

CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL  
ACTIVITIES  
TO PROMOTE THE  
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

HIGHLIGHTS

(1990-1997)

JUNE 1997

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (1990-1997)**

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Women's equality is a fundamental element of Canada's domestic and foreign policies, including its development assistance. Consistent with priorities identified in the 1995 Federal Plan for Gender Equality and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) and other international instruments, Canada has pursued and will continue its efforts to advance gender equality in all of its international activities, in partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Canada's commitment to gender equality is rooted in the belief that equal rights for women are an integral part of human rights and essential to democratic development. Canada has consistently stressed the importance of the full realization of the human rights of women at the United Nations and at the recent series of international and world conferences. The following are highlights of some of our recent and current activities.

### **UNITED NATIONS (UN)**

#### **a) Fourth UN World Conference on Women - September 1995**

- Canada played a leading role at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in securing many of the major achievements for women. The overall goal of the UN World Conference was to accelerate progress in implementing the 1985 Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies (FLS) for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000.
- Canada worked toward the adoption of a strong Platform for Action, the main Conference document, which establishes a global agenda for achieving women's equality by the year 2000. An important accomplishment was the reaffirmation of the universality of women's human rights, requiring governments to promote and protect all human rights of women and girls.
- Canada chaired some of the key Conference negotiations, and contributed to agreements on such important issues as violence against women, unpaid work, women's poverty, work and family, worker's rights, women's diversity and the promotion of gender-based analysis as a critical planning tool for governments.

- In preparing for the Conference, Canada developed its own national action plan for gender equality, Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality, a five year blueprint to accelerate the advancement of women's equality in Canada. It commits the federal government, departments and agencies to a new policy requiring gender-based analysis of federal policies and legislation.
  - At the Conference, Canada was presented with the Global Award for the Most Improvement in the Status of Women by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women for its "steady and remarkable progress" in making legislative changes in the last decade.
  - Canada also stressed the need to expand the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the government (UN) conference. At the parallel non-governmental NGO Forum, Canada's NGOs were instrumental in the development of the Alternative NGO Beijing Declaration.
  - Domestically, Canada actively supported the involvement of young women and Canadian NGOs in government preparations for the World Conference, including the provision of funding to help women's groups in Canada to participate in, and follow up on, the World Conference. The government also established the Canadian Preparatory Committee (CPC) to facilitate government consultation with a broad range of non-governmental organizations who were active on issues related to the World Conference.
  - Internationally, Canada made the participation of women from developing countries a priority for all stages of the Conference process - at the national and regional preparatory levels and in Beijing itself. In doing so, Canada helped to foster networks of organizations working on gender issues that have continued on after Beijing. This support also strengthened government - NGO co-operation, in Canada and in the developing world.
  - In March 1995, Canada hosted a major preparatory event for the World Conference, the UNESCO International Symposium, 'Women and the Media: Access to Expression and Decision-making'. The objective of the symposium was to encourage women's access to expression and decision-making in and through the media, one of the critical areas of the Platform for Action.
- b) UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**
- CEDAW is the key human rights treaty which addresses the advancement of women. It establishes an agenda for action by countries to guarantee the enjoyment of women's human rights. The *Convention* covers the spectrum of areas in which women face discrimination, including in the areas of marriage and family status, employment, education, access to health services, and civil, legal and political rights.

- The *Convention*, adopted by the United Nations in 1979, was ratified by Canada in 1981. In accordance with its reporting obligations, Canada submitted its third report on the measures taken to implement the *Convention* to the United Nations in September 1992; the fourth report was submitted in 1995. Canada presented both its 1992 and 1995 reports to the CEDAW Committee in January 1997. Canada's fifth CEDAW Report will be submitted in 1999.
- Canada has been supportive of resolutions at the UNCSW calling for the strengthening of the capacity of the CEDAW Committee to fulfil its mandate. Canada also participates in discussions to elaborate an optional protocol which would provide for the right to petition under the *Convention*.

**c) UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**

- The Commission on the Status of Women, established in 1946, makes recommendations to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on status of women issues in the United Nations.
- Canada is an active participant in CSW, and has been one of the most vocal countries in calling for an increase in the number of women in UN decision-making positions. A new UN strategic plan (1995-2000) is being implemented for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat, which focuses on achieving the goal of gender equality in professional and senior level posts at the UN.
- At the CSW in 1991, Canada proposed the creation of an international instrument to deal with violence against women. This led to the development of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1993. It was the first UN instrument to contain an extensive definition of forms of violence against women, including physical, sexual and psychological violence. Canada continues to take a leadership role on the issue at the international level.

