

**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
AUTUMN 2010**

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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, 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 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.

National Council of Women of Canada

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STATEMENTS TO THE GOVERNMENT

- 1.a. The National Council of Women of Canada strongly urges the Government of Canada to include chrysotile asbestos as a dangerous substance in the Rotterdam Convention, and to ratify the Rotterdam Convention without delay.
- 1.b. The National Council of Women of Canada urges the Government of Canada to ban the mining and export of all forms of asbestos and the provincial governments:
 - (a) to cease their mining and export of all forms of asbestos,
 - (b) to retire or retrain those workers affected by this move, and
 - (c) to provide transitional support for affected communities.
2. The National Council of Women of Canada urges the Government of Canada to develop a plan to include:
 - a) a national surveillance system to track health outcomes of people who have been exposed to asbestos, and
 - b) a listing of buildings that contain asbestos.
3. The National Council of Women of Canada urges the Government of Canada to undertake more study of the accumulative effect of excitotoxins in the food supply on human health, publicize the results widely, and, if necessary, regulate the food industry accordingly.
4. The National Council of Women of Canada urges the Government of Canada to
 - a) take all necessary measures to follow the recommendations of the Sodium Reduction Strategy which is to be published in 2010; and
 - b) ensure that the Public Health Agency of Canada:
 - i. provides leadership in educating Canadians of the dangers of excessive intake of sodium; and
 - ii. develops a strategy and regulations for reduction of sodium in processed foods, and
 - iii. adopt a colour coding system to indicate the level of sodium in products

5. The National Council of Women of Canada urges the Government of Canada to:
 - a) act on all the recommendations in the “Report of the Independent Investigator into the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak”;
 - b) increase the frequency of inspections in slaughter establishments, meat and fish processing plants, storage facilities and retail stores;
 - c) focus on prevention by developing comprehensive food safety systems that prevent organisms from getting into food in the first place, and
 - d) enforce regulations for meat imports and prosecute for non-compliance;
 - e) provide sufficient numbers of qualified Canadian food Inspection Agency (CFIA) inspectors in all areas of food processing plants;
 - f) educate the public as to the importance of appropriate cooking temperatures for raw meat products.

6. The National Council of Women of Canada urges the Government of Canada to work with First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples to develop and implement plans for funding housing and infrastructure construction without delay, and to provide sufficient funding and support to ensure that the housing:
 - a) is supported by the necessary infrastructure
 - b) is of sufficiently high quality to ensure healthy living
 - c) is sufficiently plentiful to eliminate overcrowding,
 - d) takes into account the special needs of vulnerable women and their families on reserves, and
 - e) meets the standards of the National Building Code.

- PU.1 The National Council of Women of Canada and the relevant provincial Councils urge their respective governments to give priority to: passing the necessary midwifery legislation and regulations, and increasing the number of midwifery training seats and funded positions for practising midwives in order to make their services accessible to all women in Canada.

- PU.2 The National Council of Women of Canada urges the Government of Canada to include releases of radioactive substances and waste by nuclear facilities in the National Pollutant Release Inventory.

- PU.3 The National Council of Women of Canada urges the Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Municipal governments of Canada:
 - a) to provide a full range of social and economic services and support systems, to ensure that prostitutes have realistic options to exit prostitution, and
 - b) to eliminate the procurement of prostitution, wherever it may occur, including through the internet or other electronic means, without criminalizing prostitutes.

PU.4 The National Council of Women of Canada urges the Government of Canada, in its negotiation of international trade agreements, to:

- a) ensure comprehensive public consultation, transparency and full disclosure to the public and to parliament, and
- b) incorporate respect for the rights of provincial, territorial and municipal governments to protect the public interest through local procurement of materials, services and labour, ethical and environmental policies, and the requirement that companies winning public contracts reinvest a portion of their profits in local communities.

Reiteration: The National Council of Women of Canada urges the Government of Canada to appoint an independent and non-partisan Commissioner for Canada's Children, accountable to Canadians through Parliament, with a mandate to:

- a) promote an effective and coherent approach to children in federal government policies and legislation; and
- b) ensure that the federal government lives up to the commitments made to children at the national and international levels; and
- c) ensure that children's voices are heard in decisions affecting them made at the federal level.

