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***Canada's Report to the Thirty-Fifth Assembly of Delegates  
The 2008-2010 Biennial Work Plan of the  
Inter-American Commission on Women***

*This report provides an overview of Canadian initiatives undertaken to promote the status of women since the 2008 Assembly of Delegates of the Inter-American Commission on Women (CIM) of the Organization of American States (OAS).*

**I. GENERAL ASPECTS**

Canada remains committed to advancing the equality of women through the improvement of their economic and social conditions and their participation in democratic life. Canada is comprised of ten provinces and three territories. Under Canada's constitutional division of powers, jurisdiction over policies and programs which advance women's equality is shared by the federal and provincial-territorial levels of government.

Women and girls account for almost 51% of the population in Canada (17 million compared to 16.7 million men and boys). General trends show sustained improvements in aspects of women's lives such as educational achievements and labour force participation. However, challenges remain in key areas. While overall crime rates in Canada have declined, women continue to be disproportionately the victims of certain types of crime including criminal harassment and spousal abuse. Some groups of women face particular challenges – for example, Aboriginal women and immigrant women have disproportionate rates of low income.

**Legal, political and socio-economic 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.

Canada continues to be strongly influenced by the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) and presented its combined 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Reports to the CEDAW Committee in Geneva, Switzerland on October 22, 2008 followed by an interim report in February 2010. Canada also remains committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and continues to work actively within the United Nations system, including at the UN General Assembly (GA), the UN Human Rights Council, and the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW).

**II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CIM BIENNIAL WORKPLAN (2008-2010)**

a) Gender-based violence

Canada continues to be committed to the long-term reduction of the occurrence of all forms of gender-based violence, including child maltreatment, intimate partner violence and sexual exploitation against women and girls. The Government of Canada addresses such issues in part through the Family Violence Initiative (FVI). The Public Health Agency of Canada leads and coordinates the FVI, a horizontal collaboration of 15 federal departments, agencies and Crown corporations. The FVI aims to reduce the occurrence of family violence in Canada by raising awareness of the issue; strengthening the capacity of the justice, housing and health systems to respond; and engaging in data collection and research to identify promising and effective practices. The FVI also works collaboratively with researchers and international bodies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), to prevent and address family violence.

Canada recognizes that certain groups of women may be at increased risk of experiencing violence and abuse. Canada supported the Native Women's Association of Canada's (NWAC) *Sisters in Spirit* initiative, a five-year initiative (2005-2010) which aimed to quantify the extent of violence against Aboriginal women, identifying root causes, and making recommendations to improve programs and services aimed at eliminating racial and gender-based violence. Under this initiative, NWAC published several reports on statistics and trends in gender violence. Building on the success of the *Sisters in Spirit* initiative, and as a first initiative in addressing the findings, Canada is funding Evidence to Action, this project will strengthen the abilities of 2,500 Aboriginal women and girls across Canada to recognize and respond to issues of gender-based violence within their families and communities. It will also strengthen the ability of communities to break the cycle of violence.

The Government of Canada and the provinces and territories collaborate through the Federal-Provincial-Territorial (F-P/T) Working Group on Missing Women to consider the effective identification, investigation and prosecution of cases involving serial killers who target persons living a high risk lifestyle, including but not limited to the sex trade. A second F-P/T Working Group, one on Aboriginal Justice, is examining victimization in Aboriginal communities resulting from disproportionately high levels of family and interpersonal violence, which is also highly relevant to the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. The two Working Groups share information related to common themes.

The First Nations Family Violence Prevention Program provides operational funding for a network of 36 shelters and supports approximately 350 community-based prevention projects for First Nations women, children and families resident on reserve. In June 2007, it announced new investments totaling \$55.65 million over five years to support the existing network of shelters and the construction and operation of five new shelters. In 2007, the Government of Canada made a long-term commitment to urban Aboriginal issues by investing \$68.5 million over five years to promote self-reliance and to increase life choices for Aboriginal peoples in key centers across Canada.

The Government of Canada through SWC also committed \$479,798 to NWAC for a 32-month project from October 2007 to May 2010, for a Violence Prevention Toolkit. The project trains 200 youth and youth councils across Canada to deliver workshops to sensitize and equip another 1,000 Aboriginal youth to deal with all forms of violence that Aboriginal girls face in their communities. Participants used the toolkit to address their security needs and concerns regarding domestic violence and its impact, as well as date violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse and bullying.

Budget 2010 announced the investment of \$10 million over two years to address the disturbingly high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Concrete actions will be taken to ensure that law enforcement and the justice system meet the needs of Aboriginal women and their families. The Minister of Justice will announce details in the coming months. In addition, in 2009-2010 Status of Women Canada approved \$1.5 million over three years for projects to end violence against Aboriginal women.