**d) UN Environment Programme (UNEP)**

- Canada participated in the January 1997 meeting of the UNEP Governing Council and supports actions that will result in a more effective mainstreaming of gender analysis in UNEP work and activities.
- Canada recognizes the importance of the role of women in the management of natural resources and wants to ensure continued recognition of the importance of gender equality for achieving sustainable development.

**e) UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) - June 1992**

- Canada played a leading role in ensuring that Agenda 21, one of the principal documents for the UN Conference on Environment and Development, included a specific chapter on women and that a gender perspective was integrated throughout the Conference documents.
- At the June 1997 Special Session of the UN General Assembly to follow-up on implementation of the UNCED commitments, Canada will work to ensure the reaffirmation of gender equality as critical for achieving sustainable development.
- Canada also continues to support the development of analytical tools, methodologies and mechanisms to conduct gender-based analysis in order to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women, and ensure the development and implementation of policies and programs that effectively meet and reflect the needs and concerns of women.

**f) World Conference on Human Rights - June 1993**

- Canada was instrumental in the affirmation of the equal rights and status of women and in the inclusion of concrete measures to recognize women's rights as human rights in the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, the key conference document.

**g) UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR)**

- Canada introduced a resolution on integrating women's human rights into the UN human rights system at the 49th session (1993) of the UNCHR and continues to lead on this resolution (Canada shares the lead with Australia and New Zealand on a similar resolution at the UNCSW). These resolutions have called for the integration of gender perspectives into human rights activities and programmes by encouraging: the strengthening of cooperation and coordination among all human rights treaty bodies, special rapporteurs, special procedures and other human rights mechanisms, and between the CHR and the CSW; encouraging the systematic inclusion in their reports of information on violations of the human rights of women; the promotion of the human rights of women by all relevant UN bodies and agencies through the training of personnel, and the exchange of information, experience and expertise; and the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex.
- As a result of a Canadian-led resolution at the 50th session of the CHR (1994), a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women was appointed to seek and receive information on violence against women, to recommend measures to eliminate violence against women and its causes, and to remedy its consequences. The Special Rapporteur has reported annually to the Commission on Human Rights since 1995. At the CHR session in 1997, her term was renewed to the year 2000.

**h) UN World Summit for Children - September 1990**

- Canada was one of six countries which initiated the World Summit for Children: it also co-chaired the Summit. Canada played a key role in drafting both the Declaration and the Plan of Action, which set specific goals for the year 2000 related to maternal and child health, nutrition, education, protection and adult literacy. Canada also took a leading role in the negotiation of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
- Among the commitments in the Plan of Action are measures to strengthen the role and status of women, including reduction of maternal and infant mortality rates, universal access to education, and reduction of adult illiteracy rates with emphasis on female literacy.

**i) UN International Conference on Population and Development - September 1994**

- The UN International Conference on Population and Development was notable for its emphasis on recognizing the link between population and economic and social development, and in its acknowledgement of the key role women's empowerment plays in the development process.
- Canada helped negotiate the final Program of Action of the Conference which commits UN member countries to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates, ensure equal educational opportunities for girls, and improve access and availability of reproductive health care services.
- Canada was one of the leading voices in the successful effort to have the Program of Action recognize the right of women to be protected from the consequences of unsafe abortion.

**j) UN World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) - August 1995**

- The WSSD was convened by the UN to address global social problems, particularly the eradication of poverty; the expansion of employment and reduction of unemployment; and social integration.
- Canada played a major role in promoting and strengthening the gender equality aspects of the Copenhagen Declaration and Program of Action, particularly that economic and social development cannot be achieved without women's equality. Canada also played a key role in negotiating agreements to broaden an understanding of work and employment by recognizing and valuing of the contribution made to society by people who perform unremunerated work and by developing policies to support socially useful activity.

