

March 7, 2016

## **Media advisory:**

# UN Committee concerned at inadequate social assistance, lack of affordable housing, growing hunger in Canada

Advanced, unedited [observations from the United Nations' Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) were released today and indicate that the federal and provincial governments must do more to improve the lives of Canadians experiencing poverty. In January, Hamilton Community Legal Clinic and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction issued a report called "[The Right to An Adequate Standard of Living](#)" to assist the CESCR in assessing the degree to which Canada is conforming to its obligations under the Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights.

While the UN committee expressed appreciation for the new federal government's change in direction to reverse the elimination of the long-form census and to hold an inquiry into murders and disappearances of indigenous women and girls, government policy – at both the provincial and federal levels- still leaves millions of Canadians living in deep poverty.

Amongst the UN's recommendations for Canada:

- **Revise eligibility thresholds for employment insurance.**  
*In Hamilton, only 1 in 5 unemployed workers have access to EI benefits*
- **Ensure minimum wage is increased to allow a decent living for all workers and their families** – 29.4% of workers in Ontario earn less than \$15/hour
- **Improve social assistance rates in all provinces to 'ensure an effective income safety net'** – nearly 50,000 people in Hamilton rely on social assistance benefits
- **Take measures to substantially increase the availability of social and affordable housing units** -5,700 families are on waiting list for social housing units
- **Recognize access to food as a legal entitlement for all Canadians.**  
*18,000 people use food banks monthly in Hamilton*

The UN was further troubled by the number of "victims" of "forced evictions". Craig Foye, co-author of the Hamilton report and a staff lawyer at Hamilton Community Legal Clinic said the UN's observations send a strong message to our governments: "Too many people are falling through the cracks. Canada and Ontario must take immediate action to ensure the right to an adequate standard of living is protected".