One of the most common frustrations reported by victims of crime is that they feel excluded from the Canadian justice system. Budget 2006 announced the Federal Victims Strategy, which enhanced programming, and created the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. Building on this investment, Budget 2010 provided funding of \$6.6 million over two years to enhance support for victims of crime, including providing facilitated access to EI sickness benefits for eligible workers who have lost a family

member as a result of a crime.

In 2008-2009, a total of 46 initiatives addressing the issue of violence against women were approved for funding under the Women's Program of Status of Women Canada, for a total amount of over \$6.6 million over three years. In 2009-2010, a total of 38 initiatives addressing the issue of violence against women were approved for funding under the Women's Community Fund for a total amount of over \$7.1 million over three years.

#### Convention of *Belém do Pará*

Although active in its development, Canada is not a party to the Convention of *Belém do Pará*. Canada continues to address violence against women and girls both domestically and internationally and has ratified a number of relevant international treaties, including the CEDAW and its Optional Protocol.

#### b) Gender and HIV

Canada's domestic and international response to HIV/AIDS is comprehensive, evidence-based, and built on a foundation of the respect for human rights, gender equality, anti-stigma and anti-discrimination of key vulnerable populations. Canada also recognizes the particular factors and conditions which place women and girls at risk of HIV/AIDS. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) estimated that in 2008 women accounted for 22% of people living with HIV (PHA) and 26% of all new infections in Canada. While the annual number of positive HIV tests among women has fluctuated slightly over the last decade, it is not declining. The proportion of pregnant women diagnosed with HIV who received antiretroviral treatment to prevent the transmission of HIV to their babies increased from 60% (1997) to 87.8% (2008) and the proportion of infants perinatally exposed to HIV and confirmed infected decreased from 9.3% (2000) to 1.7% (2008).

The *Federal Initiative to Address HIV in Canada* includes a number of activities and programs targeting HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and support for women:

- the development of a Status Report on Women and HIV/AIDS in partnership with experts and women affected by HIV/AIDS to guide future policy, program and research priorities;
- the development of national guidelines for HIV testing and counseling;
- funds for projects led by community-based organizations to promote awareness and deliver local prevention, care and support services to women living with, or at risk for, HIV/AIDS; and
- in Canada, voluntary HIV testing is available in all provinces and territories as part of a comprehensive approach to prenatal care.

In 2010, as President of the G-8, Canada championed the new Maternal Child Health Initiative at the Muskoka Summit Canada making maternal, newborn and child health a critical element of its new priority of securing the future of children and youth as a step towards achieving Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 (maternal and child health) and elements of 1 (health systems) and 6 (HIV, malaria and infectious diseases). This Initiative includes elements such as: antenatal care; attended childbirth; post-partum care; sexual and reproductive health care and services, including voluntary family planning; health education; treatment and prevention of diseases, including infectious diseases; prevention of mother-to-child (vertical) transmission of HIV; immunizations; basic nutrition; and relevant actions in the field of safe drinking water and sanitation.

Canada will continue to invest in research and partnerships to build the evidence base and inform policies and programs to most effectively meet the needs of people living with, and at risk of, HIV.

c) Gender and Migration

Canada recognizes the need to integrate gender considerations in the development of migration policies, including those related to the protection of migrant workers and responding to human trafficking and smuggling. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) also has a dedicated Gender-Based Analysis Unit, which serves as a centre of expertise and supports Canada's commitment to incorporating gender and diversity analysis into its immigration policies and programs. Canada continues to promote the protection of the rights of migrants, particularly women and children. The Canadian legal system provides protection for the human rights of all persons in Canada, regardless of their immigration status. Federal and provincial labor standards also apply to all workers in the same industry.

The Government of Canada continues to support the needs of immigrants and refugees in Canada. CIC's settlement program assists these women and men with overcoming challenges specific to the newcomer experience (e.g. lack of official language skills and limited knowledge of Canada) so that they can participate in the social, cultural, civic and economic life of Canada. The program accomplishes this goal by providing language learning services for newcomers, community and employment bridging services, settlement information, and support services that facilitate access to settlement programming (like child minding services for parents).

In April 2010, Canada implemented changes to its Live-In Caregiver Program, which provides foreign caregivers, the majority of whom are women, with the opportunity to apply for permanent resident status after completing two years of caregiving employment. These changes improve worker protections and increase the flexibility of requirements to qualify for permanent residence. More information on these improvements can be found at: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/backgrounders/2010/2010-08-18a.asp>.

d) Gender and Natural Disasters

Canada works with key international and regional partners in the Americas to ensure that gender issues are appropriately addressed in disaster management strategies and programs. For example, after the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), provided support to the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) to ensure that multi-sectoral services, such as health care, legal assistance and psychosocial support, are in place for women and girls at increased risk of gender-based violence.

