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Canadian Feminist Alliance
for International Action



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UN Asks Canada to Report Back on Poverty and Murdered Aboriginal Women

(Ottawa) A key United Nations human rights monitoring body has issued a report highly critical of Canada's record on women's human rights. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) reviewed Canada's compliance with the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, and issued its Concluding Observations in Geneva this week. The Committee asked Canada to report back in one year on steps taken to address inadequate social assistance rates across the country and the failure of law enforcement agencies to deal with the disappearance and murder of Aboriginal women and girls.

"Canada has serious work to do to fulfill the human rights of women," said Shelagh Day, Chair of the Human Rights Committee of the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA). "Canada is more than capable of fully realizing these rights, but has failed to do so."

"The poverty of women in Canada is a central concern to this United Nations expert treaty body," said Leilani Farha, Co-Chair of FAFIA. According to Farha, "The CEDAW Committee found that welfare rates are too low to provide women and their children with adequate housing and food. It recommended that Canada establish consistent standards for social assistance in all parts of the country, and ensure that welfare rates provide an adequate standard of living."

"The high level of violence against Aboriginal women was shocking to the UN Committee," said Sharon McIvor, an Aboriginal women's leader, and Co-Chair of FAFIA. "The Committee has urged Canada to establish an inquiry into the 511 Aboriginal women and girls who are missing or murdered," said McIvor, "and to remedy deficiencies in the law enforcement system. Poor social and economic conditions of Aboriginal women in Canada were also a major concern," said McIvor "and the Committee recommended a comprehensive strategy to deal with their poverty, lower educational attainment, poor health, and lack of access to clean water and decent housing."

Other deficiencies in Canada's realization of women's human rights include the lack of affordable child care spaces and housing, insufficient access to civil legal aid, inadequate services and shelters for women and girls experiencing violence, the cancellation of funding to the Court Challenges Program, the poor representation of women in public life, continuing labour market inequality particularly for racialized women, the mistreatment of federal women prisoners and girls in detention, and the elimination of Status of Women funding for advocacy by women's organizations.

"The CEDAW Committee wants to see real steps forward," said Louise Riendeau, member of FAFIA's Steering Committee. "So do we. FAFIA is seeking an immediate meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Helena Guergis, Minister of State (Status of Women) to discuss an implementation process."

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The CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations on Canada are available at:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/co/CEDAW-C-CAN-CO-7.pdf>

Further information is also available on FAFIA's website at:
<http://www.fafia-afai.org/>