

# MEETINGS WITH FEDERAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

May 15-19, 2006, Ottawa, Ontario



A delegation representing the League met with the prime minister and several cabinet ministers and federal government officials. The delegation included National President Agnes Bedard, National President-elect Lorette Noble, National Chairperson of Legislation Danielle McNeil-Hessian, Executive Director Kim Scammell, Life Member Anida Simurda and National Chairperson of Resolutions Dr. Rayleen De Luca.

## Meeting with the Prime Minister

The prime minister welcomed the delegation into his own boardroom where introductions were made and an explanation given about the League's history and the importance of resolutions. In response to a query about the government's goal to eliminate poverty of children by the year 2000, the prime minister noted the government's serious concern about housing, employment and child care. He thanked the League for commending the federal government's recent action in the area of age of consent. Proposed legislation refers to the "age of protection" rather than "age of consent," as the term "age of consent" could be misinterpreted. The government hopes the legislation will pass within the year. It was requested that trafficking of children be a federal focus and the prime minister responded that it is conceptually the same issue as age of protection and needs to be dealt with.

The delegation commended the federal government for being elected to the Human Rights Council. The prime

minister hopes it would become an effective body, but pointed out the difficulties in this becoming a reality. The prime minister affirmed the importance of concern raised about developing countries and water, agreeing with the delegation that water is a basic right and should not be privatized, or forced to privatize, by the World Bank. He assured the delegation that this government would not be bringing forward assisted suicide legislation, and he personally is against legalizing assisted suicide, however, the government would not be able to prevent the introduction of a private member's bill. The group discussed the increasing prevalence of crystal methamphetamine and the issue of farmers' rights to save seed. Concern was raised that a refugee appeal division had not been implemented. The prime minister did not feel an additional appeal provision was necessary because, according to his statistics, 98% of refugee claims are accepted without the need for appeal. (These statistics disagreed with the League's so the prime minister promised to follow-up.) He further noted that it was well known internationally that Canada is the easiest country to enter. The delegation commended the government for the issuance of Christmas postage stamps. The prime minister admitted the "...constant battle around here to recognize Christmas."

The prime minister was aware of the concern about grandparents' rights of access to their grandchildren as he had personally worked on it when he served in the Alberta

government. Although he had not heard of it for some time, he recognized the importance of a federal law ensuring grandparents access to their grandchildren, and requested that his assistant gather current information for him.

In response to health concerns about polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), the prime minister felt there were conflicting studies with respect to these chemicals' effects. The delegation suggested that precautions should be taken when there is no conclusive evidence either way. The topic of MaterCare was raised and the lack of funding provided by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The prime minister was not aware of MaterCare, but promised to look into it.

Throughout the meeting, the prime minister was open, friendly, attentive and informative, and took notes. His official photographer took a group photograph following the meeting. The prime minister commended the delegation on the League's resolutions.

### **Meeting with the Minister of Justice**

The delegation met with The Hon. Vic Toews, Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Canada, along with his senior policy advisor. In response to a query about child poverty, the minister acknowledged concern, especially for Aboriginal child poverty, and reported that the government was exploring a number of areas pertaining to child poverty. When the government was commended for the recent focus on trafficking of women and children, the minister indicated the penalties were not a sufficient deterrent and increasing the age of consent/protection could be one facet of eliminating the sexual exploitation of children. He encouraged members to write to the prime minister supporting the raised age of consent/protection, as well to opposition members on the parliamentary justice committee urging them to support the legislation. In emphasizing the League's concern about crystal methamphetamine, the minister advised that Canada was warned by the U.S. years ago to prepare for its arrival. The U.S. government has made some strides in terms of education, health and advertising and will be asked to offer their experience and material to assist Canada in the elimination of crystal methamphetamine. The government believes in the need for a multi-faceted strategy, not just an increase in penalties for possession and distribution.

The minister stated that the current government does not believe in assisted suicide and would not bring forward legislation to this effect. In the discussion about the United Nations convention on the death penalty, the minister advised that the Supreme Court has ruled capital punishment unconstitutional, so ratifying the protocol would be "window-dressing." The minister would not be pursuing this as he felt the government has a clear set of priorities and limited time to address them.

The meeting with the minister was held in his private office and the delegation was treated with the utmost respect.

The meeting was outstanding with an open interchange of dialogue on the issues. It is interesting to note the minister's awareness of the League as he recalled being a member of the legislative assembly (MLA) at the annual meetings when the Manitoba Provincial Council met with the premier and MLAs. He commented, "Yes, we always had a good relationship with the CWL in Manitoba."

### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

At the meeting with the chief of staff, the delegation indicated that League members would like to see Canada take a leadership role regarding the death penalty. This was not on the top of the government's agenda at this time. In discussions on trafficking of women and children, the delegation was assured of the minister's personal concern about trafficking of children and child soldiers. The delegation was further advised of the minister's commitment to global access to water, but that CIDA would be the correct department to discuss this with. Through the Group of Eight (G8) countries, \$33.7 million has been earmarked over five years to deal with global access to water and an additional \$50 million has been earmarked, through the Canada Fund for Africa, for water and water resources in Africa. The current policy does not exclude privatization as a possible solution because sometimes privatization is more cost-effective. The loan conditions ensure that water delivery is done as humanely and equitably as possible. The government is very careful to ensure that the monies are going where they are supposed to go and "the best way to effect change is to give money and attach conditions." While the chief of staff was not aware of MaterCare, he promised to brief the minister and offered to assist the League in getting a meeting with CIDA.

### **Ministry of Health**

At the meeting with the senior policy advisor, the delegation was advised that the government was currently looking at the issues of trafficking of children and the illegal manufacture and trafficking of crystal methamphetamine. The government is looking at strategies to combat the problem of crystal methamphetamine and recently held meetings in which American experts were brought into Canada to discuss the problem. A strategy to reduce PBDEs also was discussed. The delegation dialogued on retaining assisted suicide as a criminal offence and emphasizing the value of human life at every stage. After a discussion on the use of stem cells for research purposes, the delegation was requested to forward a copy of the League's position paper on the issue. (Since the meeting, a copy of the League's *Position Paper on the Use of Stem Cells for Research Purposes* has been forwarded to the senior policy advisor to the minister of health.)

### **Status of Women**

At the meeting with the special assistant, the delegation raised issues of children living in poverty, trafficking of women and children, lack of postal subsidy for *The Canadian League*,

# CONGRATULATIONS!

## Congratulations to Parish Councils Celebrating Anniversaries

### 75 YEARS

St. John the Baptist, Estevan, Saskatchewan

### 50 YEARS

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Walburg,  
Saskatchewan

Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, Lampman,  
Saskatchewan

St. Bernard, Calgary, Alberta

St. Gabriel, Athabasca, Alberta

St. Mary, Westlock, Alberta

St. Paul Diocesan Council, Alberta

St. Theresa, Halifax, Nova Scotia

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

*Congratulations to the following members  
who have reached momentous milestones:*

Monica McKinnon – 103 years on September 27, 2006

Marion Bergeron – 102 years on May 26, 2006

Alphonsine Gaudet – 102 years on June 6, 2006

Marion Hartsell – 102 years on March 25, 2006

Louise Sherback – 102 years on August 12, 2006

Marjorie Stokes – 101 years on July 7, 2006

Julie Kohanchuk – 100 years on May 17, 2006

Mae Mulvena – 100 years on June 23, 2006

Matilda Richard – 100 years on March 9, 2006

## Magazine Deadlines:

November 30, 2006

February 28, 2007

August 31, 2007

All copy should be sent to National Office.

age of consent, refugee appeal, developing countries and water, crystal methamphetamine, cancer strategy, MaterCare, grandparents' rights, PBDEs, and assisted suicide. Relative to trafficking of women and children, the delegation was advised that, per a recent announcement, Citizenship and Immigration Canada will be providing temporary visas for victims of trafficking, which may include some provision for health care. An inter-parliamentary committee has been formed to deal with the issue of trafficking.

Some caucus members have identified the issue of grandparents' rights as being very important. The delegation was further advised that the Status of Women is focusing on poverty, gender equality, seniors living in poverty, trafficking of women and children, and matrimonial property rights for on-reserve Aboriginal women. It was recommended that a meeting be arranged with the Status of Women Agency in the future.

### NDP Critic for the Status of Women

At the meeting with Irene Mathyssen, NDP Critic for the Status of Women, the delegation was advised that it is critical to keep raising the issue of children living in poverty. In the area of trafficking, Ms. Mathyssen indicated that although Status of Women is talking about trafficking of women, she realized it extends to children as well. She pointed out Status of Women's support for raising the age of consent to 16 years. Ms. Mathyssen acknowledged the devastating effects posed by crystal methamphetamine on health and reported that the attorney general for Manitoba was recently at a federal parliamentary committee meeting asking that the issue be addressed. Ms. Mathyssen noted the resistance of one manufacturer of the products needed to produce methamphetamine to making it unavailable. MaterCare was discussed and Ms. Mathyssen stated that CIDA diplomats say lack of funding and commitment is causing these "good works" projects to cease. She acknowledged the importance of exploring this area of concern. In the dialogue on PBDEs, Ms. Mathyssen talked about pesticides in general and specifically cosmetic pesticides. She has experience in the area, having worked in the Ontario ministry of the environment. She pointed out a local London website that indicates overwhelming support for banning cosmetic pesticides.

Again, it has been confirmed: the meetings with the federal government are important, informative and productive. At every meeting with federal government officials, the League delegation was openly welcomed and treated with the utmost respect. It was recognized that resolutions originate from the parish level – the grassroots. It was demonstrated once again: the League really is on a "Priority List."

### Special Thanks

A note of appreciation to Life Member Anida Simurda for the countless hours she spent arranging these meetings. For the first time in 32 years, the League delegation to the federal government met with the prime minister.