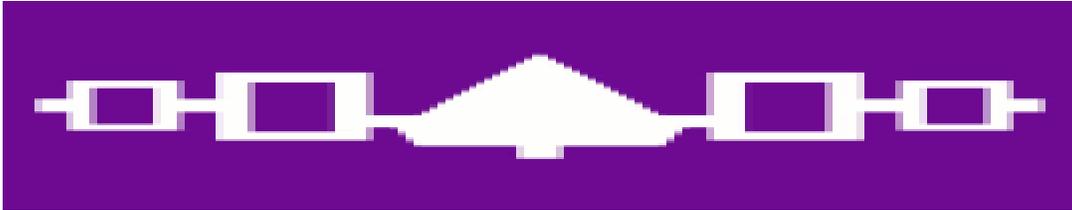


Six Nations Traditional Women's Council Fire

And

**Haudenosaunee (The People) FORWARD (For Women's
Autonomy, Rights and Dignity)**



**Report to the United Nations Committee to End All Forms of
Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**

**Canada's Flagrant and Scurrilous Human Rights Violations
Against Ogwehó:weh Agó:weh (First Nations Women)**

"You CAN do it!! Stand tall ... That's all you gotta' do!!"

- Voice of three-year-old Kaniénkéhaka
(Mohawk Nation – People of the Flint) girl
Savannah Raven Marr-Silversmith, great-
niece of Doreen Silversmith

History of Six Nations Traditional Women's Council Fire and Haudenosaunee FORWARD

Since time immemorial, we have always existed alongside the Six Nations Traditional Men's Council Fire with an equal voice in all matters affecting the Original Five Nations (the Cayugas, Oneidas, Mohawks, Onondagas, and Senecas) in this matriarchal society. We later became the Six Nations when the Tuscaroras joined the Six Nations Confederacy in the 17th century.

The Peacemaker was greatly instrumental in forming the Six Nations Confederacy under which the Six Nations (others took shelter, like the Algonquins, etc) adhere to the Great Laws of Peace. He appointed Clan mothers, Chiefs, and sub-chiefs. The Clan mothers traditionally wield great influence in the well-being of their Clans and Nations. They have the authority to de-horn (take Chieftainship away from) their errant chiefs. He also said it is to be a matriarchal society as women are sacred as they are life givers, are title holders to the land, and that women instinctively know the price of war. With the European Contact, their roles were almost diminished with the genocidal policies of the European oppressive systems of law, politics, and social inequalities towards their women. With that, a lot of our men started practicing inequalities towards our women.

More recently, there are attempts being made to fully decolonize from the scurrilous inequities of the European systems. It is a very slow progress, but nevertheless, we have made some headway. For example, the Chiefs and Clan mothers in the Six Nations Confederacy are sitting at the land negotiations with the provincial and federal governments in our struggle for lands in the Haldimand Tract. That hasn't happened since 1924. We happen to believe that if it weren't for some of our women taking the lead, along with their supporters, in taking direct action to get our land in February 2006, the Chiefs and Clan mothers wouldn't be even sitting at the negotiation table. However, there are still flagrant, scurrilous oppressions against our women by the settler society and by some of our own men.

Haudenosaunee FORWARD is an umbrella group based at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory and is the Ogwehó:weh wing of the Toronto-based FORWARD. The Haudenosaunee group started with a mother meeting of four women and plans to expand their membership through education and especially input into our reports to the United Nations. By completing surveys and writing their stories and / or recommendations, Haudenosaunee FORWARD offers a unique perspective of human rights in Canada for women.

This Report

This report draws from two sources of information:

- 1) A survey completed by 30 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women, both at Six Nations, as well as at drop-in centres in Toronto.
- 2) Our first-hand knowledge of the struggle for land rights at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory.

In attempting to fit the information from these sources into the framework of the Convention, we as Ogwehó:weh Agó:weh find it impossible to distinguish discrimination against us on the basis of sex from that which is on the basis of our Indigenous status. When considering that the Convention guarantees us the enjoyment of all rights “on a basis of equality of men and women,” we ask, “which men? Which women?” Accordingly, this report takes as its basis of comparison, Ogwehó:weh women’s enjoyment of human, economic, and political rights, compared with the enjoyment of these same rights by white, Canadian-born men. On this basis, we find that Canada has failed to protect, respect, promote and fulfill our equal enjoyment of rights.

Human Rights: Violence Against Women

1. There are hundreds of missing and murdered First Nations women in Canada, yet there is very little being done to bring the perpetrators to trial. This wouldn't be the case if they were economically rich white women.
2. First Nations women are more likely to experience violent deaths.
3. Violent assault by police and others is increasingly high.
4. Our survey corroborated the above, well-documented statistical realities. Women revealed their own experiences of violence at the hands of spouses, family members, police, and others:
 - In childhood, 80% had experienced physical abuse, and 80% had been sexually abused.
 - In adulthood, 70% had encountered family violence, and 63% experienced domestic violence.
 - Assault by police was reported by 47%, and police harassment by 50%.
 - When asked, "In the past six years, have your life experiences given you life, liberty, and security?" 100% said "No."

