

**The National Council of Women of Canada  
Le Conseil National des Femmes du Canada**

***FOUNDED 1893  
(INCORPORATED BY ACT OF PARLIAMENT)***

***IN FEDERATION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN***

***Annual Brief to the Government of Canada  
September 2008***

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President

# **National Council of Women of Canada**

## ***Annual Brief to the Government of Canada September 2008***

### *Preamble*

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

Founded in 1893, the National Council of Women is a non-profit and non-partisan organization of women, representing a large number of Canadians of diverse occupations, languages, origins and customs and reflecting a cross-section of public opinion. NCWC comprises 17 Local Councils, 5 Provincial Councils and 23 Nationally Organized Societies.

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 (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. Founded in 1888, the ICW is composed of National Councils in 74 countries.

NCWC holds Consultative Status (General) with ECOSOC, enabling NCWC to bring a Canadian perspective to the work of the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women. NCWC also participates as an Observer Non-governmental Organization with the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States.

NCWC is an organization of local, provincial and national organizations which are closely connected with issues at those levels, and which also has a firm grasp of international issues and Canada's commitment to them. For this reason, NCWC is uniquely qualified to approach our Government with suggestions and recommendations which are based on carefully researched and democratically approved policies for improving the quality of life of Canadians.

For over 100 years, the National Council of Women has worked to improve the quality of life in Canada through education and advocacy. All policy for NCWC is generated through resolutions originating with either Local Councils or NCWC Committees. These are circulated to, and then voted on, by the general membership, at our Annual General Meeting. When contacting the Government, the media and the public, Council representatives speak only on existing policy. This Brief, comprising new policies as well as updates, is therefore the united voice of the federated membership of the National Council of Women of Canada.

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## **APPOINTMENT OF JUDGES TO SUPREME COURT OF CANADA**

In practice, appointments to the Supreme Court are made in consultation with, and upon the recommendation of, the Prime Minister, who is advised by his cabinet and independent Advisory Committees.

It is of the utmost importance that the principle of judicial independence be maintained and the appointment of judges be based on merit. We believe that the composition and role of independent advisory committees is an important part of the process in the selection of Supreme Court judges.

The changes implemented in 2006 by the Government of Canada are widely assessed as having decreased the independence of the Advisory Committees, thus opening the door to appointments based on ideology rather than merit.

If the Parliament of Canada has a role in meeting prospective appointees to the Bench of the Supreme Court before their candidature is confirmed, the public perception will be that such judges report to Parliament at the expense of their dependence.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to ensure that:*

- a) *judicial independence be recognized as essential to the functioning of the Supreme Court of Canada;*

- b) *independent advisory committees be set up to ensure that appointments are made on the basis of merit;*

- c) *the advisory committee be composed of representatives from each party in the House Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness; the Canadian Bar; and the Federal Minister of Justice;*

- d) *the advisory committees be asked to differentiate between qualified and highly qualified nominees; and*

- e) *nominees not be required to meet with Parliamentary committees as part of the selection process.*

**Please Note: The Salvation Army abstained from voting on this issue.**

## **CALL FOR A NATIONAL ENERGY STRATEGY FOR CANADA**

Canada currently lacks a comprehensive energy strategy.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to develop a national energy strategy for Canada that:*

- a) ensures resource development occurs within a sustainable development framework, and*
- b) which provides economic incentives to research and develop clean energy sources for Canada's energy needs.*

## **MINING WASTE POLLUTION REPORTING**

Industrial mining facilities dispose of hundreds of millions of kilograms of toxic pollutants into their tailings ponds and waste rock piles, and this pollution heavily impacts human and wildlife health and welfare and has the potential to spoil ecosystems for generations.

Until 2006 mining facilities had an exemption from reporting the waste from mining to the National Pollutant Release Inventory. However in 2006, the Minister of the Environment permanently removed the exemption so that mining companies have been required to report the quantities of toxic chemicals they are depositing into their mining wastes, to be made publicly available through the National Pollutant Release Inventory and mining facilities have so far failed to report same.

