

BERTHA ALLEN (1934–2010)

People of the North mourn the loss of Bertha Allen (née Moses) who passed away on 7 May 2010 in Inuvik, Northwest Territories. Born in 1934, Bertha was a member of the Vuntut Gwich'in Nation of Old Crow, Yukon. She spent much of her childhood on the land, learning the traditions of her people. The Mackenzie Delta was her home for most of her life. There she married her Inuvialuit husband, Victor Allen, and together they proudly raised their family immersed in both cultures. She always returned to her beloved Yukon homeland to connect with the land and the people. She leaves a large family of 6 children, 21 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren, along with numerous relatives and friends.

Bertha was an advocate for social change, committed to the advancement of northern and aboriginal women. Her many career achievements included leadership roles with organizations in the North and beyond. She was a former president of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women in the Northwest Territories and founding President of the Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories. Later she became President of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

Bertha was instrumental in improving health and social services in the North through her participation in the Territorial Hospital Insurance Services Board and the Inuvik Medical Transient Centre and through her 2001 appointment to the Council of Grandmothers. She also served the Northwest Territories as the lone female member of the Commission for Constitutional Development, the Northwest Territories Judicial Appointments Committee, and the Northwest Territories Constitutional Committee. In the national sphere, she served on the National Aboriginal Advisory Committee to the RCMP Commissioner and on the Multicultural Advisory Committee to the RCMP.

Spending her last years at home in Inuvik, Bertha enjoyed sewing beautiful beaded moccasins, parkas, and northern clothing. She loved spending time on the land picking berries, walking, and cooking her favorite traditional foods. She always took the time to encourage and support younger women in their pursuit of academic education and traditional skills.



Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, presents the insignia of the Order of Canada to Bertha Allen during the Order of Canada Investiture Ceremony in Ottawa, 4 May 2007. Photo credit: Sgt Eric Jolin, Rideau Hall. © 2007 Office of the Secretary to the Governor General of Canada.

Her tireless work on behalf of Northerners was recognized by the deep respect for her among people across Canada and by the many awards and achievements she received. These included the Governor General's Award for Commemoration of the Persons Case, the Northwest Territories Commissioner's Volunteer Award, and the National Health and Welfare Canadian Volunteer Award. In 2005, the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation recognized her with a Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2007 she was named to the Order of Canada, and in 2009, Governor General Michaëlle Jean awarded her the Northern Medal for her leadership on issues affecting aboriginal and northern women. Bertha was known for her common-sense approach and passion for northern women and families. She will be dearly missed by her family, friends, and all who knew her.

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