RESOLUTIONS

1a. INCLUSION OF CHRYSOTILE ASBESTOS IN THE ROTTERDAM CONVENTION

RESOLVED THAT: *The National Council of Women of Canada strongly urge the Government of Canada to include chrysotile asbestos as a dangerous substance in the Rotterdam Convention, and to ratify the Rotterdam Convention without delay.*

Rationale:

According to the Rotterdam Convention's review committee, chrysotile (the dominant form of asbestos found in Canada) is unequivocally a human carcinogen. The World Health Organization (WHO) and other international agencies agree and Canada acknowledges that all forms of asbestos fibres, including chrysotile, are carcinogenic. Canada is the only western democracy to have consistently opposed international efforts to regulate the global trade in asbestos and for several years Canada has led opposition to listing chrysotile under the Rotterdam Convention. The sale of asbestos is illegal in Canada and data show increasing consumption of Canadian asbestos under the sales activities of Chrysotile Canada Inc.

1b. BAN ON MINING AND EXPORTS OF ALL FORMS OF ASBESTOS

RESOLVED THAT: *The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to ban the mining and export of all forms of asbestos and the provincial governments:*

- a) to cease their mining and export of all forms of asbestos,*
- b) to retire or retrain those workers affected by this move, and*
- c) to provide transitional support for affected communities.*

Rationale:

There is global consensus that exposure to all types of asbestos can kill – a view supported by the International Labour Organization, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Programme on Chemical Safety, the European Union, the Collegium Ramazzini, the International Social Security Association, the World Trade Organization, the International Commission on Occupational Health, 39 countries, and scores of independent scientists.

2. THE NEED FOR A CENTRAL REGISTRY OF ASBESTOS

RESOLVED THAT: *The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to develop a plan to include:*

- a) a national surveillance system to track health outcomes of people who have been exposed to asbestos, and*
- b) a listing of buildings that contain asbestos*

Note: The Salvation Army wishes it known that it abstained from voting on this.

Rationale:

In Canada there is no central registry of medical asbestos cases as in other countries so no predictions of problems can be made. In November 2007, a paper, “Exploratory Sampling of Asbestos in Residences near Thetford Mine: The Public Health Threat in Quebec” reported that levels of asbestos in more than half the homes were excessive, and Canadian Occupational Health Agency studies have concluded that exposure to asbestos accounted for approximately 60% of all work related deaths in the country in 2005.

3. FURTHER STUDY NEEDED OF EXCITOTOXINS IN THE FOOD SUPPLY

RESOLVED THAT: *The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to undertake more study of the accumulative effect of excitotoxins in the food supply on human health, publicize the results widely, and, if necessary, regulate the food industry accordingly.*

Note: The Salvation Army wishes it known that it abstained from voting on this issue.

Rationale:

Excitotoxins such as monosodium glutamate (MSG), hydrolyzed vegetable protein, and aspartame are used as flavour enhancers and sweeteners in food, and in small amounts, these additives are usually harmless to human health. However, with the proliferation of prepared foods and drinks containing excitotoxins, people are ingesting increasing amounts; and there is increasing anecdotal evidence of excitotoxins playing a role in the development of neurological disorders, degenerative diseases by the production of free radicals, and obesity.

4. DECREASING SODIUM CONSUMPTION BY CANADIANS

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

- a) take all necessary measures to follow the recommendations of the Sodium Reduction Strategy which is to be published in 2010; and*
- b) ensure that the Public Health Agency of Canada:*
 - i. provides leadership in educating Canadians of the dangers of excessive intake of sodium; and*

- ii. develops a strategy and regulations for reduction of sodium in processed foods, and*
- c) adopt a colour coding system to indicate the level of sodium in products.*

Rationale:

It is estimated that Canadians consume on average 3092 mg of sodium a day, more than double the recommended amount of 1200 to 1500 mg a day for most adults.

Consumption of too much sodium on a regular basis can contribute to high blood pressure; which is a major risk factor for heart attack, stroke, heart failure and kidney disease. It is estimated that about 80% of sodium in the diet of Canadians comes from processed food, and in 2007 the Canadian Government created the Sodium Working Group, chaired by Health Canada, to develop a national sodium reduction strategy.

