

**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 2009***

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National Council of Women of Canada

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Preamble

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) is pleased to present its 2009 policies 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 15 Local Councils, 6 Provincial Councils and 21 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 the past 115 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 is therefore the united voice of the federated membership of the National Council of Women of Canada.

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1. ENSURING POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH EFFECTIVE CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT

The majority of Canadians strongly support and trust their police in the difficult task of maintaining law and order; and according to the *Canadian Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement*, some form of civilian oversight of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the First Nations Police and the Military Police is practiced in most provinces and territories with varying degrees of success.

Civilian oversight is based on:

- a) the stated goal of building a positive relationship between the public and the police;
- b) an accessible and transparent complaints process, conscientiously monitored by independent and impartial civilian agencies;
- c) commissions and provincial agencies responsible for civilian oversight of investigations into alleged police misconduct that are mandated to ensure complaint investigations are thorough, fair and balanced to the complainant and the respondent.

There have been reports which indicate on-going serious incidents of:

- a) police action that threatens the lives of the public, especially Aboriginals and homeless people, and has, in a number of cases resulted in death, and
- b) apparent police inaction in response to the deaths of women, a large proportion of whom were drug addicts, prostitutes or Aboriginal, even though all persons are considered equal before the law; and there are a number of cases where there have been reports of the serious failure of the civilian oversight function.

*Therefore, the National Council of Women of Canada **urge the Government of Canada** to:*

- a) establish a dedicated, fully independent, civilian complaints oversight authority to investigate serious civilian injury or death resulting from police action or inaction;*
- b) establish effective civilian oversight provisions that ensure that the law is fully followed in police treatment of all people, irrespective of cultural background, race and sexual orientation;*
- c) ensure that in cases of serious injury or death to civilians, police actions are fully investigated by a dedicated, fully independent, civilian complaints oversight authority.*

Please note: the Salvation Army abstained from voting on this issue.

2. ENSURING RCMP ACCOUNTABILITY IN CASES OF NATIONAL SECURITY COMPLAINTS

After the terrorist attacks of 2001 in the United States, the Parliament of Canada defined terrorism and support of terrorism as criminal acts under the Criminal Code, thus reinstating some responsibility for national security to the RCMP. At least as early as 2005, there were concerns that the RCMP might be abusing its new powers in the national security area and these concerns were reinforced by the findings of Justice O'Connor's federally commissioned report on the Maher Arar case. There have also been serious allegations made that, in addition to Maher Arar, there have been other men detained illegally overseas.

It has been suggested that the civilian oversight of the RCMP's national security functions might be examined to determine whether to:

- a) strengthen the role of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP by restructuring it and renaming it the Independent Complaints and National Security Review Agency for the RCMP (ICRA) or
- b) establish a new review mechanism for the RCMP or
- c) leave the existing review mechanism for the RCMP unchanged.

*The National Council of Women of Canada **urge the Government of Canada** to review the recommendations of the second O'Connor Report and alternative proposals, such as those formulated by the Political and Social Affairs Division of the Library of Parliament, Information and Research Services, and implement without delay an independent and effective complaints and national security review function of the actions of the RCMP.*

Please note: the Salvation Army abstained from voting on this issue.

3. NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

Approximately three million Canadians suffer from some form of mental illness at some period of their life and as a result often face stigmatization and discrimination in the workplace and the community. Appropriate treatment for those suffering from mental illness is available in only a patchwork fashion across Canada, and in many areas is inadequate especially for young people; and wait times in emergency rooms and to see specialists often far exceed medical guidelines for those with mental illness.

Access to supportive housing, and the stability this affords, is of vital importance for the homeless suffering from mental illness if they are to take advantage of community treatment programs and have some hope of recovery; and behavioural problems resulting from mental illness often result in the individual coming into conflict with the law, with the result that about one in five of the inhabitants of Canadian correctional institutions has a diagnosable mental illness.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada, set up in 2005, has a mandate to develop a national mental health strategy for coordinating services and setting priorities, but as of now Canada has failed to meet this mandate and is still the only one of the G8 countries without a mental health strategy.

*The National Council of Women of Canada **urge the Government of Canada** to work with the provinces and territories to:*

a) develop a national mental health system which is comprehensive, integrated, and accessible to all, and sensitive to linguistic and communication issues including language and culture that will be accessible to residents of Canada;

b) address as part of the national plan, priority issues including:

- i. public education about mental illness,*
- ii. early intervention programs with infants, pre-school children and school age children,*
- iii. community treatment programs for all children, including age-appropriate facilities for adolescents*
- iv. support for families with children with a mental health illness,*
- v. access to supportive housing for the homeless with mental health problems,*
- vi. treatment for mental illness as an alternative to incarceration or as a component of incarceration for offenders with mental illness, and*
- vii. reduction of wait times for assessment and treatment*

c) ensure adequate funding for mental health services.

