

Indicators and Human Rights: Do we really want to go there, and if so, how far?¹

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A working hypothesis

An indicator is a measuring tool. Contrary to a marker, an indicator is useful to the extent that it makes it possible to monitor a situation over time. In the social sciences, indicators have become an important tool for doing impact assessments, notably *Environmental Impact Assessments* and *Social Impact Assessments*. According to an emerging literature, if indicators were applied to the field of human rights, they could be used to measure and/or evaluate the success (or failure) of different institutions and actors charged with ensuring human rights compliance.²

Setting the Context

Expert Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR): E/C.12/CAN/CO/4: 70. This expert committee of the UN, charged with applying the International covenant of the same name (ICESCR), has asked that future State party periodic reports be structured around specific articles in the Covenant et concentrate primarily on recording compliance with preceding «concluding observations». In addition to providing specific information about follow-up measures, the committee also requests that State parties explain exactly how the follow-up measures promote and advance economic, social and cultural rights. To assist in evaluating the State parties report, the Committee says that it would appreciate receiving **comparative statistical data broken down annually as well as information on percentage figures for the budgets allocated to Convention-related programmes.**

United Nations and Indicators : In 2008, the *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights* published a report exploring the use of indicators to promote and monitor the implementation of human rights around the world³. Without a doubt, this report marks a significant step for promoting the application of indicators in the field of human rights.

Poverty Level and Indicators: Technically, a poverty level is not an indicator. It is a reference point intended to determine the number of people who have, or do not have, sufficient income to ensure their own subsistence and that of their family. Nevertheless using the poverty line to

¹ The original text was written in French for the *Ligue des droits et libertés* (Québec-2010). This revised and updated version was translated by Don McAlpine in June 2011. The authors wish to thank the Law Foundation of Ontario for its financial support (Community Leadership in Justice Fellowship).

² See OHCHR, *Human Rights and Poverty Reduction, A Conceptual Framework*, 2004 and OHCHR, *Report on Indicators for Monitoring Compliance with International Human Rights Instruments* (Report presented at the 18th meeting of chairpersons and the fifth inter-committee of the human rights treaty bodies), HRI/MC/2006/7, 11 May 2006; Hans Otto-Sano, *Human Rights Indicators, Purpose and Validity*, Paper for the Turku/Abo Expert Meeting on Human Rights Indicators, 2005 at: <http://www.humanrightsimpact.org/publications/item/pub/102/> and Hans Otto-Sano, «What's the Goal ? What's the Purpose ? Observations on Human Rights Impact Assessment», [2007] 11:3 *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 275.

³ Rapport sur l'utilisation d'indicateurs pour la promotion et la surveillance de la mise en oeuvre des droits de l'homme, HRI/MC/2008/3.
(*Report on the use of Indicators for Promoting and Monitoring the Implementation of Human Rights*, HRI/MC/2008/3).

measure the variation over time of the percentage of household's living above or below the threshold places it squarely within a discussion about indicators. Indeed, the historic absence of an official poverty level has become an issue for Canada (and Quebec) in their relations with the United Nations. In 1998, the CESCR made the following remark:

«Considering the absence of any official poverty line, it is difficult to obtain, from the federal government and from its provincial and territorial counterparts, any feedback as to their compliance with the obligations incumbent upon them under the Convention»⁴

Since 1998, the CESCR has consistently reproached Canada for its lack of an official poverty level, most recently in the “concluding Observations “ to the examination of Canada’s 4th and 5th Periodic Reports (2006). To paraphrase the committee: *«Governments in Canada claim that they are fighting poverty. However they have yet to establish a definition of the concept which would include a reference point allowing us to measure whether or not their anti-poverty measures have been successful.»*

Québec, the struggle against poverty and the use of indicators: The *Act to Combat poverty and social exclusion* was adopted unanimously in the Québec National Assembly in December 2002.⁵ Article 4 of the Act stipulates that it was designed *« to progressively make Québec, by 2013, one of the industrialized nations having the least number of persons living in poverty, according to recognized methods for making international comparisons.»* An analysis of the indicators over the first five years of the strategy allowed the Government to conclude that it is on the right track. Indicators say: *Le Québec progresse! (2008).*⁶