### III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTRA-AMERICAN PROGRAM AND STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION OF THE CIM

The Eradication of Poverty

The Government of Canada (GoC) takes a long-term approach to addressing poverty, which emphasizes providing Canadians with the skills and opportunities to work towards self-sufficiency, and fostering the economic conditions to enable Canadians to support their families. Canada also recognizes that some groups are particularly vulnerable to experiencing low income.

The **Old Age Security (OAS)** program, including the **Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS)** for low-income seniors, provides Canadian seniors with a minimum income guarantee. In 2009-2010, the GoC provided \$35.6 billion in monthly benefits through the OAS to 4.6 million seniors aged 65 and over, including \$7.7 billion in GIS payments to 1.6 million seniors. According to Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Off measure (LICO), the percentage of senior women living in low income has fallen

significantly (from 26.7% in 1980 to 6.0% in 2007), including among those particularly vulnerable such as the unattached women (from 57.1% in 1980 to 14.3% in 2007).

The GoC provides about \$14 billion in benefits for families with children through the **Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB)**. This includes the **National Child Benefit (NCB)** Supplement for low-income families, the **Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB)**, which pays \$100 per month to all families for each child under the age of 6, and the **Child Tax Credit (CTC)**, which provides tax relief to parents. Budget 2010 announced changes of interest to low-income families: improved taxation of the UCCB to ensure that single-parent families receive tax treatment comparable to that of two-parent families; allowing parents with joint custody to split their monthly child benefits throughout the year; and allowing parents with joint custody to each receive one-half of the annual child component of the GST/HST credit, paid to them quarterly. The NCB prevented an estimated 144,500 children from living in low income (2005).

Budget 2009 doubled the **Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB)** to \$1.1 billion, which makes work more rewarding for low- and modest-income Canadians. In its first year, nearly one million working Canadians are estimated to have benefited from the WITB, a slight majority of whom are women.

#### Education

In Canada, the education system falls under provincial-territorial jurisdiction. The Government of Canada provides interest-free loans to post-secondary students, grants for students in low-income families, grants targeted to students with dependents, a loan-forgiveness benefit, as well as grants directed to offset the extra costs incurred by students with permanent disabilities. Provinces and territories are also major collaborative partners in delivering financial assistance to students in their jurisdictions.

In the past few decades, Canadian women have taken remarkable strides forward in educational attainment. The proportion of women in the 25-64 age group with completed post-secondary education has increased from 51% in 1999 to 62% in 2009. In 2006-07, women accounted for approximately 55% of college enrollments. And, in 2007-08 women comprised approximately 57.5% of undergraduate university students, 55% of the graduate students, and 46% of PhD students.

In 2009-10, **Canada Student Loans and Grants** assisted over 400,000 Canadian students. Women are major recipients of Canada student financial assistance and constitute 60% of Canada student loan borrowers and 77% of recipients of grants for students with dependents. In 2010, the Government of Canada also provided \$20 million in support of **Pathways to Education Canada (PEC)**, a unique program of early intervention and support for high school students aimed at reducing high school drop-out rates and increasing post-secondary enrolment of disadvantaged youth through tutoring, mentoring, counseling and financial support for students and their families.

#### Participation by women in power structures and decision-making, as well as in the workplace

Currently, women hold 22.2% of the seats in the House of Commons and 27 percent (10 of 37) of Canada's federal Cabinet posts. Women constitute 34 percent of Canadian Senators ranking 51<sup>st</sup> in the world, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009 data). In 2010, on average, 30.3 percent of cabinet posts in the provinces and territories were held by women, with Quebec leading at 46.2 and New Brunswick lowest at 4.8 percent. In the private sector, Canadian executive women are qualified for corporate leadership by experience and education. In 2009, women held 40 percent of

management-related occupations, 16.9 percent of all executive officer posts, and 3.8 percent of CEO positions. Women earned 34.5 percent of the MBA degrees granted in Canada in 2009.

Women represented 47.3% of the total workforce in 2009, up from 45.7% in 1999 and 37.1% in 1976 (Canadian Social Trends). The labor force participation rate for Canadian women aged 15 to 64 rose from 68.2% in 1997 to 74.3% in 2009. Since January 2009, women have, for the first time, comprised a majority of paid employees in Canada. They now represent 50.3% of paid employees and 35% of all self-employed persons. During the recession, the employment rate for both women and men contracted. The employment rate for women in 2009 stood at 58.3%, a decrease of 1 percentage point, while for men it was 65.2%, a decrease of 2.3 percentage points (Canadian Social Trends). Since July 2009, women have led the way in recovery, and 70.0% of their previous job losses had been regained as of December 2009. By January 2010, the entirety of job losses had been regained. Supporting the recovery process, Status of Women Canada is providing \$367,529 to the Minerva Foundation for BC Women for the project, *Women Leading the Way*, to help women develop leadership skills. The project will focus on mentorship and the processes of governance in the political, economic and social arenas.

