

**Speaking Notes
for
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**On the occasion of the Review of Canada's 17th/18th Reports
on the International Convention on the
Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Committee, Canada is honoured to appear before you today to discuss our implementation of our obligations under the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*.

I am Diane Fulford, Assistant Deputy Minister for Citizenship and Heritage in the Department of Canadian Heritage. Our delegation today is comprised of representatives from various federal government departments, including: Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Justice, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Citizenship and Immigration, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and Human Resources and Social Development. We are also pleased to have representatives from the provinces of Québec, Ontario, and British Columbia. While not all provinces and territories could be here today, you can be assured that we are continuing to collaborate closely with them in the implementation of this Convention.

Let me begin by saying, Canada commends the Committee for the key role it has played in the global campaign against racism in all its forms. The Committee has been instrumental in focusing attention on the implementation of this important international human rights instrument, and in sharing best practices in eliminating racial discrimination. Canada deeply appreciates your ongoing efforts.

We look forward to discussing Canada's combined Seventeenth/Eighteenth Report, which covers the period from June 2001 to May 2005, and anticipate that today's dialogue will be fruitful for us all.

During our presentation, in addition to highlighting a few of the efforts documented in our report, we would like to provide the Committee with information on further steps that have been taken to fight racial discrimination in Canada since the period covered by this report.

A diverse society:

As is well known by this Committee, our country has one of the world's most multicultural and pluralistic societies, with residents now claiming more than 200 ethnic origins.

As our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, said recently:

“Pluralism is essential to our civil society and economic strength. It evolved out of our foundational values: freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Generations of immigrants from all over the world have found peace and prosperity here. They have found equality of opportunity, appreciation for differences, and openness to change.”

Canada is a country marked and enriched by the many different backgrounds of its population.

And, the process of demographic change in our country is likely to accelerate in the years ahead.

In 2005, using data from the 1996 and 2001 censuses, demographic projections were developed to get a sense of the future make-up of our society in 2017, the 150th anniversary of Canada’s Confederation.

The results were very revealing.

By 2017 one Canadian in five would be of non-Caucasian, non-Aboriginal background.

Given this fact, it is particularly important for Canada to continue to take active measures to build a society where racial discrimination is not tolerated.

Canada continues its efforts to remain an international model of how different peoples and cultures can live together in an atmosphere of harmony and respect. We firmly believe in the principle that all citizens, regardless of their racial, ethnic or religious background, must have an equal voice in the affairs of their nation, and an equal right to participate fully in all facets of society.

As indicated in our last appearance before you, our society is built on a robust legal framework that advances the principles of respect and equality of opportunity for all. Although Canada is not immune from acts of racial discrimination, policies and recourses are in place to address these issues and we are continually looking for ways to enhance and complement our efforts to combat racism.

New Measures since the 17th/18th report:

I am pleased to inform you that, in the past year, Canada has acted decisively on a number of issues of particular interest to this Committee.

For example, funds have been set aside for the creation of a new agency that will offer services to expedite foreign credential assessment and recognition, in an effort to address employment barriers faced by many immigrants. Further, an additional \$307 million has been provided to help support immigration settlement services and supports.

The Right of Permanent Residence Fee was also cut in half to lessen the financial burden of new immigrants when they're starting a new life in Canada.

Further, a formal apology was offered to the Chinese Canadian community for the Head Tax of the 19th and early 20th century. A new recognition program is being created to highlight the contributions of communities that may have been adversely affected by immigration and war time measures of the past.

Aboriginal Issues:

Aboriginal health status has been improving in Canada. For example, the gap in life expectancy between First Nations and non-Aboriginal Canadians has narrowed considerably since 1980 and the gap in infant mortality rate, which fell by 60% between 1979 and 1993, has continued to close since. However, despite efforts, many Aboriginal communities face particular challenges in terms of poverty, health and education, and Aboriginal health status is still below that of other Canadians.

In a nation as prosperous and as progressive as ours, this situation is unacceptable. In response, Canada is taking concrete action on issues of particular concern to Aboriginal peoples.

In March 2006, the government implemented the Protocol for Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Communities. These new standards will help ensure that clean drinking water is available in First Nation communities.

As will be outlined in our responses to the advance questions put to us by this Committee's Rapporteur, we are making other special efforts to address the health issues of Aboriginal peoples.

Further, in May 2006, the Government of Canada approved a Settlement Agreement regarding the Indian Residential Schools to foster reconciliation and healing among all Canadians. This Agreement will broaden access to both compensation and mental health supports to all former students of Indian residential schools.

Working in partnership with First Nations leaders, Canada is also making progress on the question of matrimonial property rights on reserves. This year, a Ministerial Representative was appointed to work with the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations in developing a plan for consultations. This nation-wide consultation is the first of a series of measures to protect the rights and to ensure the well-being of women, children and families living on-reserve.

To address the very serious issue of violence against Aboriginal women, Canada continues to support the Sisters in Spirit from Native Women's Association of Canada. This initiative will quantify the extent of violence against Aboriginal women, identify root causes, and identify programs and services that can be improved to address and eliminate racial and sexual violence.

In March 2006, the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women hosted a national Policy Forum on Aboriginal Women and Violence entitled Building Healthy and Safe Communities. The Forum brought together government officials, Inuit, Metis, and First Nations women, to discuss gaps in programs and services, possible solutions for change and to showcase best practices.

