



Press release
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**The Ligue des droits et libertés and fifty other groups release
harsh report on violations of economic and social rights**

Montreal, March 12, 2006 – The *Social Report*, which is being made public today, paints a harsh portrait of the situation of economic and social rights in Quebec. The report denounces both the plainly regressive character of certain government measures as well as the insufficiency of others. The government has made choices that have resulted in significant violations of rights which affect a majority of Quebecers.

Governments are subject to international examination

While the United Nations has started the process of examining the state of economic and social rights to Canada, the *Social Report* of the Ligue des droits et libertés criticizes elected officials for the non-observance by our governments of their obligations with regard to economic and social rights. In particular, it denounces:

- the insufficiency of minimum wage which keeps workers with low incomes in a state of poverty;
- the withdrawal of the right to unionize for three significant groups of female workers;
- the increase in the number of users of food banks, of which 40% are children;
- the effects of the health system's under-funding; and
- the lack of initiative in solving the shortage of affordable housing.

In May 2006, the Canadian and Québec governments will have to report, before the United Nations Committee on the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* on the state of economic and social rights of citizens of this country. In preparation of this hearing, the Committee of Experts, which will also have received the Ligue's *Social Report*, has already addressed several questions to the Canadian and Québec governments indicating its concerns about the increase in poverty, food needs, the conditions of the homeless, student debt, the situation of the Native peoples, etc. This process of accountability in which our governments will appear before the Committee of Experts of the United Nations is also a process of accountability to the Canadian public. The Committee of Experts has on previous occasions already indicated to our governments that they are required to account for their commitments both on an international level as well as to the people directly concerned. Despite this, neither Quebec nor Canada has established a mechanism of dialogue with groups in civil society on the

subject of the follow-up to the Committee's recommendations for the full implementation of economic and social rights.

What role for Quebec on the international stage?

Quebec wants to be recognized as having a capacity to act on the international stage. For this reason, it calls for the right to put forward its own point of view during the negotiation of treaties which touch its fields of jurisdiction and, as the Minister of International Relations has declared, the province wants to be able to put forward its expertise in the field of human rights. These aspirations, albeit legitimate, necessitate that Quebec do more to conform to its commitments both to the international community and to its own population. How can Quebec seriously hope to play a credible role on the international stage when it does not conform to its obligations under the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* here at home?

On the eve of the re-convening of the National Assembly of Quebec, the Ligue demands that the Charest government explain clearly how it intends to correct this ongoing situation. As far back as 1998, the Committee of Experts of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* criticized the inactivity on the part of our governments and stated that the collective wealth of Canada and Quebec did not permit them to shirk their obligations under the Covenant.

The need to strengthen the Québec Charter and to establish effective remedies to ensure that rights are respected

It is essential that the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms be amended so that *economic, social and cultural* rights have the same status in our law as *civil and political* rights. Our governments must clearly establish the primacy of each of these rights over other domestic laws, and consequently adopt policies, programs and legislation which will allow all citizens to take advantage of these basic rights and to provide remedies in the event of their violation. The people who live in poverty, the families that do not have access to decent housing, the workers deprived of their right of association and of unionisation, the people with functional limitations who do not have access to home services, must have a remedy for the violations of their rights.

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The electronic version of the *Social Report* is available on the website of la Ligue des droits et libertés : www.liguedesdroits.ca