Despite the exemption removal, Environment Canada officials have subsequently advised mining facilities that they would not be required to report disposals of substances of concern to tailing areas and waste rock areas for 2006.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to ensure that all mining companies accurately report toxic waste pollution from their total mining operations to the National Pollutant Release Inventory, so that remedial and preventative action plans may be put in place to protect human health and welfare and the environment. We urge the Government of Canada to include public scrutiny of the reports and penalties for failure to comply with standards.*

## CLUSTER MUNITIONS

In 1996 the National Council of Women of Canada approved policy 96.7 banning the production, use, and export of anti-personnel Land Mines worldwide, which did not include Cluster Munitions (bombs). Cluster Munitions kill and injure civilians as they scatter explosives over wide areas and many of the bomblets or submunitions fail to explode on impact, killing and injuring civilians long after conflict, similar to land mines.

Cluster Munitions kill indiscriminately and are stockpiled in the billions by 75 countries. The Lebanon conflict of 2006 demonstrated that non-State armed groups now have access to Cluster Munitions and that the problem can rapidly become far worse if urgent steps are not taken. It has been reported that cluster bombs are currently being used in the Russia-Georgia conflict.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada*

- a) to participate actively in the current process to ban the production, stockpiling, use and transfer of cluster bombs; and*
- b) to support an instrument that is strong, clear, and easily implemented; and*
- c) to conclude and sign on to a treaty that will prohibit Cluster Munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.*

We commend the Government of Canada for being one of the 100 countries to sign onto a Treaty banning cluster bombs, at the Dublin Conference in May 2008. *We urge Canada to ratify the Treaty in Oslo in December 2008. We also urge the Government of Canada to provide financial, medical and rehabilitation relief for those civilians and communities affected by Cluster Munitions.*

## **GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF STUN WEAPONS**

The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 16, 1966, states (Part III, Art.12) "...No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment...", and stun weapons, also known as stun guns or tasers™ or conductive energy weapons, inflict severe distress ranging from severe pain to complete incapacitation of the person stunned.

Over 260 people in North America have died within a few minutes of having been stunned with stun weapons, and a number of these fatalities have occurred in situations where no one had been in serious danger from the person who was stunned, including situations in which people have been awakened from sleep by repeated use of the devices.

The presence of factors such as (but not limited to) age, gender, heart condition, drug exposure or deprivation, fear, exhaustion and pregnancy are known to exacerbate the effects of an electrical discharge, and exposure to even small amounts of electrical charge can interrupt the rhythm of the heart and cause ventricular fibrillation and death.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the federal, provincial and territorial governments to ban the use of stun weapons, except in the case of immediate threat of death or serious injury which could not be contained by lesser means and where a police officer would otherwise resort to firearms to protect life.*

*The National Council of Women of Canada also urge the federal, provincial and territorial governments to implement the following practices:*

- a) a complete and independent review, investigating the short-term and long-term effects of stun weapons employed in a wide variety of circumstances, physical conditions and combinations thereof;*
- b) that every instance of death or serious injury occurring within 72 hours of being stunned be treated and investigated in the same way as death or serious injury by firearm; and*
- c) that any police officer who uses a stun weapon in a situation contrary to this policy be subject to a disciplinary process.*

***Please Note: The Salvation Army abstained from voting on this issue.***

## NEED FOR REFORM OF THE EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE PROGRAM

Non-standard work accounts for one-third of employment in the Canadian workplace, and these workers have difficulty qualifying for EI, and others, such as the self-employed, are excluded.

