

## ***Statement for the December 10<sup>th</sup> Campaign For Women's Equality and Human Rights***

**On December 10<sup>th</sup>, International Human Rights Day**, Canada will mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Instead of celebrating this historical milestone, women in Canada are mobilizing to ensure that governments honour and respect their international and domestic human rights commitments. This is because over several months now, the federal government has acted in ways that deny most women's realities, undermine women's access to justice, and abandon its own obligation to advance women's human rights in Canada.

### ***Reality Denied***

In 2006, the federal government made a number of important changes affecting women's equality rights. These include a 40% cut to Status of Women Canada and the elimination of twelve regional Status of Women Canada offices. These measures signal a profound rejection of the realities of women's lives. The justifications for these measures by Minister Beverley Oda are that women are strong, already equal, and don't need these critical policy and legal supports. Although we acknowledge that women in Canada have won formal equality rights, we know that much more work must be done to make these equality rights a reality for *all* women in Canada. One indicator of this is women's wages. On average, women still earn 71 cents on the male dollar, making Canada 38<sup>th</sup> in the world in terms of the wage gap ratio. Racialized and Aboriginal women earn significantly less. Their average annual income, respectively, is \$16,621 and \$13,300. Further, even though 70% of mothers are in the paid work force, Canada still does not have in place a national child care program. According to the Toronto Community Foundation, over 10,000 children are on a waiting list for subsidized child care spaces in Toronto alone.

### ***Access Denied***

Access to justice is now denied to women on many fronts. In the last year, the federal government abolished the funding for the national child care program, decided not to adopt an improved federal pay equity law, eliminated all funds for the Court Challenges Program, removed the goal of equality from the mandate of the Women's Program at Status of Women Canada, and prohibited the use of federal funds to engage in advocacy at any level of government, lobbying and most research. Other policy decisions have also contributed to denying women's access to equality and their rights. Among these are the cuts to literacy programs, the lack of support for women and men who are homeless, the refusal to respect the Kyoto Protocol, the decisions to renege on the Kelowna Accord as well as Canada's obstruction of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

## ***Equality Denied***

Instead of promoting women's equality, the federal government is severely hindering: women's capacity to organize, advocate and lobby. They won't support women's equality in the workplace and have limited women's rights to challenge discrimination before the courts. Canada's democratic safeguards are indeed being eroded and our internationally acclaimed human rights legacy is seriously in jeopardy.

### **Respect Your Commitment, Prime Minister Stephen Harper**

We, the undersigned, urge Prime Minister Harper to respect his own election commitment to uphold women's equality and human rights in Canada. During the 2006 election campaign, Mr. Harper stated:

"If elected, I will take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada." (January 18, 2006).

Prime Minister Harper is not respecting this commitment. The government's approach jeopardizes the historic efforts by Canada to achieve women's full equality, and disregards women's human rights here at home. Rather than uphold his commitment to the women in Canada, the Prime Minister has in fact ignored the experience of millions of women in order to justify his government's actions.

### ***On December 10, we call on the federal Government to:***

- Reverse its policy decisions on childcare, pay equity, the Court Challenges Program, Status of Women Canada, and the Women's program..
- Respect the CEDAW Committee recommendations, by improving the living conditions and respecting the human rights of Aboriginal women, effectively addressing violence against women and women's poverty, improving maternity and parental benefits, funding civil legal aid, changing immigration laws to respect the rights of live-in caregivers and ensuring a more equitable participation of women in the political institutions.

Women in Canada, because we are strong, determined and passionate, can and will not accept an erosion of their hard won and still fragile equality rights. Women are not living in poverty, as mothers, care-givers or elders, because they are weak or lack self-confidence. They do not *choose* to become the victims of violence at the hands of partners, family members or strangers. They do not wish to have their children taken from them because of a lack of access to safe and affordable housing. They have not *chosen* to be under-represented in Canada's political life, or to be underpaid in countless workplaces across the country. Women, women's organizations and our allies have chosen, however, to come together to call upon this government to reverse course and promote a collective respect for women's equality and human rights.

Sincerely,

- Aboriginal Women's Community-Based Studies Initiative
- Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Canadian Council of Muslim Women
- Canadian Federation of Students
- Canadian Federation of University Women
- Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action
- Canadian Labour Congress
- Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women
- Canadian Union of Public Employees
- Canadian Women's Community Economic Development Council
- Canadian Women's Foundation
- Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada
- DAWN Ontario
- Fédération des femmes du Québec
- Feminists for Just and Equitable Public Policy
- MATCH International
- National Association of Women and the Law
- National Council of Women of Canada
- New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women
- Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses
- Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Newfoundland and Labrador
- Public Service Alliance of Canada
- Regroupement provincial des maisons d'hébergement et de transition pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale
- Transition House Association of Nova Scotia
- Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada
- Women's Space
- YWCA Canada