

Racial slurs anger women

THE SASKATCHEWAN COALITION AGAINST RACISM



Leader-Post photo by Don Healy

Irene Jamroziak (left) and Brenda Peekeekoot are both upset

By MURIEL DRAAISMA
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Two aboriginal women have left their jobs as guards at the Regina Correctional Centre because they say they were the subject of racist remarks made by other guards.

Brenda Peekeekoot and Irene Jamroziak told a news conference Wednesday they have lodged complaints with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission about the racial slurs.

Peekeekoot said she quit her job last December after she was told other guards called her "Sitting Bull's daughter, squatting squaw" and "just another lazy Indian." She worked at the prison for more than a month.

Jamroziak said she took a leave of absence last May after she was told that other guards made jokes about wanting to kill Indians and called her "Oka" in reference to the armed standoff at Oka, Que. last year. She worked at the prison for nearly three years.

Both women are upset at the treatment they received and want the prison administrators to provide cross cultural education and stricter policies for staff and management behavior.

"At the jail, right now, racial slurs are common. There is no respect for native guards," Jamroziak said.

"I am really tired of having to leave job after job because of racism at the workplace. I think the non-natives prefer to keep the workforce an all-white workforce. Native people have bills to pay too and we have families to feed."

Peekeekoot said the racism at the prison caused her much pain with which she is still coping.

"I quit because of the scar, the hurt, what I had to go through, the humiliation," she said. "There is more than one way to kill a person."

Now, Peekeekoot is waiting to hear the outcome of a grievance filed on her behalf by the Saskat-

Complaints lodged with commission

chewan Government Employees' Union. It was launched after she complained about the remarks to the union, which represents guards at the provincial prison.

The grievance does not name any guards and has been approved for arbitration, according to SGEU president George Rosenau.

Jamroziak said she never complained to the union because she was worried that such a move might jeopardize her own job. She added she does not want to return to the job if conditions have not improved.

She said management should take steps to eliminate racism at the prison by enforcing a strict behavioral policy that would call for suspension of workers who violate the policy and termination if need be.

Both women said they went public with their complaints Wednesday because they want to see changes made at the prison. Peekeekoot said it has taken her a year to gather the courage to tell her story.

The Saskatchewan Coalition Against Racism, a group that works to fight racism in the province, organized the news conference.

"This undoubtedly was a poisoned workplace. It was poisoned by racism," coalition president Peter Gilmer told reporters.

Dick Till, executive director of the corrections division for the provincial Justice Department, said corrections officials are very concerned about the allegations made by the two women.

He said Tony Lund, director of the prison, investigated the complaints after he received a report from the two women. Till declined to say whether any guards have been disciplined as a result of the complaints.

But he said the complaints are under review.