With its poverty law, Québec has clearly embraced the concept of managing poverty objectives through the application of, and measurement by, indicators. Indeed, the Act even delegates the measurement of poverty to two newly created expert agencies, the *Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale* (Centre for the study of poverty and social exclusion) and the *Comité consultatif sur la pauvreté* (the Advisory Committee on Poverty). Both of these agencies have recently supported the adoption of the market basket measure (MBM) as Québec's official poverty indicator of reference, a suggestion that was retained by the Government in 2009. That Québec was the first jurisdiction within Canada to have identified an “official reference indicator” for measuring poverty is suggestive of an emerging consensus within certain sectors of the society which maintains that only those social problems (health, education, housing, etc.) which can be measured and compared are recognized. The “official” status accorded to the MBM confirms the place of indicators and social measurement at the heart of the Québec Government's approach to fighting poverty.

These few remarks attempt to situate the preliminary discussion of this paper on the use of indicators in the field of human rights. It is a discussion which is not only pertinent, but timely because in the field of social policy, we seem to be entering into an era of *governance by experts*.

⁴ *Concluding observations* of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights : Canada. 10/12/98, #13

⁵ http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/L_7/L7_A.html

⁶ This is the title of a widely distributed flyer highlighting the success of the first five years of Québec's anti-poverty strategy. Available at: http://www.politiquessociales.net/IMG/pdf/SR_depliant_quebec_progresse.pdf

New Public Management (NPM)

After two decades of neo-liberal governance, the concept of new public management (NPM) is now well entrenched.⁷ At the core of NPM is the concept of “expert –directed” management. Using models built to understand the world⁸, experts (who may be public servants, outside professionals, a team, a task force...) identify problems and propose appropriate solutions.

If constructed on reliable and objective data, models can be interesting tools, providing a valid and useful insight into “reality”. However, in certain cases (see sidebar) they overstep their legitimate bounds. Rather than interpreting “reality”, models attempt to “create” it: reality is deemed to be what the models describe as real.

Increasingly social models are being used in the formulation of public policy.⁹ They provide the framework necessary for identifying social problems (obesity, pathological gambling, adolescent pregnancies, etc.) and proposing solutions. They provide the basis for action plans that set objectives, targets to be attained and deadlines to be met. Once in place, resources are solicited (both from stakeholders and partners) to actively implement the action plan and to measure the results obtained. Any social reality which lies outside of the model’s framework is invisible. Evidently, what is outside of the framework’s action plan is equally non-existent in terms of public policy.

New public management can be described as *results-based performance management*. It is “*Management for dummies*” wherein the manager’s responsibility is limited to obtaining the desired results. Under NPM, the public servant-manager is no longer a source of expertise; he or she is a technician. Curiously enough, the public servant-manager no longer even needs

Two examples of social modelling and NPM

Le Pacte pour l’emploi (The Pact for Employment) was developed by a group of experts within Québec’s Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity. The model upon which it is based is a mathematical curve shaped by a certain number of determinants (life expectancy, birth rate, expected immigration, etc.). According to the model, within twenty years, Québec will be faced with a new demographical situation where it will have to cope with 1) a labour shortage ; 2) a reduced tax base ; 3) an explosion in the number of elderly people requiring medical and other services. Using the model’s predictions, the Pacte’s **action plan** develops employment targets to be attained. It then develops a series of employment policies to attain the targets. The Pacte offers an excellent example of model building based on mathematical extrapolations of what the future will be.

The swine flu scare (2008-09) provides a second example of social model building. Our society was deemed « sick » not because of an abundance of actual cases of swine flu but rather because a model had predicted the imminent invasion of the H1N1 virus. On the basis of a diagnostic model of reality, Public Health authorities put in place the whole series of measures that the population is not about to forget: obligatory injections, special public clinics, public education campaigns, etc. ...The remarkable thing about all this is that when the pandemic failed to materialize, the model escaped any scrutiny; reality was deemed to be the culprit...And the population was warned of the possibility of a third wave as predicted by the model...

⁷ Consult also Dorval Brunelle, *Main basse sur l’État*, Éditions Fidès, 2005. See also Lucie Lamarche, «L’État désétatisé et ses fonctions sociales» in Paquerot et al, *L’État aux orties*, Écosociété, 1996, p. 126ss.

⁸ It would perhaps be more accurate to say that the model builds reality, but maybe that would be pushing it...

