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CANADA'S REPORT TO THE THIRTY-THIRD ASSEMBLY OF DELEGATES
The 2004-2006 Biennium of the
Inter-American Commission on Women

This report provides an overview of Canadian initiatives undertaken to promote the status of women since the 2004 Assembly of Delegates of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the Organization of American States.

I. GENERAL ASPECTS

Canada is comprised of ten provinces and three territories. Under Canada's constitutional division of powers, jurisdiction over policies and programs related to the areas identified in the CIM Strategic Action Plan is shared by the federal and provincial-territorial levels of government.

In 2004, 16.1 million women represented 50.4% of Canada's population. General trends show continued improvements in aspects of women's lives such as educational achievements and income, while challenges remain in areas such as the wage gap and the distribution of unpaid work. Certain groups, in particular female lone-parents and Aboriginal women, show above-average rates of poverty, while the poverty rate of senior women has continued to decline. Although violence against women and girls persists, statistics show a decline in spousal violence, consistent with an overall decrease in violent crime in Canada.

The Canadian government remains committed to gender equality and women's rights, and to building a society which is inclusive and respectful of all Canadians.

II. JURIDICAL, POLITICAL, AND SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION

Canada has a strong legal foundation for gender equality in its *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The federal, provincial and territorial governments have also adopted human rights legislation prohibiting various forms of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination.

Policy development related to gender equality in Canada continues to be strongly influenced by the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). Non-governmental equality-seeking groups continue to place importance on the Convention, having been actively engaged in Canada's 2003 presentation to the CEDAW committee, and the CEDAW Committee's recommendations have informed Status of Women Canada's (SWC) prioritization of women's poverty and the situation of Aboriginal women.

Canada remains committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its five and ten-year reviews and continues to work actively within the United Nations system, including at the newly-established UN Human Rights Council, the UN General Assembly and the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Convention of Belém do Pará

Although strongly active in its development, Canada is not a party to the Convention of *Belém do Pará*. Concerns were raised regarding the language of the final text, including its potential relationship to the American Convention on Human Rights, to which Canada is not a party. Canada continues its efforts to address and eliminate violence against women both domestically and internationally, and has ratified a number of international treaties protecting women's rights including the CEDAW and its Optional Protocol.

III. MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CIM STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION

(i) The Eradication of Poverty

Providing support for families with children continues to be a priority in Canada's approach to addressing poverty. In 2004, an estimated 865,000 children aged 17 and under (or 12.8%) were living in low-income families, down from 1.0 million in 1999. Families headed by female lone parents have been identified as having higher rates of poverty, with approximately 35% reporting low incomes.

At both the federal and provincial-territorial levels, Canada continues to combat child poverty through the measures detailed in the last report, including the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the National Child Benefit and the Child Disability Benefit. In a new development, the Universal Child Care Benefit was introduced in July 2006 to provide families with \$100 per month in direct income support for each child under 6 years old.

SWC's Policy Research Fund has a number of ongoing research projects linked to the theme of poverty and vulnerable groups, including work on immigrant and refugee women with a focus on human security and social capital, the impact of welfare-to-work policies on female lone parents, and a review of social security policies in the past 10 years.

In 2006 the federal government reduced the Goods & Services Tax from 7 per-cent to 6 per-cent. Recent modifications to personal income tax regulations aim to remove 655,000 low-income Canadians from the tax rolls altogether.

(ii) The Elimination of Violence

Canada condemns gender-based violence and supports a multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral approach to addressing violence against women and children. The Public Health Agency of Canada leads and coordinates the Family Violence Initiative (FVI) on behalf of 14 partner departments and agencies. The FVI promotes public awareness of family violence risk factors, strengthens the response capacity of the criminal justice, housing, and health systems and supports data collection and research to identify interventions.

As part of the FVI, Statistics Canada releases an annual report on family violence. The 8th report *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005* indicated that Aboriginal women are over three times more likely to be victims of spousal assault than non-Aboriginal women. The 9th report (2006) indicated that male perpetrators were more likely than females charged with spousal violence to repeatedly abuse their spouse.

SWC is using its annual FVI allocation (\$1 million over four years: 2003-04 to 2006-07) to fund national initiatives undertaken by Aboriginal women's organizations on the issue of violence against Aboriginal women. The Federal-Provincial-Territorial (FPT) Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women have prioritized the situation of Aboriginal women, particularly their vulnerability to violence.

In May 2005, the federal government allocated \$5 million over 5 years for the Native Women's Association of Canada's (NWAC) Sisters in Spirit (SIS) initiative. NWAC will work with other Aboriginal women's groups and the Government on initiatives to quantify the extent of violence against Aboriginal women, identify root causes, and implement programs and services aimed at eliminating racialized and sexualized violence.

In March 2006, SWC and its provincial and territorial counterparts jointly hosted the Policy Forum on Aboriginal Women and Violence to facilitate dialogue among over 250 researchers, officials, advocates and Ministers in order to elaborate on their collective capacity to prevent violence against Aboriginal women.

