

ANNUAL BRIEF

FOR PRESENTATION TO

THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

**THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JEAN CHRÉTIEN
PRIME MINISTER**

2003

BY

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA

CATHARINE LAIDLAW-SLY, PRESIDENT

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RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED IN JUNE 2003

03.1	ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FEDERALLY TRANSFERRED FUNDS	5
03.2	CAMPAIGN FOR FAIRER TRADE RULES	6
03.3	HELPING FOREIGN-TRAINED HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS ACCESS ACCREDITATION	8
03.4	RESOURCES FOR RURAL AND URBAN MUNICIPALITIES	9
03.5	LOW FREQUENCY ACTIVE SONAR SYSTEMS	10
03.6	INFORMING IMMIGRANTS	11
03.7	POSSIBLE DELETERIOUS EFFECTS OF VACCINES	12
03.8	INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS	13
03.9	MEDICAL SAVINGS ACCOUNTS	14
POLICY UPDATES		
03.1PU	FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME	15
03.2PU	DANGER OF NUCLEAR WEAPON READINESS	17
03.3PU	GENETIC TESTS AND INSURANCE CLAIMS	18
03.4PU	MEGA HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECTS IN CANADA'S NORTH	19
EMERGING ISSUE RESOLUTIONS		
03.1EIA	FIFTH WORLD CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN	20

The National Council of Women of Canada

Annual Brief to the Government of Canada

2003

Preamble

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) is pleased once again to present its new and updated policy positions in the form of their Brief to the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada.

Founded in 1893, the National Council of Women of Canada is a non-profit, non-partisan organization of women representing a large number of citizens of diverse occupation, language, origin and culture, reflecting a cross section of public opinion. NCWC is composed of 18 Local Councils, 5 Provincial Councils, and 26 Nationally Organized Societies.

NCWC policy is formulated by means of Local Council initiative or through the work of NCWC Conveners. Policy additions and changes are proposed, circulated and voted on by the general membership. Council members may speak only on existing policy when contacting the government, the media and the public. This Brief, comprising new policies, updates of existing policies and policies on emerging issues, is therefore the united voice of the federated membership of the National Council of Women of Canada.

NCWC is a federate of the International Council of Women (ICW), an international non-governmental organization holding consultative status (Category 1) with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). Founded in 1888, the International Council is composed of National Councils in 74 countries, bringing together women of all nations, races, creeds and cultural traditions.

Since 1997, NCWC has also been recognized as a non-governmental organization holding consultative status (General) with ECOSOC, which enables NCWC to bring a specifically Canadian perspective to the work of the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women.

On October 19, 2001, the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States notified NCWC that its participation as an Observer Non-Governmental Organization was approved.

03.1 ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FEDERALLY TRANSFERRED FUNDS

Rationale:

- NCWC members have become concerned that the built-in accountability provisions of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) which ensured that federally transferred funds meant for spending in the fields of Health, Education, and Welfare were terminated in 1995. They were replaced by the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) which were intended to be used for Health and Social assistance programmes by the provincial and territorial governments, relying on the good faith of the recipient administrations to use the funds as intended.
- The Social Union Framework (1999) reinforced this “good intentions” understanding to restore the element of public accountability in the use of these funds, but did not establish any mechanism for measuring the compliance practised by the recipients.
- This failure in accountability by the Federal and the Provincial and Territorial Governments has meant that there has been no coherent integrated programme to ensure that Canada succeeds in eliminating Child Poverty (originally promised for the year 2000), and no assurance that the funds meant for licensed child care did actually get spent on early childhood development programmes, the most significant source of positive development for all pre-school children.
- It is also a matter of extreme concern that the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) reports that only 60% of the funds allocated to the provinces (2001) for the purchase of medical equipment were used as intended by Provincial governments.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy that federal government transfers to the provinces and territories adhere to the principle of accountability for public money by requiring that the money so transferred be used for the purposes for which it is intended; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to ensure that, in any future financial agreement or renewal of a current agreement, money transferred from the federal government to the provinces and territories be used for the purpose intended, through placing clear requirements on how this public money is to be used; and developing mutually agreed-upon mechanisms to monitor the use of these funds and establishing clear mechanisms for annual reporting to the public.