⁹ Later in this paper, we note that Québec’s minister of Employment and Social Solidarity has announced her decision concerning a minimum social welfare payment for Quebecers. She admits that her decision was largely influenced by a group of outside experts in the field of “econometrics”, a discipline which applies mathematics and statistical methods to economics. NB: The “expert” recommendation had ultimately more weight than a recommendation from civil society. Worse, the “expert” recommendation formed public policy.

expertise in « the area » being managed. This expertise will henceforth be supplied by those who initially decide on, and develop, the framework model to be used.

There is nothing magical about an indicator nor should they be collectively demonized. An indicator is a figure, an index, a percentage or a statistic. It is a tool, and in this sense it should not be attributed powers that it does not have. As with any tool, we should be clear on what we are asking it to do. How are indicators chosen and constructed, by whom and for what purpose?

These fundamental questions need to be asked in a context where models, indicators and quantitative analysis are becoming the preferred, if not the only way to interpret society and social relations. In this sense, the use of these tools as the primary means for elaborating public policy is worrisome. Indeed, social science methodology (including the use of indicators, benchmarks, objectives to attain, etc.) has so permeated the new public management that the word hegemony is being whispered in certain circles.

Indicators and Human Rights

We are not proposing a full and direct attack on the use of indicators as a way of illustrating reality. They can, and do, play a useful role. However, specifically in the field of human rights, using indicators as the principal measurement tool for addressing issues of compliance has serious limitations.

For example, human rights violations are often identified by story-telling, that is by using a narrative framework which is quite different from that of social modeling. A narrative framework is rooted in a profound respect of the victim's story, that is, the victim's understanding of the world. In other words, while a social model represents one way of "understanding" the world, story-telling offers a different representation. In a human rights context, the importance of narrative framework may be seen in its extensive use by the legal profession when lawyers have their clients testify to explain their dolances. Testimonies are nothing if not a form of story-telling.

While indicators streamline and systematize a field of inquiry, they also serve to limit it. If properly used, they can indeed provide a "focal point" and offer a dynamic understanding of reality that is situated in space and time. However, they cannot claim to provide an understanding of what is situated outside of their "focus". Stories, on the other hand, while potentially less "focused" – some would say less "objective" – permit the creation of greater linkages between different realities. Stories allow different realities to be confronted, because there are always different stories – mine, yours, his, her's.

Consequently, before going to far in the introduction of

Housing

*To advance the **right to housing**, one could measure the quality of housing within a given territory. A preliminary study on the state of the existing housing stock could be carried out using the following indicators:*

- *Monthly cost*
- *Construction year*
- *Presence of vermin*
- *Proximity to public transit*
- *Quality of the windows*
- *Storage space*

Are these good indicators ? Are there others that should be added ?

Using this choice of indicators, is the picture provided accurate ? Does it provide a sufficient basis for developing public policy ?

How could these indicators buttress a broader vision which would be useful for advancing the right to housing?

indicators into the field of human rights, several key questions need to be raised. Given the inter-relatedness and interdependence of human rights, how can a person's "rights" be examined by a tool which is necessarily limited, or reductive, by its quantitative nature? For example, the accompanying sidebar suggests an application of an indicator logic to the "right to housing". The question becomes: is it possible to correlate, using indicators, a historical violation of the right to housing (expropriation of popular neighbourhoods in the city of Hull during the 1970's) with current violations of the right to physical security (high levels of conjugal violence in the very neighbourhoods where the expropriated families of the 1970's now live)? Nevertheless, such a correlation clearly needs to be made because it consistently emerged during recent hearings on a new proposal for urban renewal in the city of Hull (now Gatineau). During these hearings, residents told many stories about how the destruction of a social fabric 40 years ago continues to have an impact on events happening today.

In other words, how can the tension be resolved between legitimating and validating a victim's stories (subjective testimonies of human rights violations) in a context which consistently and repeatedly values only the «objective» and expert value of statistical and other quantifiable information. How does one enrich the wave of mathematical figures and constructs which currently shape our understanding of the world with concrete human experience?

