

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF CANADA
TO
THE 42ND SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

GENEVA, OCTOBER 22, 2008

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**DÉCLARATION DE LA DÉLÉGATION CANADIENNE
À L'OCCASION DE LA
42^E SESSION DU COMITÉ DE LA CONVENTION DES NATIONS UNIES SUR
L'ÉLIMINATION DE TOUTES LES FORMES DE DISCRIMINATION À
L'ÉGARD DES FEMMES**

GENÈVE, LE 22 OCTOBRE 2008

Introduction

1. I would like to begin today by expressing Canada's respect and appreciation for this Committee's tireless efforts to promote and protect women's human rights around the world.
2. Madam Chair, distinguished committee members, Canada is pleased to be here today to present our 6th and 7th reports at this meeting and we look forward to fruitful discussions regarding the implementation of our commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.
3. My name is Clare Beckton, and I am the deputy head of Status of Women Canada, the federal government agency responsible for the Status of Women. I also have with me a number of senior officials from federal departments with lead responsibility for issues that will be discussed today. Also present are representatives from a number of provinces and territories who also play lead roles on some of these issues. They are Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and Yukon.
4. In this context, I would like to remind the Committee about the Canadian system of government, as this fundamentally affects how we interact with and deliver services to Canadian women. As a federal state, Canada's structure of government outlines clear roles and responsibilities for each level of government: federal and provincial/territorial. Each has a unique role to play in implementing the articles of the Convention, depending on the subject matter. ~~Our reports~~ before this Committee attempt to identify initiatives being undertaken in all of the jurisdictions – and I will address a few of them here today.

Women in Canada

5. There are many positive stories to note related to women and their place in Canadian society. This includes significant increases in women's labour force participation and educational attainment, and in the dramatic reductions in the rate of poverty among senior women.
6. The increased participation of women in the paid work force has been one of the most significant trends in Canada in recent decades.
 - a. Employment and labour participation rates for Canadian women are near record highs and are converging toward those of men.¹ In 2007, employment and participation rates for Canadian women (ages 15 to 64) were the highest among G7 countries and were sixth highest among OECD countries. The unemployment rate for Canadian women is close to a thirty-year low and is below the unemployment rate for Canadian men.
 - b. Women have also significantly increased their representation in a wide range of professional fields of work, including among doctors and dentists, as well as business and financial professionals.²
 - c. Participation of women in university studies is higher than that of men and is increasing. Women represented almost 60 per cent of students enrolled in undergraduate studies in 2006, and in 2005 almost 46 per cent of graduates of Doctoral studies were women compared to almost 43 per cent the year before.³
 - d. Women are also increasing their enrolment in fields of study traditionally dominated by men. In 2003, women represented half of law school graduates and the majority of medical school graduates.⁴

¹ Labour Force Survey

² Women in Canada: Work Chapter Updates (2006), Statistics Canada, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, Catalogue no. 89F0133XIE, released April 2007.

³ Statistics Canada, 2008. Doctoral Graduates in Canada: Findings from the Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2004/2005. Catalogue no. 81-595-M. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/81-595-MIE/81-595-MIE2008067.htm>

⁴ Coates and Keen, (2007), "Snail Males: Why are men falling behind in universities while women speed ahead?"

- e. Canada continues to close the gender gap in earnings. In 2007, women earned 84 cents per hour for every one dollar earned by men.⁵ This ratio rose by 2 percentage points between 2002 and 2007.⁶
- f. At Canada's last appearance before this Committee, it was noted that a significant downward trend had begun in 1997, and I would like to highlight that this downward trend is continuing. The proportion of women living in low income has declined considerably in the past decade: falling from 16.3 per cent in 1997 to 10.9 per cent in 2006. However, the percentage of women in a low income situation remains slightly higher than the percentage of men. Generally, there has been a particularly sharp drop in low-income rates among senior women.

