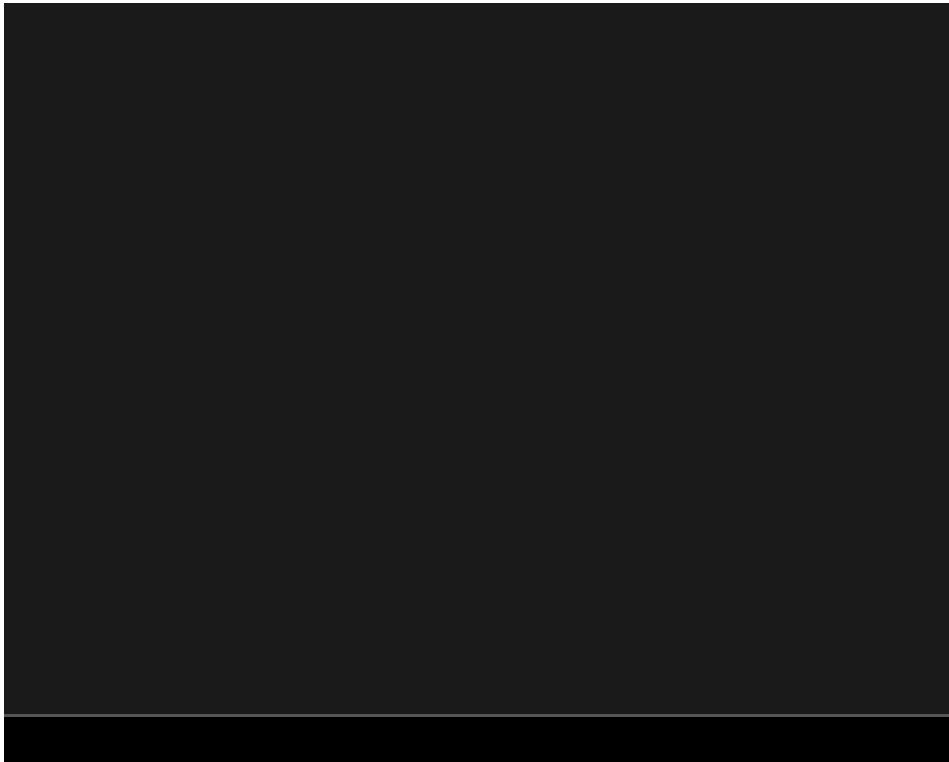


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Indigenous women ask 'Am I next?' to raise awareness about missing and murdered

Online campaign by aboriginal women spreading on Facebook

By Connie Walker, CBC News Posted: Sep 05, 2014 7:42 PM ET | Last Updated: Sep 05, 2014 10:08 PM ET



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A new online campaign is hoping to raise awareness and push Prime Minister Stephen Harper on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

Aboriginal women have begun posting photos of themselves holding signs asking "Am I next?" and — like the ice bucket challenge — asking others to do the same within 24 hours.

For Julianna Piwas, it's an issue that hits close to home.

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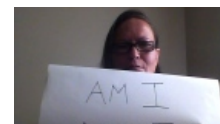
Her cousin Bernice Rich was killed last year and in February, her friend **Loretta Saunders went missing**. Saunders' body was found nearly two weeks later and Victoria Henneberry and Blake Leggette are charged with first-degree murder in her death. Saunders, who was Inuit, had been researching the issue of violence against aboriginal women.

In her photo, Piwas addresses Harper. She wants to see a national inquiry on missing and murdered indigenous women.

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"I just hope we're being heard. He needs to do something about it."

Piwas said she's encouraged that the challenge seems to be taking off on social media.

"A lot of my friends are doing it now and I've seen a lot of outsiders doing it too. I just hope every single aboriginal women does the challenge in honour of Loretta Saunders."

The RCMP recently confirmed that there are almost 1,200 police-recorded incidents of aboriginal homicides and unresolved missing-women investigations across the country. **Pressure for an inquiry has increased since the death of Tina Fontaine**, 15, just a few weeks ago.

The Harper government has repeatedly turned down calls for a national inquiry, but recently stated it's now open to a roundtable into Canada's missing and murdered aboriginal women.

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