



PRESS RELEASE

UN Human Rights Committee Blasts Canada Women Call for Action

FOR RELEASE NOVEMBER 3rd, 2005

November 3, 2005.

(Ottawa) Discrimination against Aboriginal women and women prisoners, and negative impacts on women caused by cuts to social assistance and social programmes, drew severe criticism from the United Nations Human Rights Committee, which just completed its 5th review of Canada's compliance with the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

"The Committee blasts Canada for its treatment of Aboriginal women," said Beverley Jacobs, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada. "No other word is accurate, given the Committee's comprehensive criticism."

"The Committee recognizes Canada's failure to protect Aboriginal women from violence, to address the poverty of Aboriginal women, and to correct overt discrimination in the law," said Sharon Mclvor of the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action. "The discrimination in the law is decades old, and it affects Indian women's ability to pass on their status and reserve membership to their children and grandchildren, and their access to matrimonial property rights and to basic human rights protections."

"The Committee told Canada to fully document violence against Aboriginal women, to ensure that police provide proper protection, to end discrimination in the law immediately and to ensure that there is equal funding for Aboriginal men's and women's associations so that women can participate equally in decision-making about their lives and communities," said Beverley Jacobs. "Despite the Committee's diplomatic language, it appears to be losing patience with Canada's serious, long-standing abuses of the rights of Aboriginal women."

"Similar recommendations were recently made by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women," said Mclvor. "It's way past time for Canada to bring these abuses to an end."

"The Committee is also seriously concerned about Canada's treatment of women prisoners," said Kim Pate of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. "They direct Canada to fully implement the recommendations of the Canadian Human Rights Commission and report back to them in one year. They stress the need to remove male staff from direct contact with women prisoners, to limit the use of segregation, and to establish immediately an independent

external redress and adjudication body for federally sentenced prisoners. The implementation of these recommendations is key to remedying the current discriminatory treatment of women prisoners. Canada must act now."

"The Committee has also reiterated its concern about the negative impact of cuts to social assistance and social programs on women and children, and other vulnerable groups, including African-Canadians, "said Margaret Parsons of the African-Canadian Legal Clinic. "The Committee tells Canada to ensure that cuts do not harm women, Aboriginal people and African-Canadians."

"The Committee also has specific concerns about severe cuts in the province of British Columbia," said Shelagh Day of the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action. "Its recommendation comes at a time when welfare rates are at their lowest level ever right across the country, and the safety and equality of the poorest people - who are disproportionately women, racialized people and people with disabilities - are affected. The human rights that Canada has endorsed are simply not compatible with the stripping away of social protections. It has to stop."

"An overarching concern of the Committee," said Day, "is that Canada has no procedures for overseeing implementation of the rights in the treaty, and for correcting the deficiencies that are identified by treaty bodies. We want to see Canada establish new and open procedures, so that governments are fully accountable to the Canadian people for the implementation of their human rights."

Contacts:

Beverley Jacobs, Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) 613-722-3033 ext.225

Sharon McIvor, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) 250-378-3348

Kim Pate, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) 613-298-2422

Margaret Parsons, African Canadian Legal Clinic 416- 214-4747

Shelagh Day, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) 613-232-9505 ext.222

To view the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA)'s submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee please go to: <http://www.fafia-afai.org/proj/hrc/iccpr2005can.php>

To view the UN Human Rights Committee's Concluding Observations on Canada, please go to: http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/CCPR_C_CAN_CO_5.doc