



December 12, 2016

The Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould
Justice and Attorney-General
House of Commons, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister:

In 2011 the National Council of Women of Canada adopted as policy that Canada's penal system be based on:

- a) a rehabilitation model including probation, sentencing treatment and parole of prisoners which takes into account not only community safety but also the rehabilitation of offenders;
- b) appropriate facilities for mentally ill offenders, both male and female;
- c) alternative approaches to sentencing which not only protect the community but also work towards the rehabilitation and more positive outcomes for offenders; and
- d) work with other levels of government to ensure that poverty reduction strategies as well as community programs for the support of at-risk families and youth are in place.

At our Annual General Meeting/Conference in June of 2016, we updated this policy to include solitary confinement. Solitary confinement of inmates over undue lengths of time is being used as a disciplinary tool in federal penitentiaries, and the steadily increasing numbers of prisoners due to changes in federal laws has caused overcrowding of these facilities, which has exacerbated the situation. Persons with mental health challenges are particularly at risk of self-harm and suicide.

International treaty bodies and human rights experts consider solitary confinement, which dehumanizes a person, to be a form of torture, and many jurisdictions, including Ontario, are moving away from its use.

NCWC therefore strongly urge the Government of Canada to cease using solitary confinement as a disciplinary method in federal penitentiaries and ensure sufficient, independent, secure facilities for persons with mental health issues.

Sincerely,

Karen Monnon Dempsey, President
National Council of Women of Canada

Background:

International Human Rights Law on Solitary Confinement, prepared by Human Rights First, Summer 2015

- <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/media/publications/Interventions>

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, U.N. Doc A/RES/217 (III) (Dec. 10, 1948)

- Article 5: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”