

# Aboriginal women oppose divorce bill

*OTTAWA-Aboriginal women applied for an injunction last Wednesday against a federal bill that would give band councils on reserves the power to decide who gets the family property after a divorce \_ but provides no protection for women.*

The women are fighting the bill because they want the same legal guarantees afforded other Canadians who must split family assets when they get divorced.

Currently, because provincial divorce legislation doesn't apply on reserves, native women aren't protected from being kicked out of their homes with no financial compensation. Even battered native woman cannot go to court to force their husbands off the property.

The bill would pass control of reserve land to band councils and is another step by Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart to bring native bands closer to self-government.

The proposed legislation is meant to ratify a general agreement that Ottawa reached in 1996 with more than a dozen first nations across the country. The deal would allow bands to distribute leases and licences, and set up property-management plans that must be voted on by the communities and then approved by Indian

Affairs.

But the B.C. Native Women's Society, which is trying to hobble the bill with the Federal Court injunction, said it needs Ottawa's protection to guarantee the fair treatment of women on reserves.

The society says the problem with the law is that it does not clearly define how property should be divided on a reserve when a marriage breaks up.

"Indian women married

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