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**TO: Women and Housing Advocates**

**From: The NAC Housing Committee**

**Date: May 6, 1991**

Safe, secure and affordable housing is every woman's right! This right continues to be violated through physical, economical, social, environmental, cultural and military assaults. The NAC Housing Committee has been working with a coalition to affirm and implement the right to housing in Canada. A result of this initiative is the Draft Declaration of the Right To Adequate Housing (see reverse side).

We are encouraging women's community groups, neighbours, individual women and others to define what the right to housing means for women in our daily lives and how this can be accomplished.

To assist this process, the NAC Housing Committee will facilitate a workshop at the Annual Meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women on Sunday, June 16, 1991, 4:00pm to 5:30pm (during the Policy and Campaign Committee Meeting time slot). The following proposed resolutions will be discussed.

### NAC HOUSING RESOLUTIONS

1. BE IT RESOLVED that NAC:

- a) endorse the Draft Declaration of the Right To Adequate Housing, (recognizing that such declaration will be finalized in accordance with input from widespread community consultation) and
- b) lobby the federal government to amend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to explicitly provide for a right to housing;
- c) lobby the federal government to provide adequate funding to allow women's community groups to identify how the right to housing can best be carried out in their communities.

2. WHEREAS "secure housing" issues have historically been approached in a gender neutral way;

AND WHEREAS the reality of women's lives includes the prevalence of violence against women, the feminization of poverty within the continuum of women's economic deprivation, and women's disproportionate assumption of childrearing responsibilities;

AND WHEREAS such gendered realities give rise to a gendered meaning of "secure housing"

BE IT RESOLVED that NAC lobby the federal government to:

- a) fund initiatives which address the gender specific meaning of "secure housing"; and
- b) require all recipients of government economic incentive policies and programs and funding, ear-marked for housing initiatives to address the gender specific meaning of "secure housing".

We look forward to a broader base input into the declaration and the resolutions at the Housing Committee Workshop.

# **DRAFT DECLARATION OF THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING**

## **HOUSING IS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT**

**A**dequate housing is essential to the freedom, dignity, equality and security of individuals and communities. Yet, there are an estimated 1 billion homeless and inadequately housed people throughout the world. Thousands of people in Canada, in cities, towns, reserves and rural communities, are without homes or live in substandard conditions. Every year, over 100,000 people rely on temporary shelters. Others live on the streets. This reflects only a fraction of the number of homeless in Canada. A much greater number live in poorly maintained, overcrowded housing and are forced to sacrifice necessities of life to pay high housing costs.

## **CANADA HAS AGREED INTERNATIONALLY THAT HOUSING IS A RIGHT**

**I**nternational human rights law recognizes the right to adequate housing. One of the most important agreements is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It states that "everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing". Canada has signed and all the provinces and territories have agreed to abide by this covenant. This means that on an international level, the Federal Government has a duty to ensure that everyone in Canada has access to adequate housing. However, this right has not yet been guaranteed in Canadian law.

## **MAKING HOUSING A LEGAL RIGHT IN CANADA**

**I**t is not enough for government to agree internationally that housing is a right. The right to housing and other social and economic rights such as food, medical care and an adequate standard of living should be included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and all provincial and territorial human rights legislation. This would provide a secure legal basis for claiming the right to housing. Policies or actions that deprive people of adequate and secure housing would be in violation of the Charter or illegal under human rights legislation. They could be challenged in court. Governments and others would be legally obliged to provide necessary resources and regulation to ensure that everyone has access to adequate housing.

## **THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING MEANS...**

*Access to a safe, affordable and secure place to live in peace and dignity.*

*Freedom from discrimination*, with adequate human rights legislation in all provinces and territories, enforced to prevent discrimination based on level of income, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, creed, age, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, presence of children, receipt of public assistance, citizenship, employment status or social condition.

*Secure tenure*, establishing the right of all people to a home and to a safe and healthy environment; preventing eviction for convenience, profit or as a means of punishment; stopping economic eviction by unpredictable and unaffordable rent increases, or eviction by violence, harassment, war or environmental destruction; recognizing the rights of women, children and others to maintain their homes free from violence and the special rights of aboriginal communities to land and habitat.

*Democratic processes* which enable people whose rights have been denied to participate in the decisions affecting their housing, including design, development, management policies and services.

*Community services* for health, work, income, transportation, childcare and education.

*Resources* for oppressed and excluded groups and individuals, including financial, legal, political and organizational support, recognizing the diversity and dignity of all people.

*Planning principles* which respect the integrity of the natural habitat and the rights of all people to housing, neighbourhoods and healthy environments, free of restrictions and controls that deny low income and other communities the opportunity to meet their housing needs and to participate meaningfully in the planning of their neighbourhoods.

*International cooperation and support* for housing rights in other countries, including financial and other forms of assistance to communities in need of housing and resources, and a halt to all programs, actions and policies which impede the full realization of housing rights in other countries.