



**PRESENTATION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE (FINA)
Bill C-97, An Act to Implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in
Parliament
on March 19, 2019**

Tuesday, May 14, 2019 at 12:30 – 2:00 pm

i. Canada Without Poverty

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. My name is Michèle Biss, and I am the Policy Director and Human Rights Lawyer at Canada Without Poverty.

For those who are not aware of our organization, CWP is a non-partisan, not-for-profit, and charitable organization dedicated to ending poverty in Canada. For nearly 50 years, CWP has been championing the human rights of individuals experiencing poverty and, for our entire existence, our Board of Directors has been comprised entirely of people with a lived experience of poverty.

I will begin at the outset by stating that CWP supports all recommendations put forward by Leilani Farha, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing. The *National Housing Strategy Act*, if inclusive of amendments proposed by civil society last week, presents an historic opportunity to make an incredible impact some of the most marginalized in this country.

This afternoon, I will focus on the *Poverty Reduction Act* within Division 20 of Part 4 of the *Budget Implementation Act (BIA)*. This legislation comes at a critical moment in Canada's history. This is the legislation that will guide all policies, laws and programs for millions in Canada who make daily decisions about whether to pay hydro or put food on the table. We must get this right.

While CWP supports that Canada's first poverty reduction strategy be secured in legislation, we have serious concerns as to whether this section truly adheres to and implements Canada's international human rights obligations.

ii. Context for the Poverty Reduction Act

As this committee is no doubt aware, after decades of advocacy, the Poverty Reduction Act was tabled in November 2018 by the Honourable Minister Jean-Yves Duclos. In response to the legislation, along with our partners at Citizens for Public Justice and Campaign 2000, we coordinated an open letter with recommendations to the legislation.

It is important for this committee to know that despite the fact that this open letter was signed by over 500 organizations and individuals – including the Canadian Council of

Churches; ACORN Canada; Oxfam Canada; and the Canadian Women's Foundation – none of these recommendations were reflected when the bill was lifted word-for-word into the BIA.

iii. Recommendations

I urge members of this committee to consider the recommendations brought forward on this critical legislation by CWP and hundreds of other stakeholders.

We recommend that:

- a) **The legislation be amended to place Canada as a leading country in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by committing to the spirit of SDG 1, to end poverty.** In its current form, the goal of the legislation is to reduce poverty by 50% by 2030. The reality is that when we only commit to reducing poverty, we create opportunity for some, not all, especially those who are the most marginalized.
- b) **The legislation and accompanying regulations recognize the limitations of the methodology behind Canada's new official poverty line, the Market Basket Measure (MBM).** This new poverty line will be used to establish eligibility for programs, meaning it carries significant weight. Statistics Canada must be mandated to understand that it too has a role in implementing our human rights obligations to ensure an accurate methodology that leaves no one behind.
- c) **The legislation and accompanying regulations ensure that the National Advisory Council on Poverty can adequately implement the progressive realisation of economic and social rights.** Concretely, the council must be mandated as independent; given authority to make recommendations and require remedial action for compliance with the rights of people in poverty; and sufficient budget to fulfill its mandate.
- d) **Amend section 11, which arbitrarily authorizes the dissolution of the council once poverty has been reduced by 50% of 2015 MBM levels.** As has been noted by civil society, this is highly problematic, and demonstrates a disregard for the other 50% of people living in poverty. It is an excellent example of why Canada cannot merely strive to reduce poverty, we must endeavour to end it.
- e) **The government must commit to working in partnership with Indigenous governments to co-develop initiatives to ensure accountability and implementation of remedies for the distinctive barriers faced by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit persons living in poverty.**

I look forward to answering questions in this regard. Thank you.