

For Immediate Release:
Friday, March 8, 2013

Federal and Provincial Government, Failing Aboriginal Communities

“The recent report released by Canada’s Correctional Investigator highlights the need for committed and effective action by both the federal and the provincial government to address the over incarceration of Aboriginal people in Manitoba,” according to John Hutton, Executive Director of the John Howard Society of Manitoba. “Bill C-10, passed last year in Ottawa makes it harder for Aboriginal offenders to be sentenced fairly and according to guidelines set out by the Supreme court, while 15 years later Manitoba has still to implement most of the recommendations that came out of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry.”

While the Aboriginal population of Manitoba is slightly less than 15% of the total, Aboriginal people make up 70% of those currently behind bars in this province, and that percentage is increasing, particularly among women. As well, Aboriginal inmates are less likely to get parole, more likely to be held in segregation or higher levels of security and more likely to serve longer sentences than non-Aboriginal offenders. “When one group is treated less fairly than another by government institutions, it is not the group’s fault but the fault of those in charge of courts and corrections,” Hutton noted.

“Manitoba faces a critical situation in terms of jail overcrowding, and one obvious solution is for the Provincial government to implement the recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, as the Capacity Review Committee noted last year, in a report the provincial government has still not released. Sapers’ study should serve as a wake-up for both levels of government, who cannot continue to ignore solutions to this problem which have already been identified”, Hutton concluded.

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