

July 30, 1992

TO: NAC Member Groups

FROM: Judy Rebick

RE: Canadian Panel on Violence

As you know, NAC and other national women's groups have been involved in a long process of negotiation with the Canadian Panel on Violence to attempt to persuade the panel to change their structure and process to be more inclusive and accountable.

At several moments in this process, there has appeared to be agreement that has later disintegrated. At its June meeting the Advisory Committee of the Panel agreed with the substance of the demands passed at the NAC AGM i.e. addition of racial minority women and some form of accountability to national women's groups.

Following the Advisory Committee meeting, Pat Marshall had telephone discussions with leaders of NOIVM, the Congress of Black Women and DAWN Canada. There appeared to be agreement that two racial minority women and one woman with a disability would be included in panel discussions with a status similar to the aboriginal women's circle. All three groups felt that this would be an acceptable compromise from the original position of full panel status for three racial minority women. However, when they received the proposal in writing it looked very different. The proposal was for "special advisors" who would have a much more restricted role than originally agreed. As Jestina Blake-Hill of the Congress of Black Women put it, "They asked us to sit in the kitchen while they eat in the dining room." All three groups have rejected the proposal.

In addition the covering letter to the proposal was blunt and indicated a pessimism on the part of the panel that the proposal could even work. "We must be very frank in telling you that there is real concern, in light of the aftermath of the June Advisory Committee meeting, whether the good faith and trust so necessary to the successful implementation of this proposal truly exists," says the letter.

The reference to the aftermath of the June meeting is to a press conference held by CASAC, NOIVM, DAWN and NAC in which the first three groups supported the NAC AGM resolution and the July 31 deadline and criticized the interim report that had been presented to the Advisory Committee.

Since the April NAC Roundtable on Violence where the large majority of groups present voted that NAC should withdraw its support from the Panel, NAC has worked very hard to try and find a solution to the crisis of confidence in the Panel within the women's movement. It is now clear that a solution is not possible. The Panel appears to believe that its internal priorities and process take precedence over meaningful inclusion of racial minority and disabled women and over any real accountability to the women's movement.

If this situation remains unchanged, NAC will announce our withdrawal of support from the Panel in the first week of August. Other groups will join us in that action. This means withdrawal of our representatives on the Advisory Council. NAC will not attend the August meeting that the Panel is proposing to have with national women's groups and will ask other groups to refuse to attend as well. The last few months have persuaded us that there will be no real accountability to women's groups. The NAC Violence Committee believes that it is not useful to continue working directly with the panel. NAC member groups of course are free to make their own decisions concerning their future participation in panel consultations.

NAC, for our part, will now turn our attention to developing our campaign to end violence against women and the concrete demands adopted by our AGM. We hope that the Panel will do the same.

Without adequate representation and accountability, we are doubtful that the Panel will develop the kind of action plan that is needed by women in this country to overcome violence against women. Nevertheless when the Panel report is released we will judge it objectively, in the same way we judge any federal government initiative.

We now believe that it was an error to support the initial formation of the Panel. We should have followed the lead of aboriginal women's groups in demanding real representation and real accountability. The aboriginal women's circle is the model of operation that should have been adopted for the panel as a whole. While it would have been better to demand these changes at the outset, when it became clear over the first phase of the panel's operation that racial minority women, women with disabilities and women working at a grass roots level against violence felt excluded from the process, we felt it necessary to act to try to change the situation. It is with regret that we take to the decision to withdraw but we feel that our accountability is to our members who are most directly effected by the work of the panel.

If you have any questions about our position concerning the panel, please feel free to contact the NAC office.

