

# Human rights commissioner says education too expensive

BY JEFF POWER

ST. JOHN'S (CUP) — The chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission says Canada's post-secondary education system should be more accessible to all students who want to go to school.

"I think it's too bad education today is so expensive and that many students get out of school with such a heavy burden that they can spend a part of their working life paying back what it cost them to get an education," said Michelle Falardeau-Ramsay at Memorial University last week.

She also a system that's not accessible to everybody is unacceptable in Canada.

"The danger is that we will go back to the days where there were two categories of people," said Falardeau-Ramsay.

"There were those who were able to get an education, and then,

obviously, as a result would be in a position of leadership, to be in a position where they could influence things — and people who were unable to get one and had no influence in society."

Falardeau-Ramsay's public lecture was the second—last stop on a seven—stop tour of Canadian universities commemorating the 50th anniversary of the United Nations' adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The commissioner, who has worked for the United Nations and was appointed to the post in 1997, focused her speech on the status of human rights in the 21st century.

She said while there has been significant progress in the area of human rights over the past 50 years, "we have only to read the daily headlines to realize that human rights violations are still commonplace in many parts of the globe."

And although Canada is a global human rights leader, she said, it still has a way to go "before the [UN] Declaration's vision is a reality for all Canadians."

One major area of disappointment has been the recognition of human rights for aboriginal people, she said.

She pointed to the contrast between Canada's number one ranking on a UN list of the best places to live and a recent government report that shows the standard of living on native reservations is closer to the bottom

of the list, below such countries as Thailand and Mexico.

Falardeau-Ramsay says the problem corresponds directly with poverty, another area which saw Canada receive a low grade from the UN.

"[Poverty] prevents people from exercising their rights in society," she said.

Racial harassment and discrimination and disabled rights are other areas that require action, she said.

"Everybody speaks about the deficit, about monetary matters, but

not so much about the wellbeing of the community," she said of federal politicians.

"The type of democracy we have is so fragile. We're blessed to be in a country where we have the rule of law, where we have all kinds of safeguards and also where there are many structures that allow for protection of those rights," added Falardeau-Ramsay.

"We have to be very, very, cautious not to lose that. In order not to lose that we have to make sure we maintain it in the eye of the people."

# Sprint ends unlimited calling plan

BY KAREN RAWLINES

CHARLOTTETOWN (CUP) — Sprint Canada's decision to cut off its unlimited-calling plan isn't ringing well in the ears of students and consumer rights' groups who say they weren't given proper notice the plan would be cancelled.

The enormously popular plan entitled subscribers to unlimited calling minutes after 6pm on weekdays and all day on weekends to anywhere in Canada for \$20 per month.

For student customers studying far away from family and friends, the Sprint Canada deal offered a way to stay in touch for less.

"It really made a difference," said Melissa Doucette, an English student at the University of Prince Edward Island. "I could talk to these people every day."

Clay Purves, a history student at the University of Winnipeg, also got a lot of mileage out of the plan. He used it to speak with his brother in Alberta and with friends who went to school in Ontario and B.C.

"It was nice to have a cheaper way to stay in touch with friends and family — to stay in close contact with people I wouldn't have otherwise had that kind of close contact with," he said.

But despite high customer

demand — or rather because of it — Sprint Canada discontinued the plan and replaced it with a modified version effective Oct. 5.

Early into the offer, which was introduced last July, customers were met by busy signals or recorded messages when dialling through to long-distance numbers due to network congestion.

"The unlimited savings plan resulted in a new competitive marketplace, with all of our major competitors announcing similar plans to ours," wrote Philip Bates, president and chief operating officer of Sprint Canada, in a prepared statement.

"These plans have shifted residential calling patterns and the overwhelming response to these plans has meant some customers have experienced difficulty when they have tried to make long distance calls."

Sprint is now offering customers a plan with a similar concept but different bottom line. Instead of unlimited minutes per month, customers may now talk to anyone in Canada for up to 800 minutes under the \$20 charge, with additional rates of 10 cents per subsequent minute.

Jennifer Hilliard, vice president of policy and issues of the Consumers' Association of Canada,

is not impressed by Sprint's decision to end the

deal after only a few months of offering it.

"If a company offered something, and better demands than they were expecting followed, then they would be expected to bite the bullet," Hilliard said. "It's like they've offered steak, and are giving the customers beans."

She also says the adaptation of the plan was not properly announced, so Sprint Canada should offer some kind of consumer redress to those who didn't receive notice of the change.

"Customers have to be notified before running off enormous bills."

Purves, who has decided to return to his local provider for long-distance service, says if it weren't for reading about it he wouldn't have known he was paying for a different service.

"If we didn't have a newspaper subscription we wouldn't have found out about it," he said. "I think they [Sprint] could have phoned us — they have our number."

Critics say the fact Sprint Canada continued to air television commercials for the unlimited plan close to the time the plan was cancelled added to the confusion.

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