

Indian Rights for Indian Women



Credit : Howard Bernard

Jenny Margetts and Mary Two-Axe Early representing IRIW recommendations to DIAND minister Hugh Faulkner.

SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1971, INDIAN RIGHTS FOR INDIAN WOMEN (IRIW) HAS BEEN ONE OF THE FEW NATIVE ORGANIZATIONS PREPARED TO DEAL WITH SOME HIGHLY SENSITIVE ISSUES WHICH CONCERN NATIVE WOMEN - THE RIGHTS OF INDIAN WOMEN TO LIVE, DIE AND BE BURIED ON THEIR RESERVES, THE BAND MEMBERSHIP OF THEIR CHILDREN AND, OF COURSE, FORCED ENFRANCHISEMENT.

As currently applied, Canada's Indian Act strips a woman of her Indian status if she marries a non-Indian, although, Indian men are allowed to marry non-Indians without penalty.

IRIW has been the only organization to take the responsibility for trying to change a law which discriminates against Indian women on grounds of race, sex and marital status.

In 1971, the year of IRIW's formation, Jeannette Corbiere-Lavell was protesting her loss of legal status that resulted from her marriage to a non-Indian. IRIW was not registered federally as an organization when Lavell went before the Supreme Court of Canada. The organization could not officially back her appeal; however, members of the group supported Lavell as individuals. This was the only national group to do so.

Jenny Margetts, President of IRIW recalls that, during the Lavell case, her organization asked the Native Council of Canada to act on its behalf but that