

# National Women's Group Applauds Amnesty International



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**May 28, 2007 (Ottawa)** – The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) emerged from its Annual General Meeting in Montreal with a clear direction from its membership to commend Amnesty International for their report on *The State of the World's Human Rights*. CAEFS is a federation of 26 local, community based service providers who work with and on behalf of marginalized victimized, criminalized, and imprisoned women and girls.

In the section of Amnesty International's report pertaining to Canada, Irene Khan, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, expressed concerns regarding the “*violations of the rights of Indigenous peoples, including discrimination and violence against indigenous women and girls.*” The report went on to decry the lack of “*progress in implementing recommendations made by [the Arbour] 1996 public inquiry [into women's imprisonment], a 2003 Canadian Human Rights Commission report, and the UN Human Rights Committee in 2005 that there be an independent agency established to receive complaints from women prisoners held in federal detention facilities.*”

“We agree with Ms Khan's assessment of the Canadian government's failure to fully implement the recommendations of Louise Arbour, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the United Nations' Human Rights Committee,” announced Maître Lucie Joncas, President of the Canadian Association of the Elizabeth Fry Societies. “We are also extremely concerned about the government's so called law and order agenda, especially their regressive law reform initiatives and their potential interference with opportunities for conditional release,” added Ms Joncas.

“The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies works tirelessly trying to stem the tide of the rapidly rising numbers of women in prison. The current direction in terms of law reforms being introduced, compounded by existing social economic and health policies, all of which are guaranteed to increase the numbers of imprisoned women, especially Aboriginal and other racialized women and women with mental health issues. Jails are the only institutions that cannot say ‘our beds are full’, or, ‘sorry, we have no more room’ and yet they are increasingly being used to house people who need treatment, support and other forms of social and/or health services,” advised Kim Pate, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.

“Minister Day recently announced that a Blue Ribbon Panel will review correctional operations and propose yet more changes. If they recommend federal super jails and fewer supervised release options, they will make things worse. Plus, they will vastly increase the human and fiscal cost of the criminal justice system. Imprisonment is expensive – far more expensive, in fact, than other means of preventing crime. To keep a person incarcerated in Canada, it costs anywhere from \$50,000 to \$250,000 per year, depending upon the nature of the prison and the needs of the prisoner. If even just half of the seven billion dollars currently spent on imprisoning people was invested in welfare, housing, health, education and other community based services, the resulting resources would benefit whole communities, not merely those who are criminalized,” concluded Dr. Gillian Balfour, a member of the Executive of CAEFS.

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