



National Association of  
Women and the Law



Association nationale  
Femmes et Droit

## **UN COMMITTEE CRITICIZES CANADA FOR PERSISTENT POVERTY IN THE MIDST OF WEALTH**

### **Notes Discriminatory Impact on Women**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Ottawa) In Concluding Observations released yesterday in Geneva, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed great concern about persistently high rates of poverty among women, Aboriginal peoples, African Canadians, people with disabilities, youth and single mothers. The Committee reviewed Canada's 4th and 5th periodic reports on its compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights during its 36th session, which ended in Geneva on Friday.

"The Committee concluded that Canada is failing to fulfill the rights in the Covenant, including the right to an adequate standard of living, despite Canada's wealth and economic prosperity," said Shelagh Day, who was at the review to represent FAFIA, a broad alliance of women's and human rights groups, and the National Association of Women and the Law. "The Committee is also concerned that Canada's human rights deficiencies have a discriminatory impact on the women who are already significantly disadvantaged."

"The Committee has made important recommendations to Canada. If implemented, these steps would immeasurably improve women's lives," said Day. These include:

- Ending overt discrimination against Aboriginal women regarding Indian status, Band membership, and matrimonial property;
- Establishing social assistance rates at levels that provide a decent standard of living;
- Addressing homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency;
- Stopping the clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement from families on social assistance, the majority of whom are single mother-led families;
- Giving special attention to homeless girls and providing them with adequate housing and social and health services;
- Ensuring that women leaving abusive relationships have adequate housing options and supports;
- Supporting adequate child care services.
- Ensuring that there is adequate provision of civil legal aid in all jurisdictions;
- Increasing minimum wages throughout Canada to a level enabling workers and their families to enjoy a decent standard of living;
- Providing effective access to employment insurance benefits, unionization and labour standards protections for workers in the precarious, low-wage sector, who are predominantly women;

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- Eliminating exploitation of women domestic workers admitted to Canada under the federal Live-In Caregiver Program;
- Ensuring that in all jurisdictions women are paid equal pay for work of equal value in both the public and private sectors;
- Providing greater access to Employment Insurance benefits and improved benefit levels to all unemployed workers.

"The key issue now is Canada's implementation of the treaty body recommendations. There is no question - Canada has the wealth and the infrastructure necessary to correct the deficiencies in its human rights record," said Day. "And Canada cannot ignore the critical assessments from United Nations treaty bodies of its own performance, while being a member of the new United Nations Human Rights Council and urging others to respect the United Nations human rights system. Specific, transparent follow-up procedures are needed if Canada is to be accountable for its human rights obligations of Canadians. Action is needed now."

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FAFIA and the National Association of Women and the Law made a joint submission to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This submission can be found at: [http://www.fafia-afai.org/proj/hrc/CESCR\\_april2006.php](http://www.fafia-afai.org/proj/hrc/CESCR_april2006.php)

The Concluding Observations of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights can be found at:  
<http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/E.C.12.CAN.CO.5.pdf>

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