As the debate concerning the use of indicators in the field of human rights grows, two significant shifts of the past twenty years need to be noted. One is linguistic; the other, paradigmatic. Whereas, the universalism implicit in a "human rights" approach influenced social planning and public policy during the 1960s and 1970s, social stakeholders and public office holders are currently turning to a clientelist approach. Guided by the neoliberal principles of NPM, policy makers, social planners and community partners literally lap up any mention of measures, indicators and targets. They preach reaching results and evaluations. Attaining some form of universal public good is no longer the basis for State action and figures less and less as heat of the social movement's platform. What is valued is the particular, not the universal; the need, not the right; the client, not the citizen.

Human Rights and Human Rights' Violations

Human rights' violations are experiential, even existential, in nature. For the person whose rights are being violated, there are consequences: the fridge is empty, the dwelling is in a sorry state, a parent's child is rejected by other children at school because s/he is not wearing "brand name" clothing.

As long as a person's rights are violated, that person is prevented from attaining the fullness of life guaranteed by such fundamental documents as the *International Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*. Moreover, although an empirical fact (or a set of empirical facts), a human rights violation is also a political and legal fact that demands a remedy. Social management by problems and result indicators belies this affirmation. While social management might address certain human needs, it does not propose any remedies to the rights violation involved. Indeed, in many cases social management does not even take human rights into account. While human rights are universal and often require immediate satisfaction, when these "rights" are transformed into a "needs" discourse, they are submitted to a number of negotiations and transactions and, in the process, lose their universal, indivisible and enforceable nature.

The paradigm shift that we are describing is taking place at the same time as the State is withdrawing from its direct intervention in the social field. By putting an end to universal services and programs, governments are retreating to the point where they are limiting their intervention to meeting the “needs” of the most vulnerable and “needy” groups in society. To properly define its reduced role, the State turns to the social modelling approach. In this universe, the indicators are tools that facilitate a ranking process leading inevitably to exclusion for some. For, although rights may be deemed universal, needs can be ranked on a scale with some being judged essential and others less so. In a context where we are dealing with a “scarcity of resources” (or political expediency), one particular need ends up being more important than another. And, beyond the concept of model building, the fundamental goal of the entire neoliberal procedure must be taken into consideration: to create and maintain an easily mobilizable labour force, designed to meet the needs of the employment market.

Indicators and Québec’s Fight Against Poverty

Whereas poverty is fundamentally a human rights violation (poverty = violation of the right to adequate housing, adequate food, adequate standard of living etc), the choice made by the Québec Government’s to root its anti-poverty strategy in neoliberal principles, including the those of NPM, raises a certain number of fundamental issues.

The Québec government’s fight against poverty grows out of the *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. As previously pointed out, social model building, and the resultant use of indicators, lies at the very heart of the approach.¹⁰

To summarize:

- The Act was adopted in 2002; Action plans followed in 2004 and 2010, both predicated upon an exhaustive results-based measurement of the “anti-poverty initiative”;
- In April 2009, the Québec government formally adopted the *Market Basket Measure* (MBM) as its principle reference indicator for measuring the evolution of poverty;
- The choice of the MBM by the government was made subsequent to a proposal that it received from *le Centre d’étude sur la pauvreté*, an agency of experts created following the adoption of the *Act to Combat poverty*;
- Le Comité consultatif sur la pauvreté, another agency created under the same *Act* proposed that the government use 80% of the MBM as the “floor” amount for all social assistance payments.

Some Issues

1. Depoliticizing the Fight Against Poverty

Poverty represents nothing less than the systemic violation of a poor person’s human rights on a variety of interdependent and inter-related fronts. That fighting poverty should be a political battle to reclaim and recover fundamental human rights was implicitly recognized

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 for more details on Québec’s anti-poverty initiative.

by the Québec Government when it ratified, in 1976, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Since the adoption of the anti-poverty strategy, poverty as a human rights issue is no longer on the agenda. Divesting the State of many of its responsibilities, the new way of fighting poverty is to depoliticize the issue by delegating it to new actors, largely from the private sector. These partners (charitable foundations, community leaders, municipalities) convene around stakeholder tables to discuss issues, share expertise and elaborate five-year plans. Stripped of any connotation of a political struggle pitting one interest against another, the *fight* against poverty has become a *debate about* poverty. In a world driven by poverty experts, renters and property owners have the same interest: a beautified neighbourhood, a functioning food bank and kids provided hot breakfasts at school. And to say that the experts are at the centre of this debate would definitely be an understatement; they are all over it!

