



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
OTTAWA, CANADA
K1A 0A6

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women has the honour to present its

FIRST REPORT

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on the Status of Women proceeded to