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As Halloween nears, Indigenous activists and allies urge retailers to stop selling racist costumes

MONTREAL - As shops bustle with last-minute customers looking for Halloween costumes, the Kahnawake Youth Forum (KYF) and Missing Justice will launch a campaign targeting the sale of costumes which perpetuate racist perceptions of Indigenous peoples. On Friday, October 28, they will visit various stores in and around the Downtown and Plateau areas, asking retailers to remove such costumes from their shelves. Local campaigns which target "Spirit" brand costumes for their racist depictions of Indigenous women have also emerged in Regina and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Organizers of the "Wear a costume, Not a culture" campaign assert that these costumes perpetuate negative representations of Indigenous peoples' and reinforce harmful stereotypes. Jessica Deer, President of the KYF notes that "Montrealers rarely learn about Indigenous people in school, so the representations in sports, on television, on the runway or costumes on the shelf of a Halloween store shape much of what people know and think about Indigenous people. Since they are highly inaccurate and dehumanizing portrayals that are rooted in colonial ideology, all they accomplish is creating more layers of misinformation about who we really are."

Furthermore, many of these costumes promote the sexualization of Indigenous women and girls, contributing to a culture which normalizes violence against Indigenous women. Recently, the federal government launched a national inquiry to address the thousands of Indigenous women and girls that have gone missing or were murdered in the last three decades. Deer emphasizes that "Not only do many of the costumes also contribute to the great issue of violence against Indigenous women, but they also erode at the self-esteem, confidence and sense of identity of Indigenous youth."

The Kahnawake Youth Forum and Missing Justice believe that by continuing to put pressure on retailers through boycotts, public reproach, and direct action, manufacturers will be forced to cease production of such racially and culturally harmful costumes.

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