

## **Steering Committee on Human Rights Implementation in Canada**

c/o Amnesty International  
312 Laurier Avenue East  
Ottawa, ON  
K1N 1H9

November 12, 2010

Dear Member of Parliament:

As organizations committed to the implementation Canada's international human rights obligations and commitments, we are writing to urge your support for [Bill C-304](#) (*An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians*) currently before the House of Commons for third reading. As noted in the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development recently presented in the House of Commons : "This bill ... directly responds to concerns repeatedly raised by UN treaty bodies and recently, by the UPR [Universal Periodic Review].

The crisis of widespread homelessness and inadequate housing in so wealthy a country as Canada has been a matter of growing concern to United Nations human rights bodies. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the previous Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, Miloon Kothari, following his 2007 mission to Canada, have urged that "the federal, provincial and territorial governments address homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency" They have specifically recommended that governments adopt "a national strategy for the reduction of homelessness that includes measurable goals and timetables, consultation and collaboration with affected communities, complaints procedures, and transparent accountability mechanisms, in keeping with Covenant standards."

In his Report the Special Rapporteur expressed particular concern about the severe problems of overcrowded, inadequate housing and lack of basic services in Indigenous communities, recommending "a targeted Aboriginal housing strategy that ensures Aboriginal housing and services under Aboriginal control."

In 2008, in Canada's Universal Periodic Review, serious concerns were raised by a number of states about homelessness and the failure of governments in Canada to adopt a strategy to ensure the right to adequate housing. Canada accepted recommendations to take on board the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing and to better ensure the right to adequate housing.

Bill C-304 represents the critical first step in addressing the human rights crisis of homelessness in Canada. It ensures compliance with international human rights law and provides for effective follow-up to recommendations from UN human rights bodies.

Numerous experts and studies, including the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, have found that Indigenous peoples occupy the worst housing in Canada, and that Indigenous persons, particularly those with disabilities, suffer disproportionately from homelessness. Thus a national strategy must also include an Indigenous specific housing programme at a national level that is based on the recognition of the Aboriginal right to govern their own affairs and to ensure that administration of programs intended to serve Indigenous people are directed and operated by Indigenous persons and personnel. It must also take into account the needs of Indigenous people with disabilities, Indigenous women and the Treaty right to shelter.

Bill C-304 introduces a new model for implementing international human rights in Canada, recognizing that human rights obligations require flexibility as to the roles different levels of government may assume. Quebec, for example, may choose to develop and implement its own housing strategy and assume its own accountability to international human rights norms, maintaining complete control over its own housing programs. As human rights NGOs we are supportive of Quebec maintaining control of its own housing programs and ensuring its own accountability to its international human rights obligations.

Bill C-304 ensures that representatives of all relevant governments, civil society stakeholders and Aboriginal representatives will be invited to a meeting in which, for the first time, strategies and programs will be developed together to implement the right to adequate housing and reduce homelessness.

We congratulate the members of all parties for having supported this private member's bill and for working together on important amendments at Committee. We hope it will receive all party support at third reading.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Littlechild" followed by a flourish.

International Chief Wilton Littlechild  
International Organization of Indigenous Resource Development

**On Behalf of:**

Alex Neve, Secretary General  
Amnesty International Canada (English branch)

Béatrice Vaugrante, Directrice Générale  
Amnistie internationale Canada francophone

Sandeep Prasad  
Director of International Human Rights Advocacy  
Action Canada for Population and Development

Rob Rainer, Executive Director  
CWP Advocacy Network (working in alliance with Canada Without Poverty)

Leilani Farha  
Executive Director  
Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation

Laurie Beachell, National Coordinator  
Council of Canadians with Disabilities

Kate McInturff, Executive Director  
Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA)

François Saillant, coordonnateur  
Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU)

Alexa Conradi, présidente.  
La Fédération des femmes du Québec

Dominique Peschard, président  
Ligue des droits et libertés

Teresa Edwards, Executive Director  
Native Women's Association of Canada

Nathalie Villeneuve, président  
Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale

Bruce Porter, Executive Director  
Social Rights Advocacy Centre

