**Submission to UN consultation on deinstitutionalization – Irit Shimrat, Vancouver**

I am lucky to have escaped psychiatry. Too many of my friends have not. Right now, several people I know are being coerced, under community treatment orders, to take “antipsychotic” drugs that are causing visible physical harms (e.g., tremors, muscle spasms, involuntary movements) as well as terrible emotional suffering. If they refuse, they will be detained and drugged by brute force, and may even be subjected to electroshock “therapy.” The harm done by such psychiatric “treatments,” by our torturous attempts to get off the drugs, and by the labels that make us see ourselves as less than fully human, is outrageous and unnecessary.

Objective (versus pharma-funded) “research” shows that the “science” underlying psychiatry is is bogus. Psychiatry’s victims know that the “help” it offers can be cruel, degrading, arbitrary and hugely damaging.

We often get locked up by friends or relatives who, concerned about our behaviour, summon the police. We are handcuffed, forced into ambulances, and taken to emergency wards. There, we are stripped naked, put in hospital gowns, shackled, injected with “antipsychotics” and locked into solitary-confinement cells (“seclusion” rooms). Once rendered helpless and submissive, we get to earn such “privileges” as being out on the ward with other patients, wearing clothes, participating in group activities, and, eventually, being discharged – too often with conditions such as regularly attending “treatment team” meetings, accepting unscheduled visits from “team” members and, above all, staying on the drugs. Even our ability to gain access to housing, employment and other basic needs can be made contingent upon our compliance.

Around the world, many alternatives to psychiatric “help” have been created and practised. Even people in the most extreme states have found real help in small, non-institutional settings that prioritize patience, kindness, listening, dignity and respect, rather than attempts to “fix” us. Yet it can be hard even to discuss, let alone to get funding and other material support, for such efforts – so dominant is the “mental illness” paradigm that fuels psychiatric interventions.

Legislation that supports the violation of the human and civil rights of nonconforming persons, and those experiencing emotional difficulties, must be eliminated. Available supports should include access to safe, secure, affordable housing, nutritious food, and employment; instruction in such disciplines as yoga, tai chi, meditation, breathing techniques and various kinds of body work; opportunities for many kinds of physical and social activity; the right to privacy; and people with whom to engage in activities of our choice.

We should also have access to a wide variety of groups and organizations composed exclusively of our peers, and to opportunities for creative self-expression. Too often, our self-image has been shaped, and our voices stifled, by the degradations inflicted by psychiatry. Too often, the voices of professionals, family members and others are privileged above our own.

We need organizations and publications dedicated to restoring our lives, our independence and our voices. There is tremendous power in coming together with our fellows, in sharing our experiences of subjugation and overcoming, of expressing ourselves in print and other media – in being heard, seen and validated in the fullness of our humanity.