7. Canada is proud of these positive stories of women in Canada, but we also recognize that there is always room for improvement. I would like to outline some of those areas where we are actively working to better the place of women in Canadian society. This includes:

- a. attending to labour market challenges that continue for certain segments of the female population, in particular, Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, and immigrant women. These groups have lower labour force participation and employment rates than the total female population and are under-employed relative to their skills and credentials.⁷ Women in these demographic segments also have lower labour force participation and employment rates than their male counterparts.⁸
- b. Canada is also aware of the imbalance in unpaid work, where the vast majority of child-oriented work and care for elderly or disabled family members falls to women. Women are also still disproportionately affected by poverty, and women and girls remain vulnerable to gender-based violence.

⁵ Statistics Canada, 2008. "Labour Force Survey". <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/71-001-XIE/71-001-XIE2008007.htm>

⁶ Statistics Canada, 2008. "Labour Force Survey". <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/71-001-XIE/71-001-XIE2008007.htm>

⁷ Census 2006.

⁸ Census 2006.

- c. Women are more likely to be victims of certain types of violent crime including sexual assault, criminal harassment, spousal assault and spousal homicide and Aboriginal women are particularly vulnerable to violence. However, it is important to note that spousal homicide has declined in recent years for both women and men, and survey data suggest that the severity of non-lethal assaults against women has also decreased.⁹
- d. Women in Canada typically have contact with the criminal justice system because they are victims of crime. Only a small proportion of the prison population, approximately five per cent of those admitted to federal penitentiaries are women. While Aboriginal people comprise only about three per cent of the Canadian population, more than 30 per cent of women serving federal sentences are of Aboriginal ancestry.

We continue to actively work toward improvement in these areas.

Recent Developments

- 8. Canada's 6th and 7th Reports elaborate on the different government initiatives that were undertaken to respond to the various issues facing women in Canada as I have outlined. Since our submission in May 2007, Canada has continued to pursue the goal of addressing issues facing women, and Canada remains committed to achieving equality between women and men and addressing the barriers to women's full participation in the economic, social and democratic life of the country. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the fundamental changes that demonstrate Canada's progress since we were last before you.
- 9. The Government of Canada's overall approach to gender mainstreaming is gender-based analysis, and since our last report, Canada has moved forward

⁹ Statistics Canada, 2006. Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends.
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=85-570-XIE>

with its commitments to strengthen accountability for the implementation of gender-based analysis in government. For example, the Treasury Board Secretariat now requires that all submissions for funding at the federal level include gender-based analyses, and Status of Women Canada continues to provide training and expertise in gender-based analysis to government departments.

10. In 2006, Status of Women Canada began a period of transition, which has involved concerted efforts to modernize and streamline the organization in order to improve accountability, and to ensure that policy is responsive to the needs of Canadian women. In 2007, as a demonstration of Canada's commitment to funding equality and empowerment for women, the Government of Canada increased funding to the Women's Program, administered by Status of Women Canada, bringing the total budget for the organization to its highest level ever
11. Important progress is also being made at the provincial and territorial level. For example, following public consultation, in December 2006, the Government of Quebec adopted a new action plan on gender equality. The plan, which covers the period 2007 to 2010, provides 63 measures for advancing equality and has a budget of \$24 million.

Economic Prosperity

12. In regards to economic prosperity, Canada recognizes that women are key drivers of the economy. Canada has moved forward to address specific gaps in women's economic prosperity. In particular, work has been done to enhance support to families with children. Our previous reports mentioned the introduction and progressive enhancement of the Canada Child Tax Benefit system, including the National Child Benefit Supplement for low-income families with children. The National Child Benefit is an initiative of

federal, provincial and territorial governments and First Nations, and includes both income and other forms of support. Since the last report, the value of these benefits has continued to increase. The most recent annual joint Federal/Provincial/Territorial *National Benefit Progress Report* in 2006 shows that the National Child Benefit kept 59,000 families with 125,000 children from living in low income in 2004, a reduction of 12.1 per cent. In addition, there was a 9.5 per cent reduction in the number of lone parent families living in low income as a result of the National Child Benefit.^{10,11}

13. In recent years, Canada has also invested in providing choice in childcare and tax relief for working families, such as the new Working Income Tax Benefit, which is a new refundable tax credit that provides lower-income taxpayers with a financial incentive to enter and/or remain a part of the work force. The investments that Canada has made over the last several years, combined with Canada's strong economic growth, are having an impact: The percentage of children in low income families has fallen from 18.6 per cent in 1996 to 11.3 per cent in 2006.