4. THE NEED TO PROTECT CANADA'S NAVIGABLE WATERS

Parliament and the Senate have recently rushed their approval of the Budget Implementation Act, Bill C-10 which included a very much weakened Navigable Waters Protection Act (NCWP); and the new NCWP eliminates environmental assessments (EAs) for development projects on Canadian waterways with few exceptions. The new NCWP divides Canada's rivers into those worth protecting and those not worth protecting, and, allows "class" lists to be drafted by Cabinet in secrecy, with no public consultation, scientific basis, or opportunity to appeal. Navigation is a public right, stemming from both Aboriginal Treaty rights and European Common Law.

*The National Council of Women of Canada **urge the Government of Canada** to strengthen legislation to protect our navigable waters through:*

- a) the requirement that all projects, eg., bridge, boom, dam, causeway or dredging on all Canadian waterways be subject to environmental assessment;*
- b) government review of recommendations from a Senate Committee, set up specifically for the purpose of gaining broad public input and scientific analysis and recommendations;*
- c) maintenance of the existing common law and traditional use of navigable waters.*

5. THE NEED TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE FEDERAL OR JOINT FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS

The 1992 Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA) and other environmental legislation, and legislative implementation processes, are intended to best protect the environment and ensure environmental sustainability, through standards, informed scientific input, public scrutiny and input and opportunities for public appeal, but these need to be strengthened further, not diluted or avoided.

*The National Council of Women of Canada **urge the Government of Canada** to ensure that all projects within the Provincial or Federal jurisdiction, having the potential to harm the environment, be subject to an appropriate Federal or joint Federal/Provincial Environmental Assessment that is transparent, ensures rigorous scientific input and scrutiny, allows meaningful public access to the process, and provides enhanced project scrutiny before proceeding to the regulatory stage.*

6. CESSATION OF IRRESPONSIBLE PRODUCTION OF OIL FROM TAR SANDS IN CANADA

Producing a barrel of oil from tar sands leads to at least three times the greenhouse gas emissions of producing a barrel of conventional oil; and tar sands oil production is the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas pollution in Canada. Tar sands oil production causes widespread landscape destruction, and leads to massive, toxic tailings lakes which leak and are likely to contaminate groundwater. Since each barrel of tar sands oil produced by strip mining requires an average of three barrels of water, great stress is being placed on aquatic resources and water resources in the Athabasca Valley, posing risks to the McKenzie River basin; and aboriginal communities in the tar sands region are experiencing the destruction of traditional hunting and fishing areas.

*The National Council of Women of Canada **urge the Government of Canada** to cease supporting the irresponsible production of oil from tar sands in Canada by:*

- a) placing a moratorium on new tar sands projects until the environmental concerns are resolved,*
- b) stopping federal incentives to develop the tar sands,*
- c) increasing the monitoring and reporting of the environmental and social impacts of producing oil from tar sands.*

7. STIMULATING SOCIALLY EQUITABLE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AT TIMES OF ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

The National Council of Women passed a resolution in 1989, *Reduction of Federal Government Debt*, citing “wide support among Canadians for maintaining the debt of the Government of Canada at a low level in order to reduce high interest payments.” Canada has moved to lower the federal debt since that time, so that, at the end of 2008-09, the size of the federal debt as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is projected to remain the lowest of the G7 countries.

At this time of severe world wide economic downturn which has led to sharply decreased economic activity, many official and important voices have spoken out, recommending that governments across the world engage in economic stimulus, as a matter of urgency, in order to avoid a long term “depression”; and other voices have refined the concept of stimulus spending by pointing out that investing in different areas of the economy increases economic activity at very different rates.

Government deficits resulting from a slowdown in economic activity are deemed to be part of a business cycle or to be “cyclical” deficits, with economic stimulus seen as the best way to address the lack of demand in the economy; and although the regulation of the banking sector in Canada has been lauded internationally as maintaining economic health, credit has been tight throughout 2008 and early 2009, so that loans have been hard to access.

*Therefore, the National Council of Women of Canada **urge the Government of Canada**, during a period of significant and/or prolonged economic downturn, to:*

- a) work to increase demand in the economy by running cyclical deficits at times of low economic activity, the extent of the deficit depending on the severity of the downturn*
- b) engage in the most effective and efficient stimulus measures, particularly by directing more resources to the unemployed and those on low income*
- c) work with the financial institutions to assist them in continuing to advance credit at times of low economic recession*
- d) explore other ways of ensuring the availability of credit and implementing needed alternative avenues*
- e) pay special attention to the needs of women*
- f) ensure adequate funding for appropriate retraining for those who have lost their employment.*

