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Canada must Correct Appalling Record of Discrimination Against Indigenous Women

December 14, 2011 (Ottawa) – The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) welcomes the decision of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to conduct an inquiry into the murders and disappearances of Aboriginal women and girls across Canada. CAEFS is a federation of 26 community governed service providers who work with and on behalf of marginalized, victimized, criminalized and imprisoned women and girls.

"We are confident that the Committee will see the linkages between the failure of the government to ensure human rights and state protection for Aboriginal women and the increased likelihood that they will be marginalized, victimized, criminalized and institutionalized," stated Kim Pate, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. "It seems that at every turn we are seeing the Canadian government continuing our shameful legacy of ignoring and further devastating our sisters. In addition to the women not being protected, too many of the families and friends of Indigenous women and girls who are missing and found murdered are told that their loved ones are likely off partying, prostituting or in jail. The outrageous reality is that too many are forced to defend themselves, and then criminalized for doing so."

"We are extremely concerned about the manner in which the government's omnibus bill will exacerbate the current situation," continued Ms Susan Dunlop, President of CAEFS. "Indigenous women already represent more than one third of those serving prison sentences of two years or more. Current legislative reforms will make things worse and will vastly increase the human and fiscal cost of the criminal justice system, at the expense of social, health and educational services. Imprisonment is expensive – far more expensive, in fact, than other means of preventing or addressing crime. In addition to this inquiry, the UN Human Rights Committee needs Canada to establish external, independent judicial oversight and redress mechanisms that are comprehensive and accessible," concluded Sue Dunlop.

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