14. Canada is also working to facilitate women's labour market participation through programs such as the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy, the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, the Youth Employment Strategy and the Trades and Apprenticeship Strategy. These programs continue to be successful in helping women acquire and maintain employment. For example, women's participation in non-traditional trades has increased by 77 per cent since 2000.

15. Efforts are also being made at the provincial and territorial level to combat poverty. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has invested in a new Poverty Reduction Strategy. One of the five main goals of the Strategy is

¹⁰ Press Release, June 2008. "Report shows that the National Child Benefit is improving the situation of families with children living in low income". http://www.nationalchildbenefit.ca/ncb/080613_e.shtml

¹¹ The National Child Benefit Progress Report, 2006.
http://www.nationalchildbenefit.ca/ncb/Progress_Reports/2006/pdf/ncb_progress_report_2006.pdf

to improve earned incomes. The Provincial Government is investing in initiatives that enable income support clients, marginalized workers, persons with disabilities, and other low income workers, including women, to make a successful transition to employment, work more hours, increase their skills and earnings, and maintain long-term employment. In Quebec, the third year report on the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, under the legislation adopted in this regard in 2002, indicates that investments, initially estimated at \$2.5 billion in the 2004-2005 budget, will reach more than \$3.3 billion by 2008-2009 for the full five years of the Plan. The measures introduced have helped to significantly improve conditions for several Quebec families living in poverty, and the number of adults receiving benefits under last resort financial assistance programs fell by 6.1 per cent between 2003 and 2007. This was particularly true for beneficiaries without job impediments, young people under 25 years of age, and families with children and women. Quebec intends to include new targets in its second plan, namely for single people who did not benefit to the same degree from the improvements observed in the past few years.

Violence against Women and Children

16. As in the past, all levels of government in Canada are taking action to end violence against women and children in all its forms. Significant contributions to combating violence against women include:
 - a. In 2007, funding of \$52 million over four years for programs, services and financial support for victims of crime, enabling federal, provincial and territorial governments to respond to a variety of emerging issues facing victims of crime across the country;
 - b. In June 2008, the federal government announced \$13 million for a national awareness campaign to help seniors and others recognize the signs and

symptoms of elder abuse and to develop information tools to help frontline professionals deal with incidents of elder abuse;¹²

- c. In 2007, \$7.3 million in funding through the Shelter Enhancement Program (SEP), as part of the Government of Canada's Family Violence Initiative, to support the repair and improvement of existing shelters for women, children and youth who are victims of family violence, and the construction of new shelters and second stage housing where needed;
- d. In 2007, providing additional funding to the New Horizons for Seniors Program, which, among other things, helps non-profit organizations develop national or regional projects that raise awareness of the abuse of older adults.¹³

17. The Government of Canada has also been actively combating child sexual exploitation and this remains a continuing priority. Over the past three years, numerous *Criminal Code* reforms have been implemented to strengthen our responses to the sexual exploitation of youth and other vulnerable persons. These have included:

- a. modifying the offence of sexual exploitation to increase protection for young persons by allowing courts discretion in defining exploitative relationships with a young person;
- b. raising the age of sexual consent to 16 years to better protect youth against adult sexual predators; and
- c. enhancing penalties for the offence of using the Internet to communicate with a child for the purpose of luring or facilitating the commission of a sexual offence.

