



Backgrounder on the Alma Mater Society of UBC Vancouver's United Nations Complaint Against the Governments of BC and Canada

About the Complaint

- The complaint is filed with the UN High Commissioner to the attention of the UN Committee on Social and Cultural Rights. It alleges that the two levels of government failed to meet their obligations under the *United Nations Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights*.
- The complaint was prompted by the governments' ongoing neglect of the post-secondary systems through their deregulation of tuition fees and a number of recent drastic cuts to funding.
- The UN Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, of which Canada is a signatory, states in Article 13 (c) "*Higher education shall be made accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.*"
- The complaint describes in detail how the governments have failed to meet their international human rights commitments to ensure that higher education is accessible to all.

The Government of BC and the Government of Canada's Failure to Meet Obligations under the Covenant

- Failure to adequately fund the post-secondary education system:
 - 1990s: the Canadian government drastically cut funding for post-secondary education
 - Current provincial and federal grants fail to keep pace with inflation
 - 2008: there was a \$60-million, province-wide cut and a \$15.3-million cut at UBC
 - September 2009: there was a \$16-million cut to facilities grants to institutions, and funding was frozen.
- Allowing tuition to become a barrier:
 - Fees have risen every year since 1998 and now the universities in British Columbia have increased tuition at a faster rate than any other province.
 - Tuition fees have skyrocketed since the BC government deregulated fees in 2002
 - Between 2002 and 2007, undergraduate tuition fees doubled and graduate tuition fees rose by 184.4%
 - Some faculties have seen tuition fees increase over 100% and the UBC Faculty of Law has seen a tuition increase of over 300%
- Failure to provide sufficient financial support to students in need:
 - Currently: average student debt in BC is \$27 000, and is \$24 000 in Canada
 - Lack of financial resources have been cited as the leading factor in why students choose not to pursue post-secondary education
 - For every \$100 increase in tuition price, the participation rate drops by about 0.7 percent
 - 2002: Cancelled BC Student Grant Program
 - July 2009: there was a \$16-million cut for student aid programs including, the Permanent Disability Benefits Program; the Debt Reduction in Repayment Program; BC Loan Reduction for Residential Care Aid and Home Support Worker Program; the Nurses Education Bursary; the Health Care Bursary; the Early Childhood Educator Loan Assistance Program; and the Premier's Excellence Award program
 - September 2009: It was confirmed the cut to student aid programs was actually \$17 million
- The United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights has made recommendations to Canada about the state of post secondary education in the country on two occasions. The Government of Canada and the Government of BC have yet to take action.
- The AMS has requested that the Commission appoint an independent expert or Special Rapporteur to look into the human rights situation in Canada.