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## **HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION UPHOLDS WOMEN-ONLY DEFENCE COURSE**

The Ontario Human Rights Commission has refused to reconsider its dismissal of a complaint against the Wen-Do Women's Self Defence Corporation (WEN-DO). Michael Celik, a member of a men's rights group, claimed he was the subject of sex discrimination when he was not allowed to take WEN-DO's women-only self defence course.

The Commission's decision marks the end of WEN-DO's 6 year legal battle to safeguard women's right to learn to protect themselves in a secure environment.

The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) has been sponsoring WEN-DO's case since 1988. In April 1991, the Commission dismissed Mr. Celik's complaint as "trivial, frivolous and vexatious." In its decision, the Commission acknowledged that WEN-DO's program is "specifically designed to teach women how to protect themselves against sexual violence by men. As such, it does not appear that the training would be of particular benefit to the male complainant."

It also said that denying a man equal access to a self-defence course designed for women does not result in discrimination. "The alleged unequal treatment, when viewed in the historical and social context of gender discrimination, does not constitute discrimination under the Ontario Human Rights Code."

Mr. Celik, who has a black belt in judo, applied for a reconsideration of the decision but failed to do so within the time limit set out in the Human Rights Code. Since then, the Commission has been reviewing the issue of whether it should grant Mr. Celik an extension of time.

"We congratulate the Commission on deciding not to grant the extension and for dismissing the complaint," says Marilyn Walsh, a founding director of WEN-DO Women's Self-Defence Corporation. "We have always maintained that the complaint was made simply to harass our organization. We have been striving for 22 years to give women essential life skills which have been omitted in the sociological, cultural, and educational upbringing of the vast majority of young girls. This decision validates our efforts to make life safer for women."

"This is an important decision for women", says Mary Teresa Devlin, LEAF's Director of Litigation. "First, it preserves Wen-Do's role in teaching women how to protect themselves. Second, it sends a clear message that the Human Rights Commission will not tolerate frivolous complaints which trivialize the Code's purpose of addressing valid discrimination claims."

The decision is a welcome development for other women's organizations which have been subjected to similar claims of discrimination by men or male rights groups.

Professor Sheila McIntyre of Queen's University Law School acted as WEN-DO's agent.

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