



Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses

2 Carlton Street, Suite 1404

Toronto, Ontario M5B 1J3

Tel.: (416) 977-6619

Fax: (416) 977-1227

E-mail: oaith@web.ca

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Right Honourable Stephen Harper,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) to urge you to support the removal of all sex discrimination from the *Indian Act*. OAITH is a 60 member association of primarily emergency and second stage shelters for abused women and their children. It is the largest shelter association in Canada and has been working to end violence against women for over 30 years now.

We are writing you today to ask that you support the efforts spearheaded by Sharon McIvor in her remarkable 20 year plus legal battle against the Canadian state to right some of the wrongs embedded in the *Indian Act* that have resulted in the loss of status to generations of First Nations children. Following Ms. McIvor's victory at the BC Supreme Court, Canada, to its continuing shame, appealed this decision. As a result, the BC Court of Appeal reined in the scope of Ms. McIvor's victory but nevertheless declared that sections 6(1)(a) and (c) of the *Indian Act* were in violation of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and thus, after a period of a year that allowed the government to correct the problem, would be of no force and effect.

The Government's bill, *Bill C-3: Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act* purports to correct the inequity. However, as Ms. McIvor raised before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, the Act in its original form continued to perpetuate discrimination. The Committee clearly heard Ms. McIvor's concerns and proposed amendments to *Bill C-3* which, we assert, would have remedied all the sex discrimination in the status registration provisions of the *Act*. Unfortunately, the government challenged the Committee's amendments and the Speaker ruled all but one out of order. Time ran out and no motion to report back was voted on.

At this point *Bill C-3* has not gone for third reading and therefore will likely come back in the fall session of Parliament. This is why we write to you today. You can help ensure that the amendments to *Bill C-3* or any successor legislation truly rid the *Indian Act* of sex discrimination that has had such harmful effects on women like Sharon McIvor and their families.

Canada's record with respect to its treatment of Aboriginal peoples is truly shameful. Recall it was only two years ago that the Canadian government apologized to First Nations people for its involvement in the residential school system. It is long past time that Canada took decisive action to right the wrongs it has perpetrated and to chart a new

course into the future with the original peoples of this country. I hope we can count on you to join us in supporting passage of amendments to *Bill C-3* as proposed by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs to ensure that the *Indian Act* no longer arbitrarily divides First Nations communities and families.

Sincerely,



Leighann Burns

Social Justice and Action/Anti-Racism Anti-Oppression Committee