

FOREIGN AFFAIRS CANADA'S NGO 18TH ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS CONSULTATIONS



Ann Doucet

National Chairperson of Community Life

“Unless the foibles and the failings of the UN [United Nations] on the development and humanitarian agendas are discussed publicly, they will never change. I believe to the depths of my being that they must change, because never has humankind been in greater need of a trusted, rational, purposeful, principled United Nations.” (Stephen Lewis, *Race Against Time*)

Representatives of The Catholic Women's League of Canada attended the 18th Annual Human Rights Consultations between Foreign Affairs Canada and Canadian non-governmental organizations on February 7-8, 2006. The focus of the annual consultations is the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) and is designed to aid the federal government in its preparations for these international sessions, traditionally held annually in Geneva. This year, the League was represented by National President Agnes Bedard, National President-elect Lorette Noble, National Chairperson of Resolutions Dr. Rayleen De Luca, Life Members Diane Curley and Anida Simurda, and myself as national chairperson of community life.



Pictured are: Diane Curley, Ann Doucet, Agnes Bedard, Lorette Noble, Dr. Rayleen De Luca and Anida Simurda.

Why does the national executive choose to attend? It wishes to demonstrate its profound concern for human rights in Canada and in the world and its solidarity with victims of human rights violations everywhere. This year, League representatives stressed human rights resolutions 2004.05 End Trafficking of Children, 2005.04 Ratification of International

Covenant Re: Death Penalty, 2005.05 Appeal Provision for Refused Refugee Claimants, 2005.06 Developing Countries and Water, and 2005.08 MaterCare International Funding.

At the plenary session, speakers pointed out that the emphasis this year is on transition and change. It was not business as usual as negotiations are underway for the formation of a new Human Rights Council. This is a very significant initiative as the present Commission on Human Rights has become politicized and increasingly dysfunctional.

Canada's objective is to facilitate a transition to a strong Human Rights Council. An important observation from a representative of Amnesty International with respect to the implementation of human rights is that, "If we're serious about a strong human rights system we must model that at home; for example, rights of indigenous peoples, women, against torture, refugees."

Following the plenary session, a working lunch focused on violence against women and gender equality and UN Resolutions 2005/41 Elimination of Violence Against Women and 2004/228 Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Canada has ratified the UN *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. The question remains whether laws are being observed.

Thematic workshops on specific resolutions included civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights and right to development; religious intolerance and other forms of discrimination (including minorities); rights of indigenous peoples; rights of the child and ad hoc committee on a comprehensive and integral international convention on protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities; specific groups and individuals (migrants/internally displaced persons/mass exoduses); promotion and protection of human rights (human rights defenders/treaty bodies); human rights while countering terrorism; impunity; human rights and sexual orientation; corporate social responsibility; and, racism.

Minister of Foreign Affairs, The Hon. Peter McKay, and Minister of International Cooperation, The Hon. José Verner, were present and addressed the delegates following their swearing-in ceremony on Parliament Hill.

On the second day, delegates participated in various workshops on human rights situations in countries traditionally raised at the UN sessions including Afghanistan, Sudan, Chad, North Korea, Nepal, Burma, Cambodia, Timor Leste, Belarus, Russia (Chechnya), Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Great Lakes–Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Middle East (Israel/West Bank and Gaza), Somalia, Zimbabwe, China, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cuba and Columbia.

Geographic workshops elicited very emotional presentations and heated exchanges on certain issues. Participants spoke very strongly against human rights violations existing within those countries and against perceived inaction by the UNCHR.

Workshops on the session of the Commission on the Status of Women, held on March 1, 2006, in New York, and a special session on the *American Convention on Human Rights* were also part of the consultations.

An important question posed in the workshop on the promotion and protection of human rights (human rights defenders/treaty bodies) was, “What can we do to promote, protect, and defend human rights defenders?” The death on January 15th of senior foreign affairs officer Glyn Berry as a result of a suicide bomb attack in Afghanistan and the November 2005 kidnapping of four Christian Peacemakers in Iraq highlights the utmost significance of this question.

One of the responses was, “If one of the objectives is to promote awareness of human rights defenders, why don’t we have an award annually for a human rights defender? Think of ways that you can place emphasis on this.”

You may access the full report of the 18th Annual FAC-NGO Human Rights Consultations on the League’s website.

Action Plan: Consider doing research on a country or countries affected by human rights violations. This research could lead to new resolutions and you may wish to address some of these issues with your local member of parliament. †

WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

League members are encouraged to participate in and promote the first World Elder Abuse Awareness Day to be held on June 15, 2006. With the theme *My World... Your World... Our World – Free of Elder Abuse*, the purpose of this day is to “...share information on the links and many facets of abuse and neglect in later life, as a family violence problem, an intergenerational concern, as well as a health, justice, and human rights issue. It is an opportunity to join together and recognize the many local and regional efforts to address the problem. These efforts are often overlooked. It is also a chance to speak with one voice on this important matter.” Elder abuse is a crime against humanity. A toolkit is available from the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse at www.inpea.net/weaad.html.

MARY, QUEEN OF PEACE PARISH COUNCIL ST. JOHN’S, NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR



In keeping with the national theme, *companions on the journey*, members of Mary, Queen of Peace Parish Council are reminded of the many people they meet on their journeys through life and the great impact they have.

Member Mary Moulton is a prime example of such a companion. She wears many hats: devoted wife; mother; grandmother; child care-giver; faithful council executive member; and, diligent community volunteer. It is in the capacity of community service that Mary is truly noteworthy.

For 35 years, Mary has contributed blood, plasma and platelets to Canadian Blood Services. Recently, she was honoured by Canadian Blood Services for her 200th donation. She takes the slogan, *it is in you to give*, very seriously. It is her firm belief that an obligation exists to help others. Congratulations and thank you, Mary!

WELCOME!

**The League is pleased to welcome
the new parish councils of**

St. Anthony of Padua, Timmins, Ontario
St. Francis Xavier, Vancouver, British Columbia
St. Mary, Vancouver, British Columbia

Welcome back to reactivated councils:

Blessed Sacrament, Chatham, Ontario
Christ the King, Edam, Saskatchewan
St. Stephen, Lacombe, Alberta