

Full Articles: June 26 - 30, 2006

Edmonton Journal
Calgary Herald
Edmonton Sun
June 30, 2006

Ermineskin Cree protest

Members of the Ermineskin Cree First Nation peacefully protested yesterday to draw attention to outstanding treaty issues.

"The importance of it was to get the feds to listen to the concerns over the claims from way back.

"They're not being addressed at all, at times, with some nations," said Ermineskin's acting chief Gerald Ermineskin.

Indigenous languages, health, housing, education, economic development, and land claims are among the issues of concern.

Around 60 people came out to the protest, held near CP Rail tracks that cut through the Ermineskin town site.

The Ermineskin First Nation is near Hobbema, 87 km south of Edmonton.

The National Post
June 24, 2006

16% of city's 5,052 homeless are native

Census released

James Cowan, National Post

Published: Saturday, June 24, 2006

Toronto's homeless population is 73% male, 16% Aboriginal and consists of at least 5,052 people, according to the city's first street needs assessment.

Results of the city's controversial count of people sleeping on the streets and in shelters were released yesterday.

The survey, conducted on April 19, suggests there were 3,649 people in shelters that night; 818 individuals on the street; 275 homeless in health care facilities; and 139 homeless in Toronto's correctional facilities. In addition, the census identified 171 homeless women staying in shelters for victims of violence.

"We now have a much better picture of the state of homelessness in Toronto," said Joe Mihevc, chairman of the city's community services committee.

Mr. Mihevc suggested the results show Toronto is faring well in its fight against homeless compared with other major cities. For example, Toronto has one homeless person for every 3,034 citizens compared with one in 2,109 in New York.

In Toronto, the average homeless woman is 36 years old, while the average homeless male is 39. The older an individual is, the longer he or she had been on the streets. While people under the age of 21 had been homeless, on average, for 1.2 years, the time on the streets jumped to 12 years for those 65 and older.

The survey also points to mental health and addiction issues; 19% said they had been involved in a detox program in the past six months, while 18% used a harm-reduction program such as a needle exchange. In addition, 27% wanted help with mental-health issues.

Aboriginals represented 16% of those surveyed and 26% of those sleeping outdoors. In comparison, less than 1% of Toronto's overall population is Aboriginal.

"The Aboriginal community is over-represented in the homeless population," said Phil Brown, manager of shelter, support and housing administration.

Officials emphasized the project was designed to determine what services are needed to get people off the street, not just establish the size and demographics of the homeless population. "The street needs assessment is not merely a count," Mr. Brown said. "It most importantly provides information on the service needs of homeless persons so that we can work to end their homelessness."

Not surprisingly, 86% of those surveyed said they would like to find a permanent home. Also not surprisingly, 84% said assistance finding affordable housing would get them off the street. An equal number said more money would help, and 63% said they need more help completing housing applications.

"There are some surprising things," Mr. Mihevc said. "I think it was a surprise to everyone how reliant the homeless are on drop-in centres. I think it was also a surprise how many folks use the health care system and the extent the health care system is used."

Sixty per cent said they use drop-in centres, while 51% had used a hospital or health clinic in the past six months.

The street needs assessment was conducted by more than 1,600 volunteers working with 400 paid leaders. Teams of three to four people spread out through the city and asked homeless people they encountered to complete the survey.

To test the count's accuracy, organizers positioned 49 "decoys" throughout the city. Of these, 38 -- or 78% -- were found by volunteers. Mr. Brown said the raw numbers have been adjusted to reflect the fact some decoys were not found and that not every part of the city was surveyed.

He said the survey's statistical methodology had been used for four counts in New York and was approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Tanya Gulliver, co-ordinator for the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, warned that the results may not accurately reflect the size of the homeless population.

Not only does the survey not account for the so-called "hidden homeless" -- those who stay with friends or relatives for short periods -- but it also might have missed people who were off the street when the volunteers came around.

She noted Edmonton's street count in 2004 found 1,452 people sleeping outside, while Vancouver's survey in March, 2005, counted 1,127 people. It does not make sense Toronto would have fewer people sleeping outside, Ms. Gulliver said.

"This is a minimal number," Mr. Mihevc said. "This is a one-night snapshot."

The Globe & Mail

June 28, 2006

Native leaders drop plan to block Manitoba rail lines

Canadian Press

Winnipeg — Native leaders have called off a planned blockade of two southern Manitoba rail lines.

They had planned to block the lines for 24 hours starting tomorrow in an effort to pressure the federal government to settle outstanding land claims.

CN Rail was in court seeking an injunction to stop the action.

But lawyers for the native groups say they have reached a deal with CN Rail and will hold rallies instead of blocking rail traffic.

In exchange, CN has agreed to write to the federal Indian Affairs minister and urge him to resolve native land claims.

Other

REUTERS

June 26, 2006

Native peoples accuse Canada of betrayal in U.N

Mon Jun 26, 2006 9:59 AM EDT

By Robert Evans

GENEVA (Reuters) - A coalition of indigenous peoples from around the globe on Monday accused Canada of betrayal by campaigning to bloc a United Nations declaration asserting their rights after backing it for years.

The declaration, in negotiation for the past 24 years and backed by many European, Latin American and Asian states, is up for approval in the next few days by the U.N.'s new Human Rights Council.

But Canada announced last week it wanted a delay for at least two years, saying the document could violate its constitution and wreck talks with its native Indians over control of land and resources.

A resolution tabled on Monday by Ottawa to the 47-member Council called for further consultations "to achieve the broadest possible agreement."

"We see this as betrayal by Canada," Vicky Tauli Corpuz, president of the coalition's representation in Geneva, told a news conference called by Peru, which is sponsoring the declaration in the Council.

U.S. Mohawk Kenneth Deer, a leading negotiator with governments on the declaration's text for 20 years, said Canada was acting as "a surrogate" in the Council for the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

He said the three countries and Russia, also seeking a delay, saw in the declaration a threat to government control over mineral, oil and other resources.

Other groups at the news conference, from Australia, Latin America, Africa, Asia and Russia, said Canada had been actively lobbying governments around the world to oppose the declaration, especially those in poorer countries.

The United States, Australia and New Zealand did not seek election to the 47-nation Council, which replaces the old Human Rights Commission, but both Canada and Russia are members.

If approved, the declaration would go to the U.N. General Assembly in New York for approval. It would not be legally binding, but the coalition says it would aid indigenous peoples to ensure their rights are observed.