5. FOOD SAFETY – MICRO-ORGANISMS

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

- a) act on all the recommendations in the “Report of the Independent Investigator into the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak”;*
- b) increase the frequency of inspections in slaughter establishments, meat and fish processing plants, storage facilities and retail stores;*
- c) focus on prevention by developing comprehensive food safety systems that prevent organisms from getting into food in the first place, and*
- d) enforce regulations for meat imports and prosecute for non-compliance;*
- e) provide sufficient numbers of qualified Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) inspectors in all areas of food processing plants;*
- f) educate the public as to the importance of appropriate cooking temperatures for raw meat products.*

Rationale:

A very serious listeriosis outbreak in August 2008 increased medicare expenses and caused the Government to initiate an investigation resulting in the “Report of the Independent Investigator into the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak.” As of September 2009, the Government has said that it will invest \$75 million in Canada’s food safety system and act on all 57 recommendations made in the report. However, the new investment will bolster only the processed meat inspection program and not slaughter establishments, fish processing facilities, in-store inspections or border inspection points. The government focus is on end-product testing instead of prevention, and there is a shift to more food industry self-policing powers with diminishing resources for government inspection.

6. URGENT AND CRITICAL NEED TO PROVIDE SAFE AND ADEQUATE HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

RESOLVED THAT: *The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to work with First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples to develop and implement plans for funding housing and infrastructure construction without delay, and to provide sufficient funding and support to ensure that the housing:*

- a) is supported by the necessary infrastructure**
- b) is of sufficiently high quality to ensure healthy living**
- c) is sufficiently plentiful to eliminate overcrowding,**
- d) takes into account the special needs of vulnerable women and their families on reserves, and**
- e) meets the standards of the National Building Code.**

Rationale:

The 2003 Report of the *United Nations Expert Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* urged Canada to provide special housing designed to provide safe housing for vulnerable women; and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* refers to the rights of indigenous peoples with respect to autonomy and self-government and to improvement of their economic and social conditions, including housing, for which states are required to take effective measures to ensure improvement in these conditions.

The Assembly of First Nations declares that First Nations' housing and infrastructure is in crisis and have developed a six point plan to renew its housing, involving: a) sustainable funding, b) institutional development, c) information and research capacity, d) financing, e) land management, f) human resources, and neither the long term nor annual funding provided by the Government of Canada has resulted in sufficient, safe and sanitary housing and infrastructure.

POLICY UPDATES

PU 1. MAKING MIDWIFERY SERVICES AVAILABLE TO ALL WHO WISH TO USE THEM

RESOLVED THAT: *The National Council of Women of Canada and the relevant Provincial Councils urge their respective governments to give priority to:*

- a) passing the necessary midwifery legislation and regulations, and*
- b) increasing the number of midwifery training seats and funded positions for practising midwives in order to make their services accessible to all women in Canada.*

Note: The Salvation Army wishes it known that it abstained from voting on this issue.

Rationale:

In 1986 and 2008, the National Council of Women of Canada passed policies promoting the development of midwifery services in Canada, calling for the provision of, and access to, services for all Canadian women who request it, adequate funding, legislation and regulations by relevant governments, more midwifery seats, and the recognition of foreign-trained midwives.

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) 1 in a recent report of a survey of Ob/Gyn Residents, and Heads of Ob/Gyn Departments in Canada's 17 medical schools across Canada has shown that the predicted shortage of maternity care providers is more severe than expected, and two provinces and one territory have not adopted legislation for midwives to practice in their jurisdictions with the result that women in Canada do not have equal access to choice of carer and place of birth.

In all Canadian jurisdictions that have midwifery legislation and regulations, most midwifery practices have a waiting list of women requesting their service; and in some provinces funding restricts the number of clients that a midwife can annually accept into her practice, thus further restricting access to midwifery services.

