

27 May 2009 AM
Item 4

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**United Nation Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Eighth Session
New York, 18 May to 29 May, 2009**

Item 4 (a) and (b) – Human Rights: (a) Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Report of the expert group meeting on the implementation of article 42 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, (b) Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people and other special rapporteurs

Statement presented by Celeste McKay, Director of Human Rights and International Affairs of the Native Women's Association of Canada

Thank you, Madame Chairperson. We welcome this opportunity to comment on the vital theme of human rights, from our experience in advocating for the rights of Indigenous women, their families and communities in Canada. Every State has the obligation to uphold and promote the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is concerned about the current example being set by the government in Canada. As we know, Canada is one of the world's wealthiest countries and enjoys a reputation as a champion of human rights. Yet, our reality is that we continue to face an enormous gap in the protection and fulfillment of our human rights. This was accurately summarized by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples in the report of his 2004 mission to Canada, which sadly remains true today:

“Economic, social and human indicators of well-being, quality of life and development are consistently lower among Aboriginal people than other Canadians. Poverty, infant mortality, unemployment, morbidity, suicide, criminal detention, children on welfare, women victims of abuse, child prostitution, are all much higher among Aboriginal people than in any other sector of Canadian society, whereas educational attainment, health standards, housing conditions, family income, access to economic opportunity and to social services are generally lower.”

This is only one example of many of international human rights bodies and mechanisms that have called on Canada to take effective actions to ensure that Indigenous Peoples can enjoy the human rights to which we are all entitled. Another recent example is the many recommendations made by States at the ~~recent~~ Universal Periodic Review of Canada. Our organization has repetitively expressed concern over the government's failure to engage in a meaningful dialogue about how to respond to implement these recommendations. Far too often, instead of taking meaningful action to bring about the needed change, the government has relied on simply enumerating how it is already spending money on existing programs. This approach falls short of making a commitment to implement effective solutions resulting in substantive change.

We are seeking a commitment from the government of Canada to establish a different kind of relationship where Canada will work collaboratively with Indigenous Peoples in Canada *at every step of the decision-making process*, to narrow the gap in human rights protection and fulfillment.