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Written statement* submitted by Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 August 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Forced sterilization of Indigenous women in Canada

With regards to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) draws the attention of the rapporteur on two areas of human rights violations of Canadian indigenous women.

According to the findings of the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, which has been compiled in a 1200-page document, thousands of indigenous women have died in Canada. This finding concludes that around 1200 indigenous women in Canada have been murdered or are missing from 1980 to-date. But some activists claim that the figure is probably much higher. According to the 1200-page document, the extreme brutality imposed on Canadian indigenous women is rooted in long-standing exploitation policy and negligence of Canadian government. According to the report, the continued and deliberate violation of human and indigenous rights of these people and mistreatment is the root cause of these shocking statistics in Canada.

- ODVV deems these types of actions as clear examples of “genocide” and “crimes against humanity” and calls on the Canadian government to change the criminal code to classify some killings of indigenous women by spouses with a history of violent abuse as first degree murder.
- ODVV also expresses concern over “forced sterilization of indigenous women in Canada,” an issue which recently also drew the complaint of a number of human rights organizations and lawyers. The International Criminal Court has also considered the policy of forced sterilization of indigenous women in Canada as inhumane and called it a crime against humanity.

Forced sterilization of indigenous women in Canada was uncovered for the first time in 2015 when 5 indigenous women talked about their hospital experiences in Saskatchewan. Subsequently, an inquiry was launched and while apologizing to these women, the health department officials of the Province set up new regulations for sterilization of women. Nonetheless, in the court process it revealed that some sterilisation cases were as recent as 2017.

These women victims have said that during their visits to Canadian state hospitals for delivery, their fallopian tubes were close or ovaries removed without their consent, in violation of doctors’ Hippocratic Oath and violation of the law. Some plaintiffs have said that they were told they would not be allowed to reunite with their newborn babies unless they gave consent to be sterilized.

Minister of Indigenous Services, Jane Philpott told lawmakers the “coerced sterilization of some indigenous women by medical professionals is a serious violation of human rights.”

ODVV believes that forced sterilizations, which the United Nations considers a form of torture, are symptomatic of the discrimination and abuse against Canada’s indigenous women.

While criticizing these inhuman policies, ODVV calls for an end to them.

ODVV calls on the HRC to immediately launch a longer and deeper study of sterilization without consent in Canada.
