

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Correctional Service of Canada's management of prisoners with serious mental health issues constitutes cruel and inhuman treatment: International Human Rights Program's report Says 'Canada is failing to uphold its international human rights obligations'

(Toronto) The International Human Rights Program's damning report, *Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading? Canada's Treatment of Federally-Sentenced Women with Mental Health Issues* concludes that the Correctional Service's treatment of female prisoners with serious mental health issues is discriminatory, violates the rights to liberty and security of person, access to justice, and health, and in some circumstances constitutes cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The report, released during Canadian Mental Health Week and National Elizabeth Fry Week, May 7-13, concludes Canada is failing to uphold its international human rights obligations.

While several reports have analyzed Ashley Smith's in-custody death at Ontario's Grand Valley Institution for Women in 2007, *Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading?* profiles women with serious mental health issues who remain incarcerated and who cannot access essential mental health treatment and continue to face prolonged segregation, incarceration far away from their families and communities, and the use of force.

The report finds that Canada's blatant and continued violation of the rights of federally-sentenced women with mental health issues has wide-ranging implications for civil and political rights around the world. "Canada is seen as a global leader in corrections and disability rights," says Renu Mandhane, IHRP director. "When Canada fails to show leadership, we set the bar far too low."

Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading? was researched and written by two second-year law students, Elizabeth Bingham and Rebecca Sutton, as part of their participation in the IHRP's award winning legal clinic. "My work on this project has solidified my interest in protecting the rights of those with mental illness," says Bingham, who will be working at the Centre for Mental Health and Addiction in Toronto this summer. "Last year, I was doing human rights work in Darfur, and I was surprised at the serious human rights abuses occurring right here at home," says Sutton.

Prison, disability rights, and native women's advocates have endorsed the findings of the report. "This report is meaningful in terms of framing the discussion of prisoner's mental health firmly within the disability rights framework, and will be used by Canadian and international advocates to ground women's experience in the powerful language of international human rights law" said Kim Pate, executive director, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.

"This report makes it clear that what happened to Ashley was not just the hard luck of one person, or the bad judgment of another—what happened to her could easily happen again. Systemic discrimination against women with disabilities was the direct cause of Ashley's death inside our Federal prison system and these problems continue to this day," said Bonnie Brayton, executive director, Disabled Women's Network of Canada.

Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading? is available for download here: <http://tinyurl.com/6psz4qr>

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