

BRIEF TO

**The House of Commons Standing Committee
on the Status of Women**

**SUBMITTED BY
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA**

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**Prepared by
Karen Dempsey, Vice President Economics**

**To be presented by
Catharine Laidlaw-Sly
Policy Advisor and
Past President**

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Twenty-five years ago this December, Canada signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and during the election, Stephen Harper signed the CEDAW pledge (as did all other party leaders.) However, our government has now cut funding to the operating budget for Status of Women Canada in addition to letting women's groups know that they will no longer receive funding from SWC for the advocacy, lobbying, and research work that they do. ***How can this government keep its commitment to uphold the terms of the CEDAW convention if they cut funding to the very department that helps to implement it?***

Article 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that women are to be equal before and under the law. However, while women have equal rights on paper, the reality is that there is still inequality. For example, at every education level, women earn less on average than men. ***In fact, the 2003 United Nations CEDAW report recommended to Canada that it accelerate its efforts regarding equal pay for work of equal value at the federal level*** (para. 376). Canada has a commitment to produce a quadrennial CEDAW Report for the UN; in the face of drastic budget cuts, will the Status of Women have the resources to thoroughly research and produce this document? ***Will Canada have any progress to report?***

Status of Women Canada was established to help women participate in the public policy process and bring gender equality issues to light. It has been an instrumental aid for women's progress toward gender equality, as have many women's organizations. SWC's 1993 objectives stated that it sought to "advance equality for women by addressing women's economic, social, political, and legal situation." In the new version, the government has removed the word "equality" from the terms and conditions for grants, stating that the objective is to "facilitate women's participation in Canadian society by addressing their economic, social and cultural situation through Canadian organizations."

How can Canadian women now ensure that they will continue to progress toward complete gender equality? With the 40% cut to SWC's administrative budget, research into important issues affecting women's equality will be drastically affected. How will the government be able to monitor issues affecting women to ensure that they are being dealt with fairly and effectively? Aboriginal, immigrant, and visible minority women especially will find it more difficult to make their voices heard and to have their issues addressed, as the groups which, in the past, were strong advocates for these women will no longer be able to access research and advocacy funding from Status of Women. These women, the poorest of the poor, face becoming even more marginalized.

We believe gender equality is the basis of a democratic society and a prerequisite for sustainable human development. With its drastic cuts of 40% to the administrative budget of SWC, the government automatically decreases the effectiveness of the department which promotes women's equality, works to advance women's rights, to eliminate systemic discrimination, and encourages women's full participation in life in Canada. By cutting funding to women's groups for lobbying, advocacy, and research, the work that they do to improve the lives of women and families is also put in jeopardy. ***In short, the effects of these cuts could result in a serious derailment of any further progress toward true equality for women in Canada.***

BACKGROUND ON THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA

Founded in 1893, NCWC is a non-profit, non-partisan organization of women's groups representing a very large section of our population, with diverse occupation, language, origin and culture, and reflecting a cross-section of public opinion. NCWC is composed of 18 local councils, 5 provincial councils and 28 nationally organized societies.

NCWC policy is formulated by means of local council initiative. Policy additions and changes are proposed, circulated and voted upon by the general membership. Council members may speak only on existing policy when contacting the government, the media, and the public. Thus, this brief is the united voice of the federated membership of the National Council of Women of Canada.

NCWC, with the exception of one full-time employee in our national office, is entirely staffed by volunteers who often use their own after-tax dollars to help fund NCWC's work. In order to ensure broad grassroots participation, membership dues are purposely low. This brief is submitted, therefore, without the cost projections which would lend significant weight to our policy recommendations, as funds are not available to hire necessary research staff.

NCWC holds consultative status (Category II) with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). In addition, NCWC is a federate of the International Council of Women (ICW), an international non-governmental organization holding consultative status (Category I) with ECOSOC. Founded in 1888, ICW is composed of National Councils in 74 countries, bringing together women of all nations, races, creeds, and cultural traditions. NCWC is a Participating Non-Governmental Organization, working with the Women's Commission of the Organization of American States.