In 2004, FPT Ministers agreed to update *Assessing Violence against Women: a Statistical Profile*. It is anticipated that *Measuring Violence against Women: Statistical Trends 2006* will be released in the Fall of 2006.

In 2004-05, over \$2.6 million of SWC's Women's Program funding supported anti-violence initiatives undertaken by voluntary organizations at national, regional and local levels.

From 1993-2005, Canada led an annual resolution at the former UN Commission on Human Rights on the elimination of violence against women which created the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women.

In November 2005, reforms to Canada's *Criminal Code* (Bill C-49) created three new indictable offences related to human trafficking. Additional 2005 criminal reforms (Bill C-2) will better protect against abuse, neglect and exploitation by ensuring the criminal justice process is more sensitive to vulnerable victims and witnesses, primarily women and children, by facilitating receipt of their testimony and making it easier to enforce court orders, including breaches of civil restraining orders, granted to victims of domestic violence.

Working within Canada's existing legislative framework, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) issued guidelines in 2006 for immigration officers to provide legal immigration status to victims of trafficking in persons. More information is provided at <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/press/06/0602-e.html>

(iii) **Education**

In Canada, education falls under provincial-territorial jurisdiction. The federal government partners with provinces and territories in funding various programs, including literacy projects and scholarships.

The Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP) promotes accessibility through the Canada Study Grants (CSG) program for high-need part-time students such as students with dependents and students with disabilities. The CSG includes a special grant aimed at increasing the participation of women in fields such as engineering and the applied sciences at the doctoral level. Importantly, the CSLP allows child care costs to be included in needs-assessment evaluations. Women currently make up the majority of full-time students in most university departments in Canada.

In 2005, SWC commissioned a statistical profile with the Canadian Council on Learning (an \$85 million Government-funded independent body dedicated to the study of lifelong learning) to generate a profile of the relationship between education and workforce opportunities for female lone parents, including a focus on Aboriginal lone mothers and those with disabilities.

Since 2000, the federal government has provided scholarships to over 100,000 high-need students annually through the Millennium Scholarship Fund, a \$2.5 billion endowment. Sixty-two percent of recipients have been women.

(iv) **Participation by women in power structures and decision-making, as well as the workplace**

The election of a new federal government in January 2006 saw a decline from 65 to 62 women elected out of 308 seats in the House of Commons. Six women were appointed to Cabinet positions.

SWC currently funds the non-governmental initiative "Getting to the Gate," an online bilingual campaign school which aims to increase the number of elected women at all levels of public office by providing practical tools and guidance.

In 2006, an unprecedented four of nine judges on the Supreme Court of Canada are women, making it the most gender-balanced high court in the world. Overall, 26% of all federally-appointed judges are women, and women constitute 35% of the Senate.

SWC is working to increase the participation of Aboriginal women in political processes, in particular by encouraging federal negotiators to engage Aboriginal women in the negotiation of self-government agreements with First Nations Chiefs. Currently 105 of the 633 Chiefs are women, a significant increase since Canada's last report.

In 2004, the federal government committed to strengthen cooperation with Aboriginal peoples. This has included roundtable meetings and regional discussions involving Aboriginal groups alongside provincial and territorial governments, and culminated with a meeting between First Ministers and Aboriginal Leaders. For the first time, the Native Women's Association of Canada participated in all meetings.

Women make up almost half of all paid workers in Canada. In 2004, 58% of all women aged 15 and over participated in the paid work force. A large portion of these, 27%, work part-time. Many women (67%) continue to work in the traditional fields of teaching, nursing, clerical/ administrative positions and sales and service occupations, down from 70% in 2003.

Women have increased representation in certain professional fields. In 2004, 55% of all doctors and dentists in Canada were female, and women made up over half of those employed in business and financial fields. Women also accounted for 37% of managerial positions.

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency's (ACOA) *Women in Business Initiative* is designed to assist women entrepreneurs in Atlantic Canada. In June of 2006, eleven women entrepreneurs graduated from a six-month Managed Growth Strategy Program, providing training to women business owners in expanding their companies.

The federal Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS) has been renewed until 2009. The program assists Aboriginal people in finding and maintaining employment. Importantly, the AHRDS includes a child-care component, supporting over 7,000 child care spaces in 390 First Nations and Inuit communities across Canada.

The federal government and most provincial and territorial governments have employment equity and pay equity laws or policies in place. In 2004, the federally-commissioned Pay Equity Task Force released its Final Report containing 113 recommendations for strengthening federal pay equity legislation.

(v) **Health**

Throughout their lives, women's biology and social circumstances present a varied set of health issues, which also differ on the basis of social group, such as the case of immigrant women, Aboriginal women, women with disabilities or women living with low-income. Women are the primary providers of health care in Canada, either as health professionals or in providing caregiving to relatives and friends.

The Bureau of Women's Health and Gender Analysis (BWHGA) (formerly the Women's Health Bureau) was established in 1993, enhancing Health Canada's capacity to promote equitable health outcomes for women and men, boys and girls in Canada.