### Health

In 2009, Health Canada along with its Health Portfolio partners approved a new Health Portfolio Sex and Gender-Based Analysis Policy. This policy commits Health Portfolio partners to use sex and gender based analysis when they develop, implement and evaluate their research, policies and programs to help meet the needs of Canadian men and women, girls and boys. Health Canada supports and manages the Women's Health Contribution Program, which uses a gender sensitive approach to policy research aimed at enhancing the health system's understanding of, and responsiveness to, women's health issues. Health Canada also participates in interdepartmental gender-focused networks and working groups.

Health Canada's Centres of Excellence for Women's Health represent a unique multi-disciplinary partnership among academics, community-based organizations and policy makers. To date, the Centres have produced more than 300 research reports to inform the policy process and generate knowledge about the determinants of women's health, including gender and diversity. Also, the Canadian Women's Health Network (CWHN) is funded by Health Canada's Women's Health Contribution Program to facilitate national networking of women's health organizations in Canada.

### National institutions responsible for the advancement of women

Status of Women Canada (SWC) is a federal government organization that promotes the full participation of women in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada, putting particular emphasis on increasing women's economic security and prosperity, and eliminating violence against women in order to create the conditions of success for women. SWC works with federal departments and agencies to ensure that gender dimensions are taken into account in the development of policies and programs by conducting gender-based analysis and by providing advice to the Minister responsible for the Status of Women in her or his role to advance the equality of women in Canada. In May, 2009 the Auditor General released her report and recognized the efforts of central agencies and Status of Women Canada to improve the practice of GBA across government. Further to the audit and the government's response, central agencies and Status of Women Canada have developed an Action Plan which elaborates on the commitments made in the response to the Auditor General's recommendations.

Through the Women's Program and its two components, the Women's Community Fund and the Women's Partnership Fund, SWC also plays a vital role in supporting the work of women's and other Canadian organizations. In 2009, through the Women's Community Fund, the Government of Canada supported 78 projects that positively impact the lives of thousands of women. These projects address ending violence against women and girls, improving their economic security and prosperity, and encouraging them in leadership and decision-making roles. A list of funded projects can be found at [www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/med/news-nouvelles/2010/0506-eng.html](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/med/news-nouvelles/2010/0506-eng.html). It is also important to mention that different kinds of women's machineries are in place in most provinces and territories.

Internationally, SWC contributes to advances in gender equality globally by working collaboratively with other countries and through international organizations, such as: the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation initiative (APEC), and the Organization of American States (OAS). SWC's expertise is often sought in formal presentations, information exchanges and in providing guidance based on SWC's experience in advancing gender equality. SWC has also contributed to the adoption, by multilateral organizations, of agreements, instruments and policies that advance the status of women.

#### Women in areas of conflict

The Government of Canada is committed to addressing the issues of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. In 2008-2010, Canada funded a second phase of a project by the Canadian organization, Inter Pares, to work with grassroots women's organizations and others in Guatemala, Colombia and Peru aimed at empowering women to address impunity and reparation for gender-based violence during times of armed conflict.

Canada is committed to the full and effective implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. Through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's Global Peace and Security Fund, Canada supports efforts of Canadian and international civil society organizations to address key issues on the women, peace and security agenda in the Americas. For example, the Argentinean NGO RESDAL conducts research and raises awareness about the role of women in Latin American armed and police forces and their contribution to peace operations and security institutions.

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

##### (i) At the national level

Working through Status of Women Canada, in partnership with federal departments and key stakeholders, Canada will work to further equality for women by continuing to identify barriers and challenges faced by women, as well as opportunities to promote women's full participation in Canadian society. SWC's important role will continue as outlined in the Government response to the report of the Auditor General on GBA. The plan reiterates the Government of Canada's commitment to including GBA in the development and assessment of policies and programs.

##### (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. Support for gender equality remains central to

Canada's Official Development Assistance to the region. Across the region, Canada has provided support to projects and programming aimed at increasing respect for women's rights and women's role in decision-making processes, as well as enhancing the capacity of government and civil society to advance progress in these areas. Canada will continue to integrate gender equality considerations into programs and projects in such sectors as democratic governance, education and health, and will remain engaged in policy dialogue and providing assistance to key partners such as the OAS, the IADB and PAHO to build their capacity to support progress on gender equality in the region.