In 2003 the Canadian Labour Congress released an analysis of B/U ratios (UI beneficiaries to unemployed) by age and gender from 1990 to 2001 entitled "Falling Unemployment Insurance Protection for Canada's Unemployed". This analysis finds that insurance coverage has fallen over the period studied, due to four rounds of changes made by the government, namely, Bill C-21 in 1990, Bill C-113 in 1993, Bill C-17 in 1994, and Bill C-12 in 1996. Eligibility requirements have been raised as the federal government has successively increased the hours and weeks of work needed to qualify for UI. The federal government has correspondingly reduced the maximum benefits weeks. This, in essence, has resulted in fewer and fewer people being able to qualify; those who do qualify are able to collect for a much shorter period of time. In 1990, 74% of the unemployed were receiving UI, in 1993 it was 57%, in 1994 51%, and in 1996 42%. In 2001, the number unemployed receiving UI was 39%, and in 2002, the number fell to 38%. Despite some subsequent EI enhancements, unemployed workers have increasingly had to rely on provincial and municipal social support programs, which are less than adequate, and in many cases require a disposal of significant assets. The summary also stated the difference in coverage between men and women was large and has widened with the introduction of Employment Insurance in 1996 and that the gender gap widened even more for specific age groups. *The analysis states that "EI has had a profoundly negative impact on insurance protection for women of all ages."* Their statistics show that coverage for women, under the new EI rules, fell from 39% to 33% in those years from 1996 to 2001. Coverage fell for women in every province, and in the 24 cities studied, women were definitely much worse off than men. In fact the coverage gap between men and women in some areas reached twenty points. When studying the gender gap by age, the analysis showed that 11% of young women, 15 to 24, receive EI compared to 20% of young men. In the 25 to 44 age group, only 38% of women receive benefits compared to 53% of men. Over the age of 45, only 45% of women receive EI compared to 58% of men. The analysis stated that "Before EI, there was virtually no difference in coverage between men and women over age 45." And women, who have traditionally earned less than men, are at greater risk of becoming a welfare or homeless "statistic", particularly as they age, if you take into account the fact that fewer and fewer women over age 45 are qualifying for EI.

Money collected for the employment insurance fund consists specifically of employee and employer contributions. For several years now, the Federal Government has had significant surpluses in the EI account, which have been accounted for and spent within the general federal budget, rather than used to enhance the EI Program.



The EI system must be reformed to meet the needs of Canadians who pay into it and expect it to be there for them when they need it.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to:*

- a) dedicate all insurance premiums paid into the Employment Insurance program for employment insurance only
- b) ensure that all workers, including non-standard workers and the self-employed, be entitled to participate in the Employment Insurance program
- c) reduce the number of hours required to qualify for employment insurance
- d) remove inequities in entitlements of and benefits from one region of Canada to another
- e) deem employment insurance funding as non-transferable for any other purpose.

## **INADEQUACIES IN INCOME TRANSFER PROGRAMS FOR LOW INCOME SENIORS**

As the number of people in the workforce covered by pension plans decreases, an increasing number of senior households depend on federal government transfers for a larger proportion of their income.

Statistics Canada reports that single, unattached older persons over 80, particularly single unattached older women, are most likely to fall into poverty, as measured by Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), which has led, since the 1990s, to an increased gap between seniors' incomes and those of other Canadians.

Since the Government of Canada pays retroactive payments for only 11 months for federal income transfer programs Old Age Security and Canada Pension Plan, seniors, who failed to apply at the time of entitlement for these benefits, lose thousands of dollars in income.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to:*

- a) *raise the rates of income transfer programs including the Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS);*
- b) *extend retroactive payments of OAS and CPP, including interest, owed to seniors, in order to cover the entire time for which the senior in question is eligible for federal income transfer programs, and*
- c) *develop a user-friendly system whereby all persons reaching retirement age are automatically informed, in advance, of their rights and the steps they should follow, such information not being limited to print.*