**k) UN Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II) - June 1996**

- Canada was instrumental in ensuring that the key conference document, the Habitat Agenda and Global Plan of Action, recognizes the empowerment of women and their full and equal participation in political, social and economic life as essential to achieving sustainable human settlements.
- Canada worked closely with women's NGOs to ensure the adoption of a document that reflects gender analysis and perspectives. As a result of Canadian initiatives, the document reflects a Commitment on Gender Equality, which sets out a gender equality framework and requires that governments and other stakeholders integrate gender perspectives in human settlements-related legislation, policies, programmes and projects.
- Canada was successful in ensuring the reaffirmation of the right to housing as a human right under international law and the empowerment and participation of all members of society, particularly those belonging to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

**l) UN World Food Summit (WFS) - November 1996**

- The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) called world leaders together to participate in a World Food Summit, held in Rome, November 1996. The objective of the Summit was to review world commitments to achieving food security for all.
- Canada was actively involved in the preparations and negotiations leading to the Summit, both domestically, through extensive cross-sector consultations, and internationally, as a broker and facilitator in the negotiations.
- Canada achieved a key objective in securing Summit commitments to the integration of a gender perspective into all development and economic activities in world food security. The Summit documents, the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the WFS Plan of Action recognize the need for full and equal participation of men and women in economic, political, social and environmental decision-making to achieve sustainable food security for all.
- The Summit documents reaffirm Beijing language on the key roles of women, indigenous people, the private sector and other elements of civil society in solutions to food security.

**m) UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)**

- The 9th UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (1995) adopted a resolution, introduced by Canada, on the elimination of violence against women. Further to a similar resolution at the 8th Crime Congress, Canada collaborated with others in producing “Strategies for Confronting Domestic Violence: A Resource Manual” in 1993.
- Subsequent to the Crime Congress initiatives and recent developments in the CCPCJ, at the 6th CCPCJ session (1997), Canada successfully introduced a resolution concerning crime prevention and criminal justice measures to eliminate violence against women which provides a detailed complement to the Beijing Platform for Action. In passing the resolution, the CCPCJ agreed to adopt model strategies and practical measures to be used by governments and other interested parties as guidelines in their efforts to address, within the criminal justice system, the various manifestations of violence against women. The resolution also proposes that the issue of violence against women be considered at the high-level segment of one of the forthcoming sessions of the Economic and Social Council in the context of its discussion of women’s human rights and calls upon the UN Secretary General to report to the General Assembly in 1999 on implementation of the resolution.

**n) World Health Organization/Pan American Health Organization**

- Canada is an active member of the World Health Organization (WHO) and is the world’s second largest contributor to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).
- Through the WHO Tobacco and Health Program, Canada is funding a variety of programs to combat tobacco use, some of which deal specifically with women and tobacco.
- Canada took an active role in PAHO's Four Year Plan of Action on Women, Health and Development (1991-1994) and is past chair of the Subcommittee on Women, Health and Development of the PAHO Executive Committee.

**o) UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)**

- The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development is an autonomous institution within the United Nations system established in 1963 to promote research on the social dimensions of development. The Institute has sought to make a research contribution to major world events, such as the global conferences of the 1990s.



- The Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives project seeks to integrate gender concerns into development policy, especially macro-economic policy. In November 1996, Canada presented a background paper to an international workshop in Bangladesh entitled, Working Towards a More Gender Equitable Macro-Economic Agenda.

## **THE COMMONWEALTH**

- The Harare Declaration, adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 1991 meeting, enshrines women's equality as a fundamental principle of the Commonwealth. As a result of Canadian initiatives, the Harare Declaration includes among its priorities a pledge for the Commonwealth to work with renewed vigour to pursue 'Equality for women so that they may exercise their full and equal rights'.
- Canada has strongly supported the Commonwealth's involvement in women's issues and first proposed meetings of Women's Affairs Ministers (WAMM), which have taken place about every three years since 1985. Canada hosted the Ministers' third meeting in 1990.
- One of Canada's priority issues within the Commonwealth is the impact of economic policies on women. At the Ottawa WAMM, as a result of Canadian leadership, Women's Affairs Ministers developed the Ottawa Declaration on Women and Structural Adjustment which was subsequently adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 1991 meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe.
- As a result of Canada's initiative, Women's Affairs Ministers adopted criteria in 1990 for the admittance of NGOs as observers to Women's Affairs Ministers meetings. Canada also provided financial support for the establishment of an NGO Commonwealth Women's Network, which has had three meetings since it was formed in 1991.
- Canada was part of the expert group established to review and update the Commonwealth Plan of Action (POA) on Gender and Development, adopted on the eve of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995. Canada is a strong proponent of the approach taken in the POA, particularly the need to strengthen national machineries for women, to integrate gender throughout government, and to achieve equality of outcomes for women.
- Canada's strong participation at the fifth WAMM, held in 1996 in Trinidad and Tobago, led to the adoption of recommendations for a multi-disciplinary and harmonized approach to the elimination of violence against women; recognition of the importance of time-use surveys (e.g. to measure unpaid work); emphasis on the ratification and full and effective implementation of international human rights instruments; and support for follow-up to the Declaration and Program for Action of the World Congress Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children (Stockholm 1996).