03.2 CAMPAIGN FOR FAIRER TRADE RULES

Rationale:

- NCWC members are increasingly concerned about the growing gap in the standard of living for citizens in developing (lower-income) countries and ourselves.
- It is a concern that women and children in developing countries are likely to be exposed to dangerous and exploitative conditions at work because the International Labour Organization's standards cannot be enforced.
- Agricultural subsidies paid to producers in the developed countries have the effect of driving down prices paid to the producers in lower income countries thus impoverishing their farming communities.
- Agri-business (with its vertical integration) discourages local market gardening resulting in a failure in developing countries to grow the food they need for their own populations as arable land and the cheap farm labour available is used for producing cash crops for export by huge transnational businesses. The high cost of the imported food necessary to feed local populations further impoverishes these working poor local populations.
- Increased and prolonged patent protection (especially for drugs designed to treat endemic diseases such as Malaria or HIV/AIDS) prevent citizens in developing countries from having the medical treatment that they need.*

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy support for fairer rules of trade; such as international employment standards, removal of tariffs, a ban on the subsidisation of agricultural exports, stabilisation of prices for primary commodities, and a relaxation of patent rules for vital medicines for developing countries; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to support fairer trade rules by working for:

- a) an end to pressure exerted on developing countries by the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to have them open their markets, pay debts or be required to grow crops for export without regard for the impact on impoverished nations;
- b) improved international employment standards, especially for women;
- c) removal of tariffs and other barriers that prevent the 49 poorest countries from selling their goods to developed countries;
- d) a ban on the subsidisation of agricultural exports by developed countries;

- e) **stabilisation of prices for primary commodities (such as coffee) in order to ensure fair living standards for small farmers; and**
- f) **a relaxation of patent rules for vital medicines which keep costs high and restrict the supply to developing countries**

* *NCWC members noted with approval that the Federal Government announced its intention to bring in legislation to facilitate providing the drugs necessary to treat HIV/AIDS patients in sub-Saharan Africa. Members await further news about the implementation of this initiative.*

03.3 HELPING FOREIGN-TRAINED HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS ACCESS ACCREDITATION

Rational:

- NCWC appeared before the Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada (the Romanow Commission) expressing its strong support for maintaining the Canada Health Act.
- Members realize that unless there are enough qualified health professionals working in Canada's Health Care system, the aims and principles of the Canada Health Act cannot be realized.
- It is a fact that although medical training in a country of origin will count towards facilitating the acceptance by Canada of the application of individual prospective immigrants, never-the-less, once these persons are in Canada, they face almost insuperable barriers to obtaining professional accreditation of the qualifications (and experience in some cases) that they already possess.
- The provincial governments that administer the Health Care system and separate professional organizations appear to pass the responsibility for resolving the problem (of the barriers to accreditation) back and forth, preventing a solution from being found, and prolonging the present shortages of trained medical professionals.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy that the process of accreditation of health care professionals trained in other countries be made more accessible to those professionals, while ensuring that a uniform standard of competence is maintained across Canada; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to work with the provincial governments, professional organizations and licensing bodies to make accreditation more accessible for foreign-trained professionals, while ensuring that a uniform standard of competence is maintained across Canada by:

- a) ensuring loans and other resources are available for qualifying examinations and upgrading;**
- b) developing academic assessment tools and testing;**
- c) ensure re-testing is accessible and affordable;**
- d) increasing the opportunities for foreign-trained professionals to acquire more Canadian experience under supervision; and**
- e) accelerating the accreditation and retraining process through English and French language training, including long term and/or immersion language training where necessary.**

03.4 RESOURCES FOR RURAL AND URBAN MUNICIPALITIES

Rationale:

- NCWC members have become increasingly concerned that during the campaign to reduce the Budgetary Deficit, many public costs were downloaded with the ultimate responsibility devolving on municipal administrations. However, since these administrative bodies are the creatures of their respective provincial governments, they lack the fiscal powers that would enable them to raise the funds necessary for meeting these additional demands.
- Members note that in the last few years (since 1995) municipal tax revenues in Canada have increased by only 6% while federal revenues have increased by 21% and provincial ones by 13%. At the same time, these cash-strapped administrations have been expected to do more particularly where alleviation of homelessness and other concomitants of poverty are concerned
- Additionally, in the increasingly “globalized” world, municipalities are forced to compete in attracting new businesses and industries, which very often means giving tax breaks or providing new expensive physical infrastructure and services.
- Rural municipalities can be particularly disadvantaged as their population numbers decrease with a smaller residential tax base from which to raise the necessary funds to maintain existing infrastructure and services.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy that:

- a) rural and urban municipalities be given the resources and powers by senior levels of government commensurate with the responsibilities and challenges they must now meet;**
- b) federal, provincial and territorial governments transfer sufficient funds to rural and urban municipalities to reflect their additional responsibilities and their ability to compete internationally ; and be it further**

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to:

- a) provide additional resources to rural and urban municipalities to meet their increased responsibilities and maintain their ability to compete in the world market; and**
- b) work with and encourage the provincial and territorial governments to designate resources and powers to all municipalities sufficient to meet their increased responsibilities; and be it further**

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge Provincial and Local Councils (where applicable) to urge their respective provincial governments to provide resources and powers to their rural and urban municipalities sufficient to meet their increased responsibilities.