## **CALL FOR CANADIAN SUPPORT FOR UN DECLARATION ON RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

Canada has been a vocal supporter of Human Rights Declarations and Conventions at the UN, and Canada was deeply involved in the decade-long development of the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The National Council of Women of Canada has always accorded high priority to the rights regimes articulated at the UN, and has been particularly concerned about the rights of aboriginal peoples in Canada, in particular the rights of aboriginal women, and this Declaration concerns the rights of citizens who are among the most vulnerable in Canada. Canada voted against the Declaration at the General Assembly on September 13, 2007, even though it is non-binding.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to sign and ratify the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*

***Please Note: The Salvation Army abstained from voting on this issue.***

## **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL DENTICARE PROGRAM**

Many Canadians, particularly those in lower income brackets, are not covered by company or group insurance plans, and therefore go without dental care. Dental health is an integral part of overall health for Canadians, and lack of access to preventive and remedial dental health care causes further deterioration of oral health, which, in turn, leads to greater pain and suffering and also results in long term health problems, difficult social interaction and decreased employability.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to take leadership with the provinces and territories to develop a publicly funded National Denticare Program.*

## **POINT OF SALE SECURITY**

Point of Sale (POS) systems provide the initial interface for credit card and debit card transactions and the devices themselves provide virtually no security. The information potentially at risk is name, card number, expiration date, and possibly the CVV2 (number on the back of card and the PIN code).

These devices provide varying amounts and types of storage accessible to any knowledgeable person. There have been incidents where large numbers of cards have been compromised by these vulnerabilities. Training is inconsistent and at times does not follow the available security features.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to legislate improved security standards for Point of Sale devices.*

## **GOVERNMENT DISCRETION IN AWARDING TAX CREDITS TO FILM AND VIDEO PRODUCTIONS**

To establish eligibility for receiving tax credits, a producer of films and videos requires a certificate under the Income Tax Act, and The Income Tax Amendments Act (Bill C -10) now gives the Minister of Canadian Heritage the authority to establish guidelines for the granting of these certificates to ensure that “public financial support of the production would not be contrary to public policy” [Subsection 125.4(1) (b)].

Many commentators conclude that this authority will be unaccountable and will allow the Minister and staff to grant certificates on the basis of subjective judgements, personal values and ideological beliefs. The regulations for issuing tax credits already preclude funding productions that depict pornography, as defined by the Criminal Code. Bill C-10 has already passed the House of Commons, but there may be further opportunities to influence the outcome. Before work on a film is commenced, tax credits need to be negotiated in order to pay for the filming work, but under the new legislation, the tax credit can be disallowed retroactively once the money is spent.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to:*

- a) continue to support the Canadian film and video industry by awarding tax credits to individual film and video productions*
- b) deny tax credits only to those productions which violate the Criminal Code of Canada*
- c) bring in legislation to strengthen the Criminal Code, if it finds that the present Code does not cover the depiction of extreme violence, pornography or hate messages in films and videos*
- d) abolish the provisions for retroactively disallowing tax credits allocated for the production of films and videos once the money is spent.*

***Please Note: The Salvation Army and LCW Edmonton abstained from voting on this issue.***

## THE CANADIAN BOOK EXCHANGE CENTRE

Library and Archives Canada announced its intention to close the Canadian Book Exchange Centre as of June 30, 2008. For 35 years federal libraries, university libraries, public libraries and specialized libraries have been donating books and periodicals they no longer need to the Exchange Centre for distribution to libraries that request them. Books are also distributed through this program to developing countries.