- Canada also played an active role in the 1995 meeting of Commonwealth Health Ministers on the theme of women's health. Canadian interventions led to the adoption of an agreement to pursue stronger measures to reduce smoking among women, as part of overall recommendations to improve women's health.

### **ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)**

- The CIM (Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres) is a specialized agency of the Organization of American States (OAS), which Canada joined in 1990. Established in 1928, the CIM was the first official intergovernmental agency created expressly to ensure recognition of the civil and political rights of women in the Americas. Canada was a member of the CIM Executive Committee for the 1992-1994 biennium.
- Since joining CIM, Canada has ratified three OAS conventions on the rights of women: the *Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Civil Rights to Women*, the *Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women*, and the *Convention on the Nationality of Women*.
- A Canadian judicial expert assisted in developing the *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women*, which was adopted in June 1994 by the OAS (not yet ratified by Canada). Canada provided \$150,000 over a four-year period which was used in part to cover administrative costs associated with the development of the *Convention*.
- Canada has also provided specific funding to support the participation of CARICOM representatives in CIM Executive meetings.

### **ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD)**

- The OECD is a multilateral institution which provides a forum for consultation among industrialized countries on major economic, trade and social policy issues.
- Canada consistently seeks to ensure the integration of gender perspectives in all the work of the OECD, particularly within the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee.
- Canada has been a member of the Working Party on the Role of Women in the Economy (WP6) since its establishment in 1974 and was instrumental in the adoption in 1985 of its far-reaching mandate. Canada chaired the WP6 from 1989 to 1991 and is currently a member of the Bureau (Executive Committee).

- Canada's proposal to WP6 for a joint international research project on the policy responses to unpaid caring work was accepted at the December 1996 meeting, and is now on its agenda. Phase I of this project consists of a framework document and a series of international research papers covering policy principles and case studies of unpaid caring work policies in areas such as health care and child care.
- Canada has also participated actively in the OECD's Women in Development (WID) Expert Group of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) since its inception. The WID Expert Group meets twice a year and its aim is to support gender equality throughout OECD and donor activities by sharing lessons learned and collaborating on research. Canada also participates on specific task forces such as the one on Program Aid and Other Forms of Assistance which is developing a document on gender aware economic analysis.

### **LA FRANCOPHONIE**

- Canada has played a leading role in efforts to encourage the integration of women's issues into La Francophonie's activities.
- At the fourth meeting of heads of state and government of La Francophonie (The Chaillot Summit, 1991), Canada launched the network of centres for Legal Aid and Advice for women in the countries of La Francophonie. This network aims to meet the needs of women in obtaining legal and social equality through publications, public education, legal advice, representation in courts and visits to penitentiaries. Three pilot centres were opened in Benin and Cameroon in 1992. Today, fifteen centres operate in nine countries. In 1994, the associations of women jurists who manage the centres created the International Network of Law Clinics (Réseau international de cliniques juridiques). As of May 1997, the International Network of Law Clinics had a membership of 22 associations of women jurists in 15 countries. Canada has a continuing commitment to this Network.
- At the fifth Francophonie Summit, held in Mauritius in 1993, Canada reinforced its commitment to human rights, including children's rights, with a contribution of \$2 million to be used for the improvement and adaptation of educational systems, youth training and the encouragement of functional literacy of the girl-child.
- A resolution on follow-up to the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, adopted at the Cotonou Summit (6th Francophonie Summit, Bénin, 1995) and supported by Canada, reaffirms the need for full integration of a gender perspective in policies and programmes and underscores the commitment of La Francophonie to women's equality.

