



THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA  
LE CONSEIL NATIONAL DES FEMMES DU CANADA

November 17th, 2010

To The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.  
House of Commons  
Ottawa ON, K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister:

**Re: Canada's Dialogue with the Aboriginal Women of Canada**

Canada has said it has maintained a consistent and principled position by not signing and ratifying the *United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (the "Declaration") due to significant concerns with the wording of provisions of the Declaration.<sup>1</sup> We are glad to see that Canada has now reconsidered its position and endorsed the Declaration as of November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010. In doing so the Government of Canada has demonstrated a commitment to foster open dialogue towards improving the lives of Aboriginal peoples throughout Canada.<sup>2</sup>

**We are writing to specifically urge the Government of Canada to engage in open and meaningful dialogue with the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) and continue to fund their *Sisters In Spirit* initiative for research, policy, and advocacy.**

We are aware that in February 2009 Canada was told it's not doing enough in areas like aboriginal rights, violence against women, poverty and racism by the UN Human Rights Council.<sup>3</sup> In November 2008, 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. 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.<sup>4</sup> CEDAW recommended that Canada develop a specific and integrated plan for addressing the particular conditions affecting Aboriginal women, both on and off reserves, including poverty, poor health, inadequate housing low school-completion rates, low employment rates, low income and high rates of violence.<sup>5</sup>

We are also aware that Canada presented itself as a candidate for a temporary seat on the U.N. Security Council six times, and was voted to the powerful post each time. That changed

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1 <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/mr/nr/s-d2007/2-2936-eng.asp>

2 <http://news.ontario.ca/maa/en/2009/12/ontario-asks-canada-to-reconsider-un-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

3 <http://www.vancouver.sun.com/news/Racism+poverty+aboriginal+issues+cited+report+Canada/1256907/story.html>

4 <http://www.fafia-afai.org/en/resources/un-asks-canada-report-back-poverty-and-murdered-aboriginal-women>

5 [http://www.fafia-afai.org/files/Backgrounder\\_CEDAW.pdf](http://www.fafia-afai.org/files/Backgrounder_CEDAW.pdf)

on October 12, 2010.<sup>6</sup> The UN Security Council is the only body which has the right to impose its will on other members.<sup>7</sup> We support Canada's membership as a means of focusing diplomatic attention on issues that Canada deems important.

The National Council of Women of Canada has adopted as policy and has urged the Government of Canada to

1. Work with provincial and territorial governments and with aboriginal organizations and governing bodies to develop and fund more safe houses/shelters, on and off reserve, including programs and services that respect aboriginal culture and traditions, for aboriginal women and their children who are victims of family violence. Engage stakeholders to successfully address the underlying issues contributing to the high rate of family violence within the Aboriginal community, and to increase the capacity of Aboriginal women to break the cycle of family violence<sup>8</sup>
2. Collaborate with Provincial and Territorial governments and with aboriginal organizations and governing bodies, and to consult with civil society to develop anti-poverty legislation that includes a strategy to eliminate poverty by addressing the systemic barriers to full social participation by all Canadians and which contains accountability measures for government, in support of the UN Millennium Goals<sup>9</sup>
3. Provide more effective prenatal care for aboriginal women, as they are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, so that their children are less likely to be born HIV+;<sup>10</sup>
4. Study the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* and undertake appropriate action using a conciliatory process to create a new and better relationship between the Government of Canada and Aboriginal Peoples<sup>11</sup>
5. Remove section 67 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* as quickly as possible and to draft an Aboriginal Human Rights Code in consultation with First Nations governments in compliance with the UN Human Rights Conventions.<sup>12</sup>
6. Sign and Ratify the *UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.<sup>13</sup>
7. Establish a national comprehensive child care policy designed to facilitate the development of child care services and resources which would, *inter alia*, be sensitive to

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6 <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/canada/101101/united-nations-security-council-foreign-policy>

7 <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canada-abandons-un-bid-in-embarrassing-turn-for-harper/article1753222/>

8 [http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/policy\\_2006.pdf](http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/policy_2006.pdf)

9 [http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/policy\\_2006.pdf](http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/policy_2006.pdf)

10 [http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/policy\\_2007.pdf](http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/policy_2007.pdf)

11 [http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/1997\\_NCWC\\_Policies.pdf](http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/1997_NCWC_Policies.pdf)

12 [http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/2002\\_NCWC\\_Policies.pdf](http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/2002_NCWC_Policies.pdf)

13 [http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/NCWC\\_Resolutions\\_2008.pdf](http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/NCWC_Resolutions_2008.pdf)

the particular cultural requirements of aboriginal and immigrant families<sup>14</sup>

8. Enter into partnership with Aboriginal communities and organizations to review and identify barriers to the use of Section 81 and 84 of the *Correctional and Conditional Release Act*, and create and implement an action plan to encourage its use for Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women. This partnership should include financial resources for those communities wishing to undertake the responsibility of assisting in the reintegration of Aboriginal women offenders; and Ensure that Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women are fully aware of Sections 81 and 84 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* and encouraged to apply under these sections<sup>15</sup>

NCWC urges the Government of Canada to collaborate with NWAC in reporting back to the United Nations on CEDAW's recommendations. NCWC further urges the Government of Canada to develop, fund and implement an integrated plan to address the systemic conditions affecting Aboriginal women.

We also ask the Government of Canada to respond to each of our eight policy statements above in their response to this letter in highlighting progress that is being made by this Government through continued collaboration and partnership with Aboriginal communities in addressing systemic issues of violence against women and children.

Sincerely,

Mary Scott  
President NCWC

CC:

The Hon. Rona Ambrose, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Works and Government and Government Services and Minister for the Status of Women

The Hon. Lawrence Cannon, P.C., M.P., Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Hon. Rob Nicholson, P.C., M.P., Minister of Justice

The Hon. John Duncan, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs

Hon. Anita Neville, M.P., Opposition Critic, Status of Women

Hon. Irene Mathyssen, M.P., Opposition Critic, Status of Women

*The National Council of Women of Canada is a federation composed of Local Councils, Provincial Councils, and National Organizations. Founded in 1893, it was incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1914 and has been designated by the Government of Canada as being of national historic significance for its role in Canadian women's history. For more information, consult our web site at [www.ncwc.ca](http://www.ncwc.ca)*

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14 [http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/1992\\_NCWC\\_Policies.pdf](http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/1992_NCWC_Policies.pdf)

15 [http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/policy\\_2005.pdf](http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/policy_2005.pdf)