



NATIONAL COALITION DENOUNCES CUTS AND CHANGES TO STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA

The Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women have come together in Ottawa for its annual in-person meeting. Part of the Coalition's Ottawa agenda is to join other organizations in protest of the cuts to Status of Women Canada and changes to the Women's Program, and communicating its concerns to elected representatives and others. Coalition members represent provincial and territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women from Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland/Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Northwest Territories, the Yukon and Nunavut. These advisory councils are appointed by their respective governments to operate at arms length to provide advice on issues of concern to women and their families. The Coalition was formed upon the cessation of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women in 1995 to provide a venue for collaboration and strategic action on issues of national concern to Canadian women and their families.

THE FACTS

In September 2006, the federal government announced a \$5 million cut to Status of Women Canada (SWC), indicating that the money would come from the administrative budget of the department. The budget of the department was approximately \$23 million, with \$10.8 million earmarked for the Women's Program, a funding source for community-based equality seeking women's organizations. The cut has resulted in the department losing more than 43% of its annual budget.

In October 2006, the federal government announced changes to the Women's Program including

- removing the advancement of women's equality from the mandate of the Women's Program
- barring organizations accessing funding through the program from advocacy and lobbying of government
- eliminating research as an eligible activity for funding
- making for-profit organizations eligible for funding

In November 2006, the federal government announced the closure of 12 of 16 offices of the Status of Women Canada (effective April 2007), eliminating over 60 positions - jobs primarily held by women.

Since these changes have been announced, women's organizations across the country have organized protests, letter writing campaigns, petitions, and news conferences to denounce what they perceive to be an attack on women and the advancement of women's equality in Canada. The response of Bev Oda, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper, that the federal government believes that women are equal has been met by organizations that fight women's inequality every day with shock and disbelief.

In November 2006, the federal government began to indicate that the \$5 million cut to Status of Women Canada will now be reallocated. Women's organizations are still waiting to hear how and when money will be reallocated to the Women's Program.

THE IMPACTS

Changes to the Women's Program

The removal of women's equality from the mandate of the Women's Program has appalled women across Canada. Comments from the federal Minister Bev Oda and Prime Minister Harper that women's equality has been achieved, and therefore no longer a goal for the Government of Canada, is an insult to women who live with inequality every day. It is staggeringly ridiculous to suggest that women in Canada are equal when in 2005 Canadian women made just 63% of men's incomes; when single mothers, senior women,

Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, and immigrant and racialized women are at least twice as likely to live in poverty as their male counterparts; when women make up 84% of all victims of spousal homicide; and when women have never made up more than 22% of the House of Commons. The barring of those receiving funding from domestic advocacy activities and lobbying of federal, provincial and municipal governments and research and polling activities has changed the mandate of the Women's Program so fundamentally that organizations will no longer be able to do the work that has assisted women to get to where they are today: able to vote and run for office; able to access some resources for family violence prevention; able to point to some legislation that protects against gender discrimination in the workplace. Advocacy and research has been the very essence of projects funded through the Women's Program and of the organizations that have been supported by SWC.

To say that we need funding for action on the front line is fair, but to say that there is no further need for advocacy and research is to fund band-aid solutions without addressing the root causes of women's inequality. It is not enough to support mothers to access parental benefits when the system and women's economic reality ensures that they are less likely to be eligible for benefits than fathers. It is not enough to give parents \$100 a month for childcare when they are unable to find daycare space for their infant. It is not enough that legislation protects women's rights to matrimonial property when they don't have access to civil law legal aid to access those rights.

Without funding support for women's equality seeking organizations to do research and to advocate on behalf of the women they serve on issues such as civil law legal aid and universally accessible child care, Canadian women's organizations will be unable to continue their work, and the status of women will not advance, but diminish. Another significant change to the Women's Program has been that this already limited pot of money can now be accessed by for-profit organizations. Supporting for-profit organizations to increase women's participation is wonderful; however, if the federal government does not create a separate pot of money for this endeavor, non-profit women's organizations will suffer, as they simply do not have the resources to compete with for-profit corporations.

Cuts to Status of Women Canada (SWC) Budget

The \$5 million cut to the administrative budget of SWC has resulted in a closure of 12 of the 16 Status of Women offices across the country. This will gravely diminish access by women's organizations to funding and support. In addition, it will eliminate the vital role that SWC program officers play in provinces to act as an advocate for women's equality within other federal and provincial structures, share knowledge and information with other federal and provincial departments and bring a gender analysis to their work. Having localized SWC program officers who understand the realities in each community increases the ability of SWC to enhance social development and timely access to funding for women's organizations. A website cannot deliver equality.

THE COALITION'S RECOMMENDATIONS

That the federal government reinstate the \$5 million cut to the Status of Women budget

That the federal government reinstate the advancement of women's equality within the criteria for the Women's Program

That the federal government remove Research and polling activities not directly tied to a project that will result in an outcome that would improve directly the situation of women and Domestic advocacy activities and lobbying of federal, provincial and municipal governments as activities which are not eligible for funding under the Women's Program

That the federal government removes eligibility of for-profit organizations for funding under the Women's Program

That the federal government reverses the decision to close 12 of 16 SWC offices in Canada

Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women

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