### **ASIA-PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION (APEC)**

- APEC was formed in 1989 in response to the growing interdependence among Asia-Pacific economies. Begun as an informal regional dialogue group with limited participation, APEC has since become the primary regional vehicle for promoting open trade and economic cooperation.
- Canada is one of APEC's 18 member economies and is the Chair of APEC for 1997. Canada's host duties will culminate in the meeting of APEC Economic Leaders in November 1997, in Vancouver.
- The work of various APEC fora to advance consideration of gender issues (the role of women in economic, technical and business development in particular) was reinforced in November 1996 when APEC's Foreign Affairs and Trade Ministers and Economic Leaders met in the Philippines. Leaders gave instructions to put special emphasis on encouraging the full participation of women in the development of APEC's economic and technical co-operation agenda, ensuring that gender issues would have a meaningful place within the APEC policy framework.
- Canada has been a strong contributor within APEC to progress in advancing gender perspectives with respect to human resource development, science and technology and small and medium business.
- The Women Leaders' Network of APEC economies, an informal network of women from the private sector, government, academe and NGOs, was founded in 1996 with financial support from Canada to promote gender considerations in APEC. The second meeting of this group will be held in Hull, Quebec - September 13-16, 1997.

### **CANADA/USA WOMEN'S HEALTH FORUM**

- In August 1996, the Minister of Health and the US Secretary of Health and Human Resources co-sponsored a Canada-USA Women's Health Forum in Ottawa. In affirmation of the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women and the International Conference on Population and Development, a Program of Co-operation was established between both countries on joint initiatives in the area of breast cancer, tobacco cessation, research and information networks. The purpose of the Program of Co-operation is to share information on findings, on means to address issues and to explore innovative ways of building on the efforts of the two countries to advance women's health.

## **METROPOLIS PROJECT**

- Metropolis is a six-year international research project, bringing together some 20 countries and organizations, aimed at promoting interdisciplinary research on the effects of international immigration on urban centres.
- Canada's primary contribution to Metropolis is the creation in 1996 of four Centres of Excellence for Research in Immigration and Integration at Canadian universities. One aspect of Canadian funding relates to support for research and related activities that will contribute to a better understanding of immigration issues from a gender perspective.
- The first national conference of the four Centres of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration (Edmonton, 1997) included a workshop on “Gendering Immigration/Integration Research: Approaches and Issues”.

## **DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION**

- Since the 1970's, Canada has played a lead role among donor countries in putting women's equality on the development agenda.
- Canada has been a longtime supporter of the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the mainstreaming of gender issues in other multilateral organizations to which it contributes such as the InterAmerican Bank, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, the United Nations Development Program, and the World Health Organization.
- In 1995, Women in Development (WID) was established as one of six programming priorities for Canadian Official Development Assistance (ODA), with a focus on gender equity and women's empowerment.
- Other Canadian international development policies, such as the Policy on Poverty Reduction (1996), reaffirm the commitment to women's equality by recognizing the need to implement policies and programming to address the relationship between poverty and gender inequality. The new international development Strategy for Health (1997) also recognizes the crucial linkages between health and the promotion of gender equality and establishes specific objectives to improve women's health (including reproductive health), to target programs for the health of the girl child and to address trauma and violence, particularly violence against women.

- The overall goal of the Women in Development and Gender Equity (WID&GE) Policy is the full participation of women as equal partners in the sustainable development of their societies. Gender Equity Funds, now operational in most regions where Canada provides official development assistance, are an important strategic mechanism for Canada to support gender equity.
- In 1994-95, 5.1% of Canada's bilateral ODA disbursements went to programming specifically focused on addressing gender inequality. WID&GE considerations were also integrated into a wide range of other project activities which did not focus exclusively on this issue.

### **BILATERAL RELATIONS**

- Women's equality is an important component of Canada's bilateral relations with other countries. In discussions and consultations with foreign officials and ministers both in Canada and at missions abroad, the importance of advancing women's equality and respecting women's human rights is often raised.
- Canada is well respected internationally for the mechanisms we have developed to integrate women's needs and concerns into all programs and policies of governments. Every year, Canada responds to requests to receive delegations from other countries to learn about Canadian models for addressing women's concerns from a governmental perspective. Particular interest has been expressed by countries in Canada's approach to gender-based analysis and issues such as violence against women and women's rights as human rights.

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