While there has been some decline in use in recent years as library collections have shifted to digital, and staffing of the Exchange has become less stable, there were still 143,000 items distributed through the Centre in 2006-07. The biggest users of the Exchange are academic libraries, which for research purposes, require past as well as current issues of periodicals and reports.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to:*

- a) reverse the decision to close the Canadian Book Exchange Centre in 2008*
- b) continue to provide the service as long as there is a significant need for it, and*
- c) consult with participating libraries about the future of the Exchange.*

## **UPDATE: CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES**

In 1991 the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) urged the Government of Canada to reduce the number of families in poverty by providing more adequate income support and by improving opportunities for self-support. In a 1997 *Update Eliminating Child Poverty in Canada*, NCWC urged the Government of Canada to raise the Child Tax Credit for low and modest income families and fully index it to inflation. In 1999 the National Council of Women of Canada urged the Government of Canada to undertake the Articles of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 27-acting to raise living standards of the poorest Canadian children). In a 2000 *Update Child Poverty and Benefits*, NCWC urged the Government of Canada to substantially increase the amount of the Child Tax Benefit and to set terms for payment which benefit all children equally, and to request that our Provincial Councils and Local Councils (where appropriate) urge their respective provincial governments to cease the clawback of the federal Child Tax Benefit from those families receiving social assistance. In 2006, child poverty (12.8%) was still higher than in 1989 (11.7%), the year that the House of Commons unanimously resolved “to seek to achieve the goal of eliminating child poverty among children in Canada by the year 2000,” despite continued economic growth during most of the intervening years.

There is increasing evidence that in addition to strong labour markets, a government commitment to implement a coordinated, long-term poverty reduction strategy, with targets, timelines, a dedicated budget and ongoing evaluation, is required to achieve sustained results. Poverty reduction strategies have been effective in a number of countries and implemented in two Canadian provinces.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to develop and implement a national strategy for the urgent reduction of child and family poverty, with the following goals:*

- a) *that full time, full year employment provide a level of income above the poverty line;*
- b) *that parent/ guardians who are not able to be in the workforce, be assured of a basic income and child benefits above the poverty line.*

*The NCWC urge the Government of Canada to develop and implement its national strategy for the urgent reduction of child poverty by ensuring that the plan has the following components:*

- a) *measurable targets and timelines,*
- b) *a plan of action and budget that coordinates initiatives within and across government and other partners,*
- c) *a government accountability structure for ensuring results and for consulting with Canadians, particularly low-income people, in the design, implementation and evaluation of the actions that will affect them, and*
- d) *a set of agreed poverty indicators that will be used to plan, monitor change, and assess progress.*

## **UPDATE: MIDWIFERY SERVICES IN CANADA**

In 1986 the National Council of Women of Canada urged the Government of Canada to approve the legalization of midwifery, and in 2008, not all of Canada's provinces and territories have yet undertaken or completed the legalization process.

Midwifery services have been shown to be a safe and cost-effective means of providing services for women and infants during pregnancy and birth, and in provinces with regulated midwifery, up to 50% of the requests for midwifery services cannot be filled due to the shortage of midwives. Only 400 midwives are registered to practice in Canada and there are few spaces in midwifery education programs.

*The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to:*

- a) regulate and publicly fund midwifery services where they are not yet regulated;*
- b) facilitate the examination and accreditation of foreign-trained midwives;*
- c) promote and encourage universal access to publicly-funded midwifery care in Canada.*

## UPDATE: NUCLEAR POWER PHASE-OUT

In 2004, NCWC adopted as policy:

- a) the rejection of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd's concept for burial of nuclear waste
- b) the need for a broad-based public debate on the energy future of Canada, with a specific focus on the need for alternative sources of energy, energy efficiency and energy conservation
- c) the need for significant expenditures on the search for safe technology to treat nuclear waste, upgrading of nuclear site storage and safety; development of alternative sources of energy, energy efficiencies and energy conservation; improvements for international radiation standards, to reflect gender, age, health, long term low level radiation exposure by workers and the public and environmental impacts e.g. air, water and soil
- d) the need for a Federal/Territorial/Provincial Environmental Assessment of the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) recommendations
- e) opposition to the expansion of the nuclear industry in Canada, and the need for a phase-out of nuclear plants at the end of their life cycle and
- f) the need for a ban on the importation of high-level radioactive waste for any purpose.