**PU 2. NUCLEAR POWER: INCLUSION OF RADIOACTIVE EMISSIONS
AND WASTE IN THE NATIONAL POLLUTANT RELEASE
INVENTORY**

RESOLVED THAT: *The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to include releases of radioactive substances and waste by nuclear facilities in the National Pollutant Release Inventory.*

Note: The Salvation Army wishes it known that it abstained in the voting on this issue.

Rationale:

In 1994 the National Council of Women of Canada passed a policy urging the Government of Canada to continue to update the Nuclear Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) as needed, and, in 2008 urged the Government to ensure that all mining companies report their toxic unsafe pollutants to the National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI). NPRI is Canada's legislated, publicly-accessible inventory of pollutant releases and transfers, but does not include radioactive substances released or generated as waste by nuclear facilities. Releases of radioactive substances (radionuclides) from nuclear facilities have been assessed and declared "toxic" under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999* (CEPA 1999) as "entering the environment in quantities or concentrations or under conditions that have or may have an immediate or long-term harmful effect on the environment or its biological diversity."

The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission either does not make available to the public or does not have an easily accessible way for the public to determine the amounts of radioactive substances being released or generated as waste by facilities in the entire uranium fuel chain (mining, milling, processing, power generation and waste management). Canadians can more easily ensure their health and safety is protected from nuclear releases and waste if this information is collected and made publicly available through the National Pollutant Release Inventory.

PU 3. ELIMINATION OF COERCIVE, VIOLENT AND ABUSIVE PROSTITUTION

RESOLVED THAT: *The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Municipal governments of Canada:*

- a) to provide a full range of social and economic services and support systems, to ensure that prostitutes have realistic options to exit prostitution, and*
- b) to eliminate the procurement of prostitution, wherever it may occur, including through the internet or other electronic means, without criminalizing prostitutes.*

Rationale:

The National Council of Women of Canada adopted as policy in 2001 “Prostitution and Trafficking in Women and Children,” reiterating NCWC policy (1983) that prostitutes should not be criminalized for soliciting, except adults soliciting from minors

Prostitution is a form of male violence that sexually exploits women and children. It is a product of, and contributes to, gender inequality, therefore, the eradication of prostitution is necessary to achieving equality for all women. Prostitution is also the leading cause of the domestic and global human trafficking of women and youth.

PU4. INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

RESOLVED THAT: *The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada, in its negotiation of international trade agreements, to:*

- a) ensure comprehensive public consultation, transparency and full disclosure to the public and to parliament, and*
- b) incorporate respect for the rights of provincial, territorial and municipal governments to protect the public interest through local procurement of materials, services and labour, ethical and environmental policies, and the requirement that companies winning public contracts reinvest a portion of their profits in local communities.*

Note: The Salvation Army wishes it known that it abstained from voting on this issue.

Rationale:

The Canadian government is in negotiations with the government of the European Union for an expansive new free trade agreement. A proposed trade deal with the European Union would also bind provincial and municipal governments to NAFTA-like restrictions, and this approach would drain needed stimulus from the Canadian economy, worsen the current crisis in manufacturing and interfere with provincial and municipal governments' authority to provide and regulate local services.

It is the right of local and provincial governments to support local or Canadian suppliers, set minimum local rules for materials or services on major projects, adopt ethical and environmental purchasing policies, enforce commitments to hire workers locally or require companies winning public contracts to invest a portion of revenues or profits in Canadian communities.

REITERATION

A COMMISSIONER FOR CANADA'S CHILDREN

RESOLVED THAT: *The National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to appoint an independent and non-partisan Commissioner for Canada's Children, accountable to Canadians through Parliament, with a mandate to:*

- a) promote an effective and coherent approach to children in federal government policies and legislation; and*
- b) ensure that the federal government lives up to the commitments made to children at the national and international levels; and*
- c) ensure that children's voices are heard in decisions affecting them made at the federal level.*

Rationale:

Policy decisions affecting children are made by many departments of government. The federal government has made commitments to work together with provinces and territories to improve the well-being of Canada's children and has adopted an active role in promoting the Children's Agenda. However, Canada needs an independent body to monitor the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada in 1991, and the Children's Bureau, which was set up in 1991 within the Department of Health cannot fulfil this role because it lacks independence. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a child who is capable of forming his/her own views should have the right to express them in matters affecting the child.