03.5 LOW FREQUENCY ACTIVE SONAR SYSTEMS

Rationale:

- NCWC members oppose the testing of Low Frequency Active Sonar Systems (LFASS) in Canadian waters.
- Specifically, it is the United States Navy that has access to Canadian coastal waters for these purposes.
- LFASS is being developed and tested for purposes of waging war, and is known to have deleterious effects on aquatic life-forms, especially whales and other marine mammals.
- Recent information indicates that LFASS may cause the same sort of fatal damage to internal organs of maritime mammals as too rapid decompression causes in humans (commonly called the bends).
- Whale populations are particularly stressed with some species facing extinction, therefore NCWC members believe that there is need to cease all practises that increase the mortality rates in these marine mammals.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy opposition to the testing and/or use of Low Frequency Active Sonar Systems in any Canadian marine environment or any waters where it would have a deleterious effect on whales and other marine animals; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to ban the testing and/or use of Low Frequency Active Sonar Systems in any Canadian marine environment or any waters where it would have a deleterious effect on whales and other marine animals; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the International Council of Women to adopt as its policy a ban on the testing and/or use of Low Frequency Active Sonar Systems in any marine environment, or any waters where it would have a deleterious effect of whales and other marine animals; and be it further

RESOLVED that the International Council of Women request its member Councils to urge their governments to adopt as policy a ban on the testing and/or use of Low Frequency Active Sonar Systems in any marine environment, or any waters where it would have a deleterious effect of whales and other marine animals.

03.6 INFORMING IMMIGRANTS

Rationale:

- In 1982, NCWC members called on the Government to ensure it provided adequate and sensitive services for immigrant women, especially those with children. In 1995, members urged the government to ensure that Immigration officers had undergone gender sensitivity training to enable them to better understand the needs of women, many of whom may have suffered abuse and discrimination in their countries of origin.
- NCWC members are concerned that although Canada has achieved an enviable record in many ways of working towards real equality for women, it has been ranked only eighth in its treatment of immigrant women.
- NCWC members believe that if immigrants, both men and women were better informed before they are accepted as immigrants about what the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms means when applied to conditions of daily life, their integration into Canadian life would be greatly facilitated.
- NCWC members particularly wish to see that in cases where the immigrants live in a society where custom and laws do not practise gender equity, it is necessary to take steps to inform both women and men about the Rights and Freedoms that are the normal basis for daily life in Canada.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy:

- a) that all Canadian immigration offices have at least one person on staff able to explain the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms with all its legal and social implications for both men and women and also able to compare this with the legal and social position of men and women within the would-be-immigrant's country of origin; and**
- b) to ensure that all would-be-immigrants, their spouse and family members receive this information both verbally and in print; and be it further**

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to;

- a) ensure that all Canadian immigration offices have at least one person on staff able to explain the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms with all its legal and social implications for both men and women and also able to compare this with the legal and social position of men and women within the would-be-immigrant's country of origin; and**
- b) to ensure that all would-be-immigrants, their spouse and family members receive this information both verbally and in print.**

03.7 POSSIBLE DELETERIOUS EFFECTS OF VACCINES

Rationale:

- NCWC members, reading of the on-going debates about the possibility that some current immunisation vaccines could be dangerous to the long-term health of some children, ask that Health Canada investigate this issue thoroughly.
- NCWC supports immunisation programmes in principle and in practise, but would like this possible issue of safety to be investigated and resolved. In particular, members understand that some questions are being raised about the safety of multiple vaccines, as well as the possible dangers posed by the use of Thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative still used in Hepatitis B and influenza vaccines.
- The question of a possible connection between the multiple vaccines administered to infants and young children, and the later diagnosis of autism or attention deficit disorder in some children needs to be investigated thoroughly and resolved.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy

- a) support for immunisation programmes which reduce or eliminate the incidence and severity of many childhood diseases,**
- b) the need for on-going monitoring of the components of vaccines in order to protect children against possible deleterious effects; and be it further**

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to:

- a) continue to support immunisation programmes;**
- b) require Health Canada to carry out exhaustive tests on the components of vaccines and make full disclosure of the testing history, the chemical content and processes used in making vaccines for Canadians, and provide unrestricted public access to these reports via the Health Canada website and regular bulletins;**
- c) initiate legislation requiring the mandatory reporting by any medical practitioner of suspected adverse reactions to vaccines;**
- d) ensure that further research is undertaken on the components of vaccines and the effects of multiple vaccinations on the neuro-immune systems of infants; and**
- e) investigate the possible connections with autism and ADHD.**

03.8 INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

Rationale:

- Although this policy is primarily directed to Canada's provincial and territorial governments for implementation, nevertheless, members believe that the Federal Government should be aware of this concern.
- Because NCWC members believe that the ignorance of and misunderstanding of Canada's democratic institutions and infrastructure is one of the causes for the steady erosion in the rate of participation in Canada's elections especially among young people, this is an issue that should greatly concern all levels of government. A democracy is only valid if citizens can and do participate in their own government.
- Many older members of NCWC remember that instruction in Canada's democratic systems formed part of school curricula, starting at the earliest grades. Members believe that such courses are one reason that older Canadians are more likely to exercise their franchise than are younger citizens. Such courses are also necessary to follow up on and re-enforce the information absorbed by immigrants in their citizenship courses.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy support for involving youth in the democratic process by urging provincial governments to include instruction in the democratic process in Canada in school curricula from kindergarten through to secondary school graduation level; therefore be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge its federate members to support the involvement of youth in the democratic process by urging provincial governments to include instruction in the democratic process in Canada in school curricula from kindergarten through to secondary school graduation level where such instruction is not currently provided.

03.9 MEDICAL SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

Rationale:

- Ordinarily, NCWC does not adopt a negative policy. In this case members were unable to find a positive way to express their strong rejection of the whole idea of Medical Savings Accounts both in principle and in practise.
- NCWC has repeatedly stressed the importance of universality of access as a keystone of the Canada Health Care system.
- Members believe that using a system of Medical Savings Accounts would penalize lower-income families and individuals. This would include single-parent families (particularly those that are women-lead), older women who are still more likely to be poor as they age, and all those persons where a catastrophic illness totally wipes out the account.
- Members are also concerned that instituting such a system and administering it could be more costly than cost-effective where the Health Care system is concerned.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy rejection of Medicare Savings Accounts (MSAs) as part of the reform of the health care system; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to reject any proposal to introduce MSAs as a way to improve the delivery of the health care system; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge its Provincial and Local Councils to approach their Provincial Governments to reject any proposal to introduce Medical Savings Accounts as a way to improve the delivery of the health care system.

03.1 PU FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME

Rationale:

- NCWC members are concerned that the tragic consequences of consumption of alcoholic beverages during pregnancy (from the earliest stages) which can result in Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) or Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAE) * are conditions for which there is no cure. Children born with either of these conditions are severely handicapped in many ways and will inevitably need expensive care of some sort throughout their lives.
- Health professionals do not always recognise FAE in particular, which can result in misdiagnosis and inappropriate or inadequate treatment. FAS and FAE children need special intensive and constant care because their proper neurological development was irreparably damaged before they were born.
- There would be a savings to society if the incidence of these conditions could be reduced. NCWC members believe that a vigorous nation-wide public education campaign outlining the dangers for the fetus when the mother (and possibly the father) consumes alcohol before and during pregnancy should be implemented.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy recognition of the issues of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE) and their negative impact on society and the need for preventative measures; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada, the Provinces and the Territories to:

- a) undertake a campaign to make men and women aware of the dangers of drinking alcoholic beverages during pregnancy;**
- b) develop improved diagnostic techniques that will help doctors and other health care professionals better recognise and diagnose FAS and FAE;**
- c) require distributors of alcoholic beverages , including wine, to attach a warning label to their products indicating the dangers of drinking when pregnant;**
- d) assist in providing services required by those affected with FAS and FAE; and**
- e) strengthen the provision of public information on the dangers of alcohol consumption by pregnant women ; and be it further**

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada improve awareness of FAS and FAE through holding special programs, and health promotional activities on the subject and distributing white cords to symbolize the broken cord of FAS as a means of introducing the subject, when worn on a lapel, thus increasing public awareness of

FAS and FAE and encouraging its federates to do the same; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to address Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effect as a Public Health Crisis, and address treatment of alcohol abuse in women of child-bearing age.

