

Community Marks UN Day To Eradicate Poverty

The Antigonish Coalition for Economic Justice (ACEJ) is sponsoring a teach-in on poverty from October 15 to 18 in light of the United Nations endorsed Eradication of Poverty day on October 17.

The teach-in is designed to encourage educators, community workers and religious leaders to look at the new faces of poverty, the links between national and global poverty and actions that can eradicate poverty.

ACEJ is providing educators with lesson plans that can be incorporated in a variety of classroom subjects at all age levels.

Joanne Tompkins of ACEJ said the teach-in materials highlight the nature of poverty in the modern world. Poverty is not a result of laziness or unemployment, Tompkins said. "Poverty is built into the system," locally and globally.

The United Nations Development Report 1998 reported in 1960, that 20 percent of the world's population, living in developed countries, had 30 times the income of the world's poorest 20 percent. By 1995, the richest 20 percent had 82 times as much income as the 20 percent at the bottom of the income

scale.

Tompkins said this discrepancy between rich and poor is a socially created condition that can be eradicated through human effort.

She also noted that links exist between globalization, continued militarization and increased poverty in the world, Canada and the Maritimes.

Teach-in materials, collected from such groups as trade unions, Development and Peace, the United Church and the Canadian Labour Congress, are designed to highlight factors linking poverty with consumerism and corporatism.

Teach-in materials offer lesson plans to make the realities of poverty understandable for children of varying ages and offers young people an opportunity to reflect on the problems that might occur because of the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

Canada, although voted the choice country in the globe by the UN in recent years, secured a failing grade in the human poverty index, ranking 10th in a list of 17 industrialized countries.

Tompkins, an education professor at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, said in 1989 the Canadian

government promised to end poverty by the year 2000. However, she said the numbers of people living in poverty are up 60 percent since then.

"More and more Canadians wonder why, in a country as rich as Canada, families continue to live in poverty with the numbers growing every year," Tompkins said. "NAPO, the National Anti-Poverty Organization, estimates that over one million Canadians suffer the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual devastation of poverty."

Since 1996, the UN has held October

17 as a day to call for the Eradication of Poverty.

ACEJ is inviting educators, community leaders and the clergy to spend time with students, community members and congregations critically examining the causes and effects of poverty.

"The time is ripe to change the way we look at poverty," Tompkins said. "We need to begin to reframe poverty as a problem of greed and excessive wealth rather than a problem of the poor."