

CESCR Opening Statement

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Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action

Canada has a new government, and our Prime Minister has announced that “Canada is back”. He has renewed Canada’s engagement with the United Nations and just made an 18 million dollar contribution to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which we applaud. We hope that this signals a new embrace of human rights as fundamental to the well-being of Canada’s residents and to our role in the world.

However, when we look at paragraph 3 of Canada’s response to the list of issues, we can wonder whether, in fact, we did get a new government. The statement that Canada’s Charter is mainly a civil and political rights guarantee belongs to an old government and a different time. We expect this new government to embrace its obligations under the Covenant and to foster interpretations of the Charter that will encompass economic, social and cultural rights and ensure that there is an effective legal remedy in Canada for violations.

Instead we see the same old view that social and economic rights are not real rights; and do not impose legal obligations on Canada to provide clean water and adequate food clothing and shelter for everyone. Does “Canada is back” simply mean that Canada is back to its old disdain for social and economic rights? We hope not.

About women’s economic social and cultural rights, we want to highlight the strong connection between women’s social and economic marginalization and the violence they experience. This connection is starkly lit in Canada at the moment because of the crisis of murders and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls. These murders and disappearances are rooted in the impacts of colonization. Colonization

caused profound economic disadvantage and social dislocation, and has made Indigenous women targets for violence. In its recent inquiry into the murders and disappearances, the CEDAW Committee found that Canada is in "grave violation" of the CEDAW because of, among other things, Canada's failure to fulfill the economic and social rights of indigenous women and girls, making them vulnerable to violence and unable to escape it. This failure is deadly, and violates women's right to life.

The connection between failures in fulfillment of economic and social rights and violence is true for all women. Women who live in overcrowded unsafe housing cannot protect themselves. Women who flee their home communities and become engaged in prostitution because of poverty are at high risk. Women cannot escape violence when social assistance is not enough for them to support themselves and their children alone. Women with disabilities, who have very high rates of poverty, experience high rates of violence.

Canada claims to want to stop male violence against women, but it cannot do so unless it takes concerted, planned steps to fulfill women's economic, social and cultural rights. This it has not done. We ask the Committee to urge Canada to take violence against women seriously by urgently working towards the fulfillment of women's economic, social and cultural rights. We ask the Committee to urge Canada to take violence against women seriously. We ask you to reiterate and reinforce the CEDAW Committee recommendation that Canada improve the social and economic conditions of women and girls by immediately putting in place national anti-poverty, food security, housing, education and employment strategies.

In particular, we ask the Committee to urge Canada:

1. to ensure that the planned national inquiry into the murders and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls fully examine and correct the profound social and economic marginalization of

Indigenous women and girls, which is a root cause of the violence they experience, because it makes them vulnerable to the violence and unable to escape it.

2. to seek the participation of the provinces and territories so that this inquiry can be truly national in scope, not just federal, and fully address the social and economic dimensions of the inequality that is at the root of the violence.