In 2003, the BWHGA, through the Women's Health Contribution Program, established the Aboriginal Women's Health and Healing Research Group. In April of 2005 the Bureau initiated the Aboriginal Women and Girl's Health Roundtable, towards developing Aboriginal-specific health indicators and a culturally relevant gender-based analysis.

The Government has invested \$110 million over five years (2005-06 to 2009-10) for maternal and child health services for pregnant First Nations and Inuit women and families with infants/young children. Providing increased access to programs aims to align programming in on-reserve First Nations communities with what is available to other Canadians.

The BWHGA is partnering with two Centres of Excellence for Women's Health to develop and deliver a skills-building session on Gender, Diversity and HIV/AIDS at the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto in August 2006.

Health Canada's Health Policy Research Program has called for research proposals to fill identified gaps in women's health indicators. The goal is to develop and validate indicators that reflect gender differences and diversity in physical and mental health in relation to a range of areas including socio-cultural roles, social exclusion, the environment, and health services.

Funding has also been approved for two projects through the competition on Secondary Research on Women's Health Indicators: "Psychotropic drug use as a gender-sensitive marker of emotional health for women in Canada" and "Measuring health inequalities among Canadian women: developing a basket of indicators", with completion dates projected for November 2006 and March 2007 respectively.

At the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly, Canada co-sponsored the resolution on the girl child, adopted by consensus, which includes references to sexual and reproductive health care.

(vi) **National institutions responsible for the advancement of women**

Status of Women Canada (SWC) is the federal government agency supporting the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. SWC acts as a knowledge broker on gender equality, a centre of expertise, and a catalyst in network building, providing leadership to other federal departments and agencies. SWC also undertakes its own policy analysis and development, and provides funding to equality-seeking non-governmental organizations and independent policy research.

In 2005, SWC conducted nation-wide consultations to obtain the views of Canadians on directions for advancing women's equality. This included an online questionnaire on the SWC website. The results indicate support for increased focus on Aboriginal women and on poverty, the development of indicators, and interest in gender equality legislation.

The federal government established the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women in the fall of 2004. The all-party Committee has tabled a series of reports containing recommendations on key issues affecting women. The full reports, as well as the Government's responses, are available at: <http://cmte.parl.gc.ca/cmte/CommitteeList.aspx?Lang=1&PARLSES=391&JNT=0&SELID=e24 &COM=10477>

Following the Committee's report on gender-based analysis, the Government created an Expert Panel on Gender Equality Accountability Mechanisms. The Expert Panel's conclusions and recommendations were tabled in the House of Commons in November 2005. The Panel's final report was made accessible to the public in July 2006 and can be found online at: http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/resources/panel/report/index_e.html

In 2006, Statistics Canada released the fifth edition of *Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report*. It represents a comprehensive picture of women and men in areas such as health, family status, education and paid and unpaid work.

(vii) **Migration**

SWC's Policy Research Fund is planning to release five new research projects under the theme of Urban Migration, including examinations of Aboriginal women's migration to urban areas, and the secondary urban migration of high-needs immigrant and refugee women.

(vii) **Women in areas of conflict**

The Women at Risk (AWR) assists refugee women in unsafe situations. This program allows Canada to quickly resettle women who qualify as Convention Refugees Abroad or members of the Country of Asylum or Source Country classes on an emergency basis.

The Urgent Protection Program (UPP) of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) ensures that Canada is able to respond to requests from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to assist refugees who are in urgent need of protection.

Canada has continued its leadership role in the area of policy development and research initiatives on women, peace and security issues focusing on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

IV. FUTURE ACTIONS TO ADVANCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CIM STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION

(i) ***At the national level***

The Government of Canada's current priorities focus on child care, tax relief, health care, crime reduction, and accountability. In this context, SWC's upcoming work will build on the Government's commitment to gender equality especially as it relates to these priorities.

SWC will be engaged in developing indicators and benchmarks to set objectives, measure change, and flag emerging trends. SWC will work to increase accountability mechanisms for the application of gender-based analysis and gender equality results. Policy development will focus on the priority issues of poverty and the situation of Aboriginal women. SWC will also continue to provide vital support for women's and other equality-seeking organizations.

(ii) ***At the regional/hemispheric level***

Canada will continue to be involved in the work of the Inter-American Commission on Women (CIM). Canada supports annual OAS General Assembly resolutions that promote gender equality in the hemisphere, including one that pertains to the strengthening of the CIM.

Gender equality is a crosscutting theme to be addressed systematically in all of the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) programming in support of the Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality results will be explicitly identified within CIDA's development cooperation in relation to women as decision makers, the human rights of women and girls, and access to and control over resources.

Since 2001, CIDA has been supporting the efforts of the OAS in integrating a gender perspective into programs and activities through the OAS Gender Mainstreaming project, to develop and implement a training program on gender mainstreaming for OAS staff and permanent representatives. In December 2004, CIDA approved the extension of the project to September 2006 and increased its budget by \$100,000.