While a political struggle implies the mobilization of citizens immediately concerned by an issue, a depoliticized fight, led by “poverty experts”, has no “immediate consequences” on the actors involved: they are not poor, their fridge isn’t bare, their housing is adequate. A depoliticized battle tends to be theoretical, less than urgent. It is more important to have a good analysis than to act. Indeed, experts, guided by indicators and action plans, can often justify inaction, waiting until their mathematical appreciation of a situation is extra perfect, extra refined and extra recent. A new study is always just around the *corner*...

2. « Seems to be » outranks « to be »

*“It should be mentioned that the 2006 data on the MBM, that factor in a differentiated cost of living depending on the province, **demonstrate that Québec ranks well in comparison with the other provinces and with Canada as a whole**»¹¹*

The political use of indicators introduces a « comparative » logic into the discussion, a discussion that is no longer one of human rights and rights’ violations per se. A “comparative” logic contradicts the “universal” logic of human rights. For, while indicators tend to show relative progress, they cannot account for the absolute claim of a rights violation. To be blunt: a person whose rights are violated in Québec couldn’t care less whether there are more or less suspected violations in Newfoundland or in Belgium. Whether Québec is doing “better” or “worse” than another jurisdiction is irrelevant to the Québécois citizen whose rights are being violated now!

3. Attaining the indicator becomes the goal of the struggle

«In the case of families, the objective of guaranteeing such a minimum [the MBM] has already been attained. Indeed, in Québec, as of 2009, families have available to them a minimum income that is almost as high as the recommended reference threshold.»¹²

¹¹ Taken from a press release issued by Minister Hamad announcing his acceptance of the EPE proposals.

¹² Advisory Committee on poverty and social exclusion, *To improve the incomes of individuals and families*, Notice to the Minister, April 2009, p.23.

Le Comité consultatif is clear : family income has already attained the official reference indicator for measuring poverty in Québec. In other words, as far as this indicator is concerned, poor families are invisible, statistically insignificant. And yet, the stories that we hear paint a different picture : too many families are poor, their fundamental rights are being outrageously violated. However, if the majority of families are “invisible” to the official poverty reference indicator, the question needs to be asked: Is the battle in Québec against poverty or is it to attain targets?

4. The use of indicators tends to promote a political strategy targeting the “poorest of the poor»

Debating the issue of poverty by focusing on the appropriateness of the MBM indicator as a reference measure is socially dangerous. The MBM is an indicator measuring the income necessary to purchase a basket of « essential » services. The fact is, however, that poverty goes much further than « satisfying some essential needs”. In real life, and in the context of directing “rare resources”, wanting to satisfy essential needs implies limiting the struggle to assisting “the poorest”...and forgetting that the poverty phenomenon goes further, much further, than the situation of “the poorest”.

If the struggle against poverty is limited to assisting the « poorest », what about the commitments made by our governments to implement a series of universally applicable social and economic rights? Everyone has the right to adequate housing and an adequate standard of living...not just the poorest in our rich society.

Experts are dispossessing those with valid rights of their own reality

Once poverty, or the definition of a right, becomes the object as determined and measured by a mathematical or statistical model, the only dialogue possible is that between experts using a jargon only they understand. Quite rapidly, those people whose rights are being violated are dispossessed of their own reality. A person is « classified » as poor if his or her situation appears on a particular statistical sheet. Depending on the indicator chosen, one is poor...or not. Depending on the indicator used, one is eligible for a program...or not.

A social reality that is determined by a model built by experts is one made up of clients and even clienteles. The clients become the raw material in a reporting process, statistics in an annual report and entities on a curve. And, in turn, the statistics in a report represent the raw material for the development of other indicators and models...

Meanwhile, human rights...

Indicators : at the heart of Québec's combat against poverty

The *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* was adopted unanimously in Québec's National Assembly in December 2002. The objective of this Act **is not to have fewer poor people by 2113**. No, it «is intended to progressively make Québec, by 2013, one of the industrialized nations having the least number of persons living in poverty, **according to recognized methods for making international comparisons**. (Article 4)»

Many Québec organizations, including the *Ligue des droits et libertés*, would have preferred an anti-poverty strategy rooted in a recognition of the importance of guaranteeing fundamental human rights. Nine years after the Law has taken effect, we cannot help but recognize that the Québec Government has chosen a completely different orientation for fighting poverty, one that is grounded in the attainment of targets and results. In this context, "indicators" assume a major role in *where* and *how* the state will intervene to "combat" poverty. The choice of the indicators is not neutral; it is fraught with political overtones...

