

Canada's Statement to the UN Commission on the Status of Women misleading and disappointing

On February 28, 2007, Canada delivered its statement to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW), the United Nations body responsible for promoting the equality of women and girls, and monitoring the implementation of international agreements and commitments to women's equality, including the Beijing Platform for Action. The focus of this year's UNCSW is the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against girls.

Canada's statement to the UNCSW is our country's report to the international community. Canada has a history of strong leadership in advancing women's equality on the international front, but the statement issued on February 28, 2007 clearly shows we are backtracking as a country and as an international leader.

Internationally, it is disappointing that this statement did not put forward what we should do, collectively, as an international community to protect the rights of girls to quality public education, healthcare, and other public services, and to be free from violence, poverty and the many barriers to their full equality.

The statement mentions the "close partnerships with women's organizations, non-governmental organizations and other sectors of society" and states that "the voluntary sector has played a crucial role in raising public awareness and combating violence against women and girls." However just this year, this same government has eliminated funding to the women's organizations that have done the important research and advocacy work in bringing violence against women and girls and many other equality issues to the forefront, and who have proposed and piloted solutions to these societal issues.

Indeed, the statement was silent on the series of bad decisions the government has made on women's equality and women's machinery in Canada. Since Harper's government was elected in January 2006, it has cut 43% of Status of Women Canada's operating budget, closed 12 out of 16 regional offices, eliminated funding for research and advocacy for women's equality, eliminated the Court Challenges Program, torn up the federal-provincial child care agreements, and refused to implement proactive pay equity legislation.

We want to remind our government that equality for women and girls is still not a reality in Canada, and even less so for Aboriginal women, racially visible women, women with disabilities, young women, older women, poor women, and other marginalized women.

Canada's statement suggests that "girls must be empowered with the tools they need to exercise their rights" and that "as governments, we must learn to better recognize,

respect and support both the incredible resiliency and agency of girls”. While the government’s approach is now to fund short –term projects that will make “a direct impact on people’s lives”, we ask how this approach deals with the systemic solutions required to address the root causes of inequality? How will that help ensure girls have a chance for equality? Where is this government’s accountability to promote the rights of women and girls, to provide full access to these rights, and to provide the public services they need to exercise them?

Clearly, Canada’s statement falls short of where Canada should be on the issue of equality for women and girls. We will continue to ensure that our government meets its international obligations to equality for women and girls. We are watching, and we will not be silenced.

Canadian Voice of Women for Peace
Native Women’s Association of Canada
YWCA Canada
National Council of Women of Canada
Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women
Canadian Federation of University Women
Public Service Alliance of Canada
Ontario Teachers’ Federation
Feminist Alliance for International Action
Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women
National Association of Women and the Law
McGill Women’s Caucus, Faculty of Law

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