

Ottawa accused of failing Aboriginal children ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Canada is discriminating against its indigenous children and failing to meet its commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a group of advocates said Monday.

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and Kairos, a faith-based organization, are appealing to the UN to hold the federal government accountable for its treatment of First Nations children. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child does periodic reviews of reports that countries must submit on how they are implementing the convention, which Canada ratified in 1991.

The federal government's most recent report on how it's meeting the convention was submitted in 2009, and will be reviewed in the coming months by the UN body.

The two groups on Parliament Hill on Monday have done their own report, highlighting what they say is discriminatory treatment of indigenous children.

Their report, *Honouring the Children*, says First Nations children on reserves receive less money for health, welfare services and education and it calls on the UN committee to do a special investigation on Canada's compliance with the convention. It also makes a dozen other recommendations.

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The poor condition of many schools on reserves was given as an example of the racial discrimination the groups say the federal government practises against aboriginal children. The advocates said many schools lack running water, basic supplies and heat, while others are infested with mice and mould. Many communities don't have high schools, and children must leave home in order to continue their education, or, they drop out.

"There is no reason for this inequity in such a wealthy country," said Bianichi.

The substandard living conditions, health and education services on reserves were recently documented by former auditor general Sheila Fraser in her last report tabled in June. She said the department of Indian and Northern Affairs had taken various actions but overall had not made progress in closing the gap in education between aboriginal and non-aboriginal youth.

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper this week is attending a meeting of Commonwealth leaders that will focus heavily on human rights and discrimination and Blackstock wants to hear a commitment from Harper out of that meeting.

"Unless he makes a full and immediate commitment to addressing the inequality experienced by First Nations children and families, he and his government have effectively accepted racial discrimination against children as a legitimate national measure," she said. "All Canadians and citizens of the world should be alarmed and concerned."

The federal government, in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations, has launched a national panel on education that will produce a report with recommendations on how to improve the system.

Blackstock said it's a positive step, but many commitments have been made by governments before and yet the inequity persists.

"As Canadians, we need to look at what the government does, not at what it says," she said.

The groups are hoping their appeal to the United Nations will draw international attention to Canada's treatment of its indigenous peoples.

- reprinted from CBC News

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