

The Issue: Aboriginal Peoples

The United Nations Human Development Index has ranked First Nations in 68th place compared to 8th place for Canada.

Spending on First Nations is half the amount for average Canadians: between \$7,000-\$8,000 compared to \$15,000-\$16,000. Since 2000, First Nations budgets have declined by almost 13%. By contrast, Canada Health and Social Transfers to provinces are growing at an average rate of 6.6% per year.

In 2001, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal Peoples was 19.1%, while it was 7.4% for the total population in Canada. The unemployment rate is 22% for First Nations and Inuit people and 14% for Métis people.

Eighty percent (80%) of First Nations Peoples have personal incomes below \$30,000 per year. In 2000, 41.6% of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada had low incomes -- more than double the national average.

One in four First Nations children lives in poverty compared to one in six for children in the rest of Canada. Suicide accounts for 38% of all deaths for First Nations youth aged 10-19. Inuit youth suicide rate is six times the national average.

Water and sanitation systems in Aboriginal communities are inadequate. Nearly 100 reserves across Canada have boil-water advisories.

Aboriginal women have had and continue to bear the brunt of social, political and economic injustice, including violence. The crisis of violence against Aboriginal women was highlighted in Amnesty International's 2004 report, *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada*. No systemic solutions have yet been implemented to end this crisis and the violence continues.

The United Nations has noted Canada's poor record on Aboriginal Peoples. The UN Report of the *Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people* (December 2004) states that:

Poverty, infant mortality, unemployment, morbidity, suicide, criminal detention, children on welfare, women victims of abuse, child prostitution, are all much higher among Aboriginal people than in any other sector of Canadian society, whereas educational attainment, health standards, housing conditions, family income, access to economic opportunity and to social services are generally lower.

Why is this an issue?

More than ten years ago, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples made extensive recommendations to improve the situation of Aboriginal Peoples, however, these recommendations were either ignored or ineffectively implemented.

In November 2005, the Aboriginal Summit in Kelowna B.C. gave hope that we could start closing the gap between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. Health, education, economic development, relationships between government and Aboriginal Peoples, and housing were on the agenda.

Since then, Harper's Conservative government has failed to commit the funds agreed to in the Kelowna Accord.

The 2007 federal budget ignored the needs and issues of Aboriginal Peoples.

The Conservative government has withdrawn its support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Persons.

The current federal government is effectively turning its back on Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Strong, vibrant, healthy and prosperous Aboriginal communities make for a better Canada. What we need is the political will to make it happen.

What will the candidates and parties do about this issue?

Ask your MP and candidates for office:

If your party is elected to form a government:

- How will you close the social and economic gap between Aboriginal Peoples and other people in Canada and what resources (financial and other) would your party be willing to commit to resolve this gap?
- What is your party's position on the Kelowna agreement?
- What concrete initiatives will you undertake to eliminate poverty and reduce unemployment rates of Aboriginal People?
- What initiatives will you undertake to deal with the water, education, health care and housing crisis that is currently occurring within Aboriginal communities?
- What steps will you take to ensure that Aboriginal youth are provided with the support and resources needed for a healthy and successful future?
- What will you do to address the high rates of violence against Aboriginal women, among other important issues?
- How do you propose to resolve the land claims and treaty rights of Aboriginal Peoples?