

Interim Report on Violence Against Aboriginal Women Released

By Jennifer Koshan

Report Commented on:

House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women Interim Report, [Call Into The Night: An Overview of Violence Against Aboriginal Women](#)

Just before the House of Commons was dissolved for the election, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women tabled its Interim Report, [Call Into The Night: An Overview of Violence Against Aboriginal Women](#). In a [news release](#), the Honourable Hedy Fry, Chair of the Committee, stated as follows: “It is rare that an all party Committee displays such unanimity, urgency and passion in getting its message out. All members were so astounded and overwhelmed by the systemic, institutionalised nature of the violence against Aboriginal women that we wanted to make sure, this time, that their voices will be heard; that their cries for help and the hope which these hopeless and desperate women had placed in us was not lost because of an election call.” I [blogged](#) on the Committee’s Edmonton hearing back in January, focusing on the lack of attention the study was receiving in the media. The silence around violence against Aboriginal women is also identified as a major issue in the Committee’s Interim Report (at 3-4).

The Interim Report is to be followed by a Final Report with recommendations in the fall of 2011. The Committee identified two key principles in its Interim Report that will guide its development of recommendations: “Listening to Aboriginal people and enabling communities”, and “A coordinated, holistic approach to violence against Aboriginal women”. It noted several relevant articles of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) that support these principles. Article 22 was highlighted, which provides that “States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.” The Committee also referenced Article 19, which deals with the State’s duty to consult indigenous peoples in enacting and implementing legislative and administrative measures, Article 21, which recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to the improvement of their economic and social conditions and the duty of States to take effective measures in this regard, and Article 23, which sets out the right of indigenous peoples to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In addition, the Committee referenced the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) concerning violence against Aboriginal women, and noted that its findings affirmed theirs. Issues addressed specifically by the Committee in its Interim report include poverty, child welfare, housing, missing and murdered Aboriginal women, concerns with the response of the justice system, ongoing racism, and recognition and support for the role of Aboriginal women.

The Committee’s references to the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* are a welcome recognition of Canada’s endorsement of the *Declaration*, which was made only in

November 2010. It is to be hoped that the Committee's final report will contain recommendations and an action plan that take seriously Canada's obligations on violence against Aboriginal women, the complex causes and effects of that violence, and the leadership of Aboriginal women.