Another important development is Canada's decision to repeal Section 67 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, which has had the effect of shielding the provisions of the *Indian Act*, and any decisions made pursuant to it, from the protection of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*.

This subject will also be addressed in more detail shortly in our responses to the advance questions.

Action Plans against Racism:

Returning to Canada's Seventeenth/Eighteenth report, it is important for us to

highlight Canada's Action Plan Against Racism and a number of provincial and territorial strategies for fighting racism.

A Canada for All: Canada's Action Plan against Racism is one of the newest pillars supporting efforts to eliminate racial discrimination. This coordinated approach, which brings together some 20 different departments within the federal government, is noted in our report and a full copy has been provided to you.

Delivering on Canada's commitment to consult annually with stakeholders on progress, meetings were held across the country. Overall, the Action Plan has been well received during these meetings and stakeholders are very interested in seeing the work continue and expand.

New initiatives have been put in place to respond to gaps in the following areas: workplace discrimination; youth integration; race-based issues in the justice system; hate crimes; law enforcement and broadening access to government programs and services. Some of these initiatives will be addressed this afternoon in our responses to the Rapporteur's written questions, so for now I will note that the Action Plan is nearing completion of its second year. Some recent highlights of its implementation include the release of the first year of hate crime data for the cities of London and Ottawa; and the active engagement of regional staff on the Racism-Free Workplace Strategy.

Provincial-territorial initiatives

(Madam/Mr.) Chair, I would like to underscore the significant role played by provincial and territorial governments in combating racial discrimination, by highlighting a few initiatives they have undertaken:

To respond to special needs of Aboriginal children and families, in 2003, Manitoba restructured its child welfare system. Manitoba's legislation establishes three Aboriginal Child and Family Services Authorities, to enable First Nations and Metis communities to develop and deliver culturally sensitive child welfare and adoption services.

In Quebec, with a view to developing an anti-racism and anti-racial discrimination policy, a parliamentary committee heard from nearly one hundred organizations on issues relating to racism and discrimination during the fall of 2006. This

committee is consistent with the Government of Quebec's strategy in recent years to facilitate the integration and full participation in society of Quebecers of all origins. This spring, Quebec will develop a policy and plan of action on racism and racial discrimination.

Ontario has created a Hate Crimes Community Working Group mandated to advise the government on strategies for reducing the incidence of hate crimes and to better address the needs of victims of hate. The Working Group submitted a report in December 2006. In response, the Ontario government has established an 18-month project to develop a comprehensive hate crimes reduction strategy building on the recommendations contained in the report.

In Alberta, the *Help Make a Difference* initiative encourages Albertans to contribute to building a fair and respectful society through their own actions. Public service announcements were produced, focused on the themes of cultural diversity, inclusion of persons with disabilities, and women.

In February of each year in New Brunswick, heritage groups, communities, schools, access centres and libraries host special activities to recognize the province's diverse heritage. The theme for 2007 – Our Rights, Our Freedoms, Our Heritage – will give everyone an opportunity to reflect on the values of citizenship and human rights.

British Columbia has a Strategic Framework for Action, which encourages joint action on multiculturalism and the elimination of racism. This strategy involves the participation of the private sector, municipalities, non-government organizations, media, education, and the provincial government. As well, British Columbia is forging a New Relationship with Aboriginal people founded on respect, recognition and reconciliation of Aboriginal Rights and Title.

And, Nunavut, a territory officially inaugurated in 1999, passed its first Human Rights Act in 2003, which prohibits racial discrimination.

The examples I have just given represent only a small sample of the work being done by Canada's provincial and territorial governments to fight racial discrimination in our country.

Partners:

Governments cannot combat racism alone. We would like to take a moment to acknowledge the efforts of our partners in contributing to the elimination of racism. For example,

- We are honoured that the Aga Khan has chosen Ottawa, our country's capital, to establish its Global Centre for Pluralism and we are proud to bring our contribution to this initiative.
- The Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination, an initiative led by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, has been established. To date, nine municipalities, including Montréal, Toronto and Calgary, have joined the Coalition. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Union of Municipalities of Quebec have also indicated their support.
- We wish to recognize, as well, the efforts of the many Canadian non-governmental organizations who work to increase public awareness, understanding and informed public dialogue about multiculturalism, racism and cultural diversity in Canada. In fact, we met with a number of organizations prior to this appearance and I see representatives of several NGOs are here today. We applaud their continuing efforts.
- Finally, among examples of government initiatives to engage civil society and ethno-cultural communities, I would like to mention the ongoing Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security, which provides a forum to discuss emerging trends and developments, provides insight on how national security measures impact Canada's diverse communities, and promotes the protection of civil order, mutual respect and common understanding.

Taken together, all of the initiatives I have described today, and the others detailed in Canada's latest reports, symbolize our country's unwavering commitment to combat racial discrimination.

Canadians recognize the scope of the challenge, and we remain determined to achieve it, no matter how long it takes.

Mr. / Madam Chair, esteemed members of the Committee, this concludes my opening remarks. On behalf of the Government of Canada, I thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you.

We would now be happy to provide you with responses to the list of 32 advance questions received from the Country Rapporteur. We will try to be as concise, yet comprehensive, as we can.

I will call upon various members of the delegation to address the issues as appropriate to their areas of expertise.

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