

CFUW at the Universal Periodic Review of Canada: The UN in Geneva¹

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On April 26th, Linda and I, as representatives of CFUW and members of the International Relations Committee, were present for the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Canada. The purpose of the UPR sessions is for countries to report on how they are progressing with the promotion and upholding of the human rights of citizens. Canada in this case, presented its report and the other 82 countries present acknowledged the positives Canada has taken but also made 162 recommendations to the Canadian governmental delegation on efforts that Canada needed to pursue. The Government of Canada delegation was led by H.E. Ms. Elissa Golberg, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in Geneva.

The coalition of CFUW and the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) had sent in a NGO UPR report to the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) with the issues they requested be addressed by Canada. With one exception—that of non-State actor torture—all of the issues included in the CFUW/NCWC report (for example homelessness, poverty, housing, Aboriginal rights—including on the missing and murdered women— violence against women, the need for proper data collection) were all addressed. Many of these issues were also included in other NGO reports submitted to the OHCHR. Linda and I spoke with Theresa Edwards, the Aboriginal legal representative of the Native Women’s Association of Canada and Kenneth Deer, the Chief Administrative Officer of the Indigenous World Association, who were absolutely thrilled by the overwhelming support provided by the recommendations made by State representatives. Other issues that were recommended included the need for Canada to strengthen laws to protect children from sexualized exploitation and ‘prostitution’.

Other Meetings Attended

Ms. Golberg facilitated a meeting with Canadian NGOs in attendance at the UPR session. The NGOs asked questions of the Canadian delegation on homelessness, poverty, Aboriginal rights—including questions about the missing and murdered women— and on the rights of children. I asked the delegation why they have not initiated the recommendations of the Committee against Torture and Linda and I requested an explanation as to why the Government is not agreeing with the General

¹ Sarson, J. & MacDonald, L. (2013, May). CFUW at the Universal Periodic Review of Canada: The UN in Geneva. *The Communicator*, 19(4), 18-19.

Comments of the Committee against Torture. We are waiting for this promised response.



Conference Room of the UN Human Rights Council where the UPR sessions are held.

Linda and I also met Nina Joyce of IFUW, and arranged meetings with various staff members at the OHCHR. All of these connections were most informative and will be followed up once we are back in Canada.

Mr. Norberto D. Frydman, Human Rights Officer American Section, OHCHR, held a meeting with Canadian NGOs to discuss the UPR process and how to bring in new and emerging issues.

Future Recommendations

Based on feedback gained during these meetings, on learning from our attendance at this UPR session, and on the stark social human rights exclusion that non-State torture is a specific form of violence against women and girls, Linda and I advance the following

recommendations to CFUW and NCWC, who have polices on the need for the criminalization of non-state actor torture in Canada. The recommendations consist of:

- a) A report to specifically address gaining human rights recognition for non-state actor torture as a violation of human rights that the Government of Canada has rejected doing,
- b) To present a single-issue report to human rights committees. The next such opportunity will be when Canada is up for review by the CEDAW Committee.