In fact, the seeds of this indicator-driven, quantitative approach are to be found in the original Act.

The Act created a brand new institution, le *Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale* (CEPE) which was given the mandate to propose to the minister responsible **an official poverty indicator for Québec**. Following a thorough and comprehensive research, identifying different possible indicators,¹³ the CEPE proposed that the Market Basket Measure (MBM¹⁴) should be retained as the principle reference indicator for measuring poverty in Québec.¹⁵ In April 2009, the minister accepted the Centre's advice and since this time, the MBM has been the point of reference for poverty in the province.¹⁶

¹³ See, among others, CEPE, *Indicateurs de la pauvreté et de l'exclusion sociale*, October 2005. This study documents no less than seventy-five different ways of measuring poverty. Among the measures analysed are the Market Basket Measure (and its derivatives) and the Low Income Cut-off (LICO) and its derivatives. The LICO, with its component of relativity, is the measure used by the United Nations and largely used by the Canadian anti-poverty movement. It is more "generous" than, say, the MBM...

¹⁴ The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is an absolute indicator of poverty. Under the MBM, poverty is assessed based on the ability of a «family unit» to obtain those goods and services deemed to be «basic needs». To be able to establish the cost of an «imaginary» basket of goods and services, there is a guideline : if the income of the family unit allows is such that it can purchase the contents of the basket, it is not classified as poor; if it cannot purchase these contents, it is classified as poor. Under the MBM, the basket is filled with five categories of goods and services for a family made up of 2 adults and 2 children (8 and 13 years old). The basket, regularly modified and adjusted by Statistics Canada, contains 5 purchase categories: food, clothing, housing, transportation and other expenses. For more information, see, Vivian Labrie, *Pour se parler de la MPC, 2008*. Available on the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* site www.pauvrete.qc.ca

¹⁵ CEPE, *Prendre la mesure de la pauvreté*, Notice to the Minister, April 2009

¹⁶ Significantly, as part of the *Universal Periodic Review (UPR)* at the United Nations and two months after Québec's announcement, the Canadian government made public that it was also « committed to enhancing the importance of the market basket measure...». See, Government of Canada, *Universal Periodic Review : Canada's reply to the recommendations, «Poverty and Homelessness», 2nd paragraph, June 2009*

The Act also created *le Comité consultatif sur la pauvreté*, an advisory group representing different sectors of Québec's civil society and reporting to the Minister. One mandate given to this Committee was to propose a minimum level (*barème plancher*) for social assistance benefits. As the *CEPE* proposed the MBM as the reference indicator for measuring poverty, the Comité consultatif proposed that **the same measure should be the basis for fixing minimum social welfare benefits**. More precisely, citing the «*investment capacity of the State*», the Comité consultatif recommended that «the minimum financial assistance be set so as to guarantee 80% of the MBM's threshold ».¹⁷

In this way, the Comité consultatif transformed an indicator, which had been proposed by the CEPE as a «**means**», into a social policy «**end**».

Update (June 2011)

The Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity referred the Comité consultatif's recommendation to the *Centre interuniversitaire sur le risque, les politiques économiques et l'emploi (CIRPÉE)*, yet another expert body. Applying "econometric" models to the Comité consultatif's recommendations, this second expert group arrived at a different conclusion.

On June 21, 2011, upon the CIRPÉE's expert advice, the Minister announced that she could not accept the Comité consultatif's recommendation that minimum social welfare payments be fixed at a level equivalent to 80% of the MBM because such a measure would be too expensive for the State.¹⁸

Indeed, we are light years away from an approach to fighting poverty which is based on the primacy of the human rights of all citizens.

¹⁷ Comité consultatif, *Améliorer les revenus des personnes et des familles*, Avis au ministre, avril 2009 (Advisory Committee, *To improve the incomes of individuals and families*, Notice to the Minister, April 2009)

¹⁸ Available at : <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/assemblee-nationale/39-2/journal-debats/20110608so/documents-deposes.html>. The reference to "econometric models" is found on page 46. See also note 7 of this paper.