Environment Canada and Health Canada have determined that the effluent from uranium mines and mills is a toxic substance as defined by the Environmental Protection Act and fish, wildlife and plants in the vicinity of uranium mines have been contaminated by radioactive materials posing a risk to consumers of food grown nearby.

Large quantities of radioactive and "conventionally" hazardous waste rock and tailings from mines and milling operations will require care virtually forever, and mining impacts will increase with the use of lower grade ores as supplies of high grade uranium are depleted.

*Therefore, in 2008, the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to legislate that:*

- a) the mining of high grade uranium be phased out, in tandem with the phase-out of nuclear plants at the end of their life-cycle;*
- b) the mining of low-grade uranium not be allowed as a replacement for high-grade uranium;*
- c) in the interim, active mines and mills be made safe, and abandoned mines be cleaned up and secured.*



## **UPDATE: THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL FIRE ADVISOR**

In 1984 the National Council of Women of Canada urged the Government of Canada to undertake a program to educate the public about the hazards involved in the use of polyurethane and other synthetic materials when exposed to fire. Canada, unlike most developed countries, currently has no mechanism for compiling and distributing information on training, prevention or education regarding fires or for coordinating provincial/territorial fire-prevention strategies or for responding to domestic or international emergencies. The interests and expertise of the Canadian fire services have no official input regarding the National Fire Code or the National Building Code.

The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) adopted in 2004 a resolution supporting the creation of the Office of National Fire Advisor (ONFA) to address these vital issues, and on several occasions has presented their policy on the creation of the ONFA to Parliamentary committees and to individual Members of Parliament. The creation of the ONFA is seen by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities as being the single most important action the Federal Government could take to improve the protection of Canadians.

*The National Council of Women of Canada, therefore, urge the Government of Canada to establish the Office of National Fire Advisor as part of Public Safety Canada and to make it responsible for:*

- a) recommending national standards for fire training and education, and for fire prevention;*
- b) educating the public about the hazards involved in the use of polyurethane and other synthetic materials when exposed to fire;*
- c) coordinating provincial and territorial fire prevention activities;*
- d) developing strategies at a national level for Fire Prevention in Canada;*
- e) coordinating a national fire service response to both domestic and international emergencies;*
- f) serving as the national link for provincial and territorial Fire Marshals and Commissioners;*
- g) ensuring that fire-related information and statistics are compiled and distributed in a timely and standardized manner; and*
- h) ensuring that the interests and expertise of the Canadian Fire Services are represented on the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes and in the National Building Code and National Fire Code.*

## **UPDATE: CHANGING THE NATIONAL BUILDING CODE TO IMPROVE SAFETY FROM FIRE**

In 1974 the National Council of Women of Canada urged the Government of Canada to incorporate several fire safety items into the National Building Code, and in 1975 urged the Government of Canada to enforce the National Building Code, and in 1984 urged the Government of Canada to find a replacement for synthetic materials in home furnishings that pose a fire hazard and educate the public about same.

The current National Building Code and associated standards have not responded positively to submitted material related to clear guidelines for safe buildings and fire behaviour associated with spatial separation between buildings and eaves and other projections from buildings. There is significant ambiguity in interpretation and usage of Building Code definitions related to building height, particularly in consideration of sprinkler requirements and determination of combustible and non-combustible construction, and there are performance differences between floors constructed of solid lumber and floors supported by engineered wood systems in a fire situation.

*Therefore, the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to ensure that the National Research Council and the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes (CCBFC) amend the National Building Code (NBCC) to address fire safety issues, including but not limited to the following:*

- a) spatial separation between buildings as it relates to construction materials and building design;*
- b) determination of height limitations and fire safety system requirements for combustible multi-family buildings based on occupied levels and physical height; and*
- c) safety concerns related to engineered wood floor systems and other current building materials when exposed to fire.*

***Please Note: The Salvation Army abstained from voting on this issue.***