18. The provinces and territories also adopted measures in this regard. Quebec has been combating violence against women for years through a variety of measures, including the adoption and implementation of framework policies

¹² HRSDC Press Release, 2008. "Government of Canada taking action to address elder abuse". <http://news.gc.ca/web/view/en/index.jsp?articleid=405179>

¹³ HRSDC Press Release, 2007. "Government of Canada highlights new funding available under the New Horizons for Seniors Program". <http://news.gc.ca/web/view/en/index.jsp?articleid=358709>

and action plans, such as the *Government Action Plan 2004-2009 on Domestic Violence* and, more recently, the *Government Action Plan 2008-2013 on Sexual Assault*. In addition, funding of shelters for women who have been victims of violence increased substantially, from \$30 million in 2002-2003 to \$61 million in 2007-2008.

Trafficking

19. Canada is also focused on combating the trafficking of women and girls at the domestic and international level. Amendments to the *Criminal Code* of Canada, which came into force in November 2005, created three new indictable offences that specifically address trafficking in persons. These offences build upon existing *Criminal Code* offences, which have been successfully used to address trafficking-related conduct, as well as the trafficking offence found in the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. It is worth noting that the first conviction under these new trafficking offences occurred earlier this year.

20. To support implementation of these new offences and the issues surrounding this crime, including how to effectively respond to the needs of victims, various federal partners, as well as municipal police forces have been delivering training to front-line law enforcement officials and other justice-system participants. An important aspect of this training is awareness of the special needs of Aboriginal women when coming into contact with law enforcement as victims of trafficking.

21. In May 2006, Canada introduced measures to strengthen its response to the unique needs of foreign nationals who are victims of trafficking in Canada. The measures provide immigration officers with the authority to issue short-term temporary resident permits (TRP) to trafficking victims. In 2007, the length of the permit was extended from 120 days to 180 days. In addition,

victims have to Interim Federal Health-Care benefits, including medical treatment and counseling services, and those victims who are issued a temporary resident permit are now able to apply for a fee-exempt work permit.

Aboriginal Women

22. Canada remains firmly committed to working with Aboriginal women to bring real improvements to the quality of life for Aboriginal peoples – First Nations, Inuit and Métis, and to ensure Aboriginal women, children and families feel safe and empowered. In recent years we have made significant progress because of genuine collaboration between Aboriginal organizations, their governments and the Government of Canada.

23. In order to work collaboratively to address Aboriginal women's issues, Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments participated in the National Aboriginal Women's Summits in 2007 and 2008. These ground-breaking events brought together Aboriginal women, government leaders and officials to discuss the challenges that exist for Aboriginal women across Canada. Emerging from the Summits were recommendations for government action, which have served as a basis for concrete actions taken over the past year and for the funding of specific initiatives in targeted areas.

24. The Government of Canada also acted with Aboriginal women and Aboriginal organizations to develop and enhance family violence prevention programs and services on reserve. This resulted in an extensive funding commitment and the creation of five new shelters.

25. Reconciliation and a renewed partnership with Aboriginal peoples is another important element of this work. On June 11, 2008, the Government of Canada, on behalf of all Canadians, offered an historic formal apology to former

students of Indian Residential Schools, including Aboriginal women. It recognized the suffering of students and families from this school system, and the impact it continues to have on Aboriginal culture, heritage and community.

26. The apology is a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, as is the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which includes compensation to former students who resided at government and church-run Indian Residential Schools. To date, 64,000 individuals have received compensation.
27. The apology, settlement agreement, as well as the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, all demonstrate Canada's commitment to deal fairly with obligations arising from the past in order to achieve our mutual goals, today and into the future.
28. A further example of efforts being made to address the needs of Aboriginal peoples, and especially women, is the recent repeal of Section 67 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, which prevented First Nations, living or working on reserves, from making complaints of discrimination arising from actions taken or decisions made pursuant to the *Indian Act*.
29. The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) has hailed the repeal of section 67, and has announced its commitment to work closely with First Nations organizations and the Government of Canada to design and build a human rights system that reflects and respects Aboriginal peoples' cultures and traditional laws.