Economic Inequalities

5. First Nations women earn lower average wages and have higher unemployment rates than men or women of the settler society.
6. First Nations women are highly overrepresented among women who are homeless on the streets and in shelters.
7. Once again, our survey corroborated the statistical evidence.
 - 30% had been homeless in the last six years – the period covered by this review
 - In the same period, 33% had been evicted.
 - Half of the women surveyed relied on drop-in centres, community meals, and food banks for food, while 30% relied on friends and family.
 - Women reported that they carried many outstanding debts, including rent due (39%), debts to friends (40%), to family (33%), to credit cards (30%), loans (30%), and student loans (27%).
 - One-third of the women relied on welfare for their income, and 30% relied on social assistance for persons with disabilities.
 - Of these, almost all said that their experience with social services, welfare, disability, or trusteeship had been “very poor.”
 - Only 50% of those who had applied for disability assistance had received it.
 - While 73% required the Special Diet Supplement from welfare, only 37% received it, while it had been taken away from 33% due to recent eligibility changes.
 - Only one woman surveyed owns her own home and business.
8. The State keeps First Nations women entrapped in its oppressive system. When we become economically independent using traditional or treaty-guaranteed livelihoods, we are fined heavily. For example, women are fined if we are caught with cigarettes that we are trading with other First Nations Territories, and when we step outside of so-called “reserves.”

Political Inequalities

9. There is no equal representation of First Nations women in provincial, territorial and federal governments in Canada.

10. There are very few First Nations women policy-makers in the settler society realm of politics. But meanwhile, many of these policies disproportionately affect First Nations women's daily lived experiences, because we are overrepresented in the criminal justice and social services systems.

11. The governments of Canada do not recognize the Clan mothers' legitimate and equal role in traditional politics, for example in the Six Nations Confederacy which is a matriarchal society. However, because women are the traditional leaders, it is women who are leading many of the current struggles for land rights in Canada. As a result, women are disproportionately affected by the police brutality and other forms of repression with which the state targets these struggles. Here are some examples:

- A 16-year-old girl in Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory near Belleville, Ontario had a gun held to her head by a member of the Ontario Provincial Police when she blockaded a road leading into disputed territory that was being quarried by a private company.

- A former police officer who resides adjacent to land being reclaimed by Six Nations threatened to "shoot and kill all of your children!"

- At Barrier Lake, where the people were protesting against logging on their territory, the Sureté du Québec (provincial police), used tear gas to disperse a group including infants, children and women.

- In the April 2006 police raid on the peaceful encampment at the Six Nations reclamation site, young girls were attacked and a grandmother was beaten by police.

- In September 2008, Ontario Provincial Police once again entered the reclamation site, and brutally assaulted and arrested the male partner of one of the women; meanwhile, when two women came to the door to see what was happening, the police pointed assault rifles at their heads, and said "Get back or we'll shoot."

This is where violence against Indigenous women meets political repression, and it is all but impossible to determine where one ends and the other begins. In the words of one of our survey respondents, "The genocide starts and ends with women. The colonial powers know that our nations live and die with the women."

Government Actions in the Period Covered by this Review

12. In spite of the extreme economic, social, political, and human rights inequalities facing First Nations women, Canada's current federal government cancelled the Kelowna Accord in 2006. This agreement, which took 18 months to negotiate between provincial, territorial, federal, and First Nations governments, would have provided for \$5 billion in funding to address economic and social disadvantage in Aboriginal communities. Women, as the group most disadvantaged, were disproportionately affected by this cancellation.

13. The Government of Canada also lobbied against the passage of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and has failed to sign this historic document.

14. Members of the current federal government overtly demonstrate racist and sexist attitudes towards First Nations women. For example, when a group of First Nations women requested a meeting with a government official, she told them, "You can meet with us as long as you're sober, and you don't have a sit-in."

15. Ontario Provincial Police have failed to protect Six Nations women from racist agitators who have threatened the peaceful land reclamation blockade.

16. In 2008, Canada's current Prime Minister offered a public apology for the harms done to First Nations peoples by the residential school system. However, of the women we surveyed, 100% did not believe this apology was sincere, as the current government demonstrates no regard for the safety and well being of First Nations.

Voices of Ogwehó:weh Agó:weh

We invited survey respondents to write a brief message to CEDAW members. With the hope of empowering these women with the knowledge that their voices have been heard at the United Nations, we respectfully submit their responses verbatim to you:

“Egalitarian” across the board.

Compel Canada to sign the UN Declaration on First Nations Rights. Adhere to the UN Covenants for the protection of First Nations women – health, education, etc. Revive the Kelowna Accord – get the Canadian Government to revive it.

Demand that the government stop criminalizing us and using violence when we stand up for our rights. Respect we women as people. Deal with us on a Nation to Nation basis. Settle land claims quickly. Investigate and bring to trial those who are responsible for the missing and murdered women. Honour our treaties.

Compel Canada to respect women’s rights and also deal with us an a Nation to Nation basis with equality.

Actually help people and quit talking for nothing.

Equal representation and self-government. Equal access and rights. Jail the murderers.

All women are vital to the caring and nurturing of family, for all the races of our country, and that the value of aboriginals life is the same as any other.

Tell the Canadian government to back off of violating our Onkwehón:we women and to deal with us on a Nation to Nation basis and to recognize our right to liberty, security, etc – and self-determination and sovereignty and to honour the treaties we signed with them, like the Guswenta (Two Row Wampum). We have kept our promises. They need to recognize us as protectors of Mother Earth and stop abusing her. And finally, realize that we are People too. Also, to bring the perpetrators of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women to trial.

Compel Canada to settle the land claims quickly. Deal with us on a Nation to Nation basis. Honour our treaties. Stop criminalizing us for standing up for the land and for our inherent rights.

Stand up for our women and fight for their rights!

I deserve to be myself. And any women deserve to feel safe. Self esteem, good job and our families.

Compel the government to fully fund women's programs and demand that they fully investigate the murders and disappearances of our women. Stop the hatred. Compel government to fully fund the women who fought for Bill C-31. We need more housing. Tell government to axe the racist, misogynist "Indian" Act and stop calling us "Indians." Compel the government to settle the land claims quickly and in a fair manner.

No (message for the Committee), I trust the women.