* *FAE is now referred to as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder*

03.2 PU DANGER OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS READINESS

Rationale:

- NCWC wishes to remind the government that the more nuclear weapons there are in the world poised and ready to launch, the higher the probability that a nuclear holocaust could be set off possibly started by human error with no opportunity to reconsider.
- Members are also concerned that the proposed National Missile Defence (NMD) or “Star Wars II” is designed to be continental in its approach. Because it is a new system of defence, it will be expensive. It is also as yet not certain that its technologies will be effective. Being engaged in such an enterprise will mean that if there is fallout from the testing, or some other nuclear accident, Canadians could suffer as a result. A nuclear accident in Canada is not an acceptable risk for Canadians who are aware of the short and long term risks to life and health.
- Members would far rather that Canada used its influence to work diligently to secure the signature on and ratification of the United Nations Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty by the four remaining nuclear states that have not yet signed on.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy :

- a) support for the 1996 ruling of the International Court of Justice stating that all countries have an obligation under international law to conclude negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons;**
- b) support the policy of strengthening the international treaty that will prohibit the militarization of space;**
- c) support the policy of encouraging and persuading countries such as Pakistan, India, North Korea and the United States that are holding back, to sign and actively support the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty;**
- d) that the National Council of Women of Canada use their ability to make representations to the International Council of Women to encourage them to make a presentation to the United Nations, to speak on behalf of the women of the world in promotion of a world free of nuclear weapons.**

03.3 PU GENETIC TEST RESULTS AND INSURANCE CLAIMS

Rationale:

- NCWC has repeatedly urged the government to bring in legislation restricting the results of genetic testing to the person and his/her medical advisor for whom the test has been done.
(See NCWC Policy Listings; www.ncwc.ca 00.3 EM Regulation of Reproductive and Genetic Technologies and 02.4 UP New Reproductive Technologies)
- NCWC members are concerned that since this testing could indicate a predisposition to a possible long-term or serious health problem resulting in high cost claims against insurance companies, these companies could make this information a reason for possible rejection of a claim.
- Insurance companies could also use failure to disclose these results as grounds for denying claims, unless there is legislation prohibiting insurance companies from requiring mandatory reporting of such tests.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy the position that the reporting of genetic test results to one's insurance company be at the discretion of the insured individual; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada encourage the appropriate federal department to investigate and draw up regulations to prohibit the insurance industry from requiring the mandatory reporting of genetic test results by its policy holders.

03.4 PU MEGA HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECTS IN CANADA'S NORTH

Rationale:

- NCWC members have repeatedly urged the Government of Canada to take an active role in protecting the integrity of Canada's water resources.
- In 1991, members urged the government that a complete joint environmental assessment should be done before the Grande Baleine Project could proceed.
- NCWC has also over many years urged a pro-active policy of developing alternative sources of power along with protection of bio-diversity and natural ecosystems with respect for and conservation of the Aboriginal heritage that will be inevitably affected by development of mega hydro electric projects.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as its policy:

- a) mega-dams should not be built in Canada's north as sources of electricity, and**
- b) should the Government of Canada allow the provincial governments to proceed with mega-dams, that these, and all related projects should be subject to complete and intervener-funded environmental assessments, and**
- c) that the Government of Canada exert its right to cancel such projects should the environment assessment show they will have damaging environmental consequences immediately, or in the future; and be it further**

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to:

- a) discourage all mega-dam hydro projects and support instead the use of energy conservation and alternative forms of energy for hydro needs, and**
- b) ensure that all such mega-hydro project proposals be subject to full intervener-funded, environmental assessments; and**
- c) exert the right to cancel such projects , should the environmental assessment show they will have damaging environmental consequences, immediately or in the future.**

03.1 EI A FIFTH WORLD CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN

Rationale:

- NCWC members are concerned that since the 1995 Beijing Conference, the situation of women world-wide has not improved significantly.
- Additionally, the large social changes effected by Globalization are negatively affecting the social context in women live and work.
- Members therefore believe that it is necessary to re-evaluate the progress being made world-wide to improve the lives of all women. The preparations for a Fifth Conference will focus on the indicators that will evaluate the progress made since 1995 on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as policy support in principle for the holding of a Fifth World Conference for Women; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to support the holding of a Fifth World Conference for Women.