Caregiving

30. Canada recognizes the valuable contribution of its unpaid caregivers - the majority of whom are women. In the past two years, the Government of Canada has: extended access to the Employment Insurance Compassionate Care Benefit to more caregivers; helped parents caring for children with disabilities by introducing a Registered Disability Savings Plan; increased the amount of the Child Disability Benefit; and broadened the list of eligible expenses that can be claimed in the Medical Expense Tax Credit.

Children and Families

31. Since Canada's last appearance before the Committee, Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services agreed to a Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care in 2003. It builds on the 2000 Federal, Provincial and Territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement. Through these agreements, the Government of Canada provides provinces and territories with \$850 million a year to support early learning and childcare.
32. Canada recognizes that families are the building blocks of a society, and that child care is a priority for Canadian families. In 2006, Canada introduced its Universal Child Care Plan. It consists of two key elements designed to give parents choice in childcare in order to balance work and family life: First is the Universal Child Care Benefit which provides \$100 per month for each child under the age of six; and second are new measures to support the creation of child care spaces, including a \$250 million per year transfer to the provinces and territories.
33. This is in addition to a series of tax measures and investments designed to recognize the costs of raising children. In total, the Government of Canada will provide \$5.8 billion in 2008-09 in support of early learning and care

through transfers to the provinces and territories, direct spending and tax measures for families.

Health and Well-being

34. Women's health and well-being are also priorities for Canada. Since May 2006, Canada has been active in the World Health Organization's Committee for the development of an Action Plan on the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). As a participant in the development of the Action Plan and the Strategy, Canada renewed its commitment to promote the mobilization of funds and reallocation of resources in order to expand access to high quality comprehensive Sexually Transmitted Infections management, diagnosis, treatment and support.

35. In 2006, Canada also participated in the development of the Sexual Health for the Millennium Declaration along with the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization. Through this declaration, Canada renewed its commitment to support the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by: (1) recognizing, promoting, ensuring and protecting sexual rights for all; (2) advancing toward gender quality and equity; (3) providing universal access to comprehensive sexuality education and information; and (4) ensuring that reproductive health programs recognize the centrality of sexual health.

36. Another key focus has been preventing the acquisition and transmission of new HIV infections, including mother-to-child transmission of HIV.. Voluntary HIV testing is now available in all provinces and territories as part of a comprehensive approach to prenatal care. In Canada, the proportion of pregnant women diagnosed with HIV who are receiving antiretroviral treatment to prevent transmission of the disease to their babies has steadily increased – from 60 per cent in 1997 to 89 per cent in 2006. In this same

period, the HIV infection rate of perinatally HIV-exposed infants in Canada has decreased significantly from 22 per cent in 1997 to three per cent in 2006. The reduction in mother-to-child transmission could be attributed to Canada's integrated approach to HIV prevention.

Concluding Remarks

37. Madame Chairperson and distinguished members of the Committee, these examples of current Canadian policies and programs affecting women and their families are intended to demonstrate Canada's continued commitment to women's human rights and to the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*.
38. Not only do we work domestically, as described, to address systemic barriers, we also work with other countries to share best practices (especially on gender-based analysis) and to promote equality for *all* women. Canada remains fully committed to the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). These international standards provide a constant benchmark for the fulfilment of women's rights. Canada is a staunch supporter of the work of UN Treaty bodies, such as this Committee, as key mechanisms in the international structure to promote and protect human rights for all.
39. Canada is an equally strong supporter of the Millennium and Development Goals (MDGs) and a champion of MDG 3, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. We view the third goal, which seeks to "promote gender equality and empower women", both as a goal in itself and as a fundamental step in achieving all of the MDGs. As part of the Global Call to Action, Canada is renewing its commitment to women around the world.

40. Canada remains committed to achieving equality between women and men and removing the barriers to women's full participation in the economic, social and democratic life of the country. Canada is proud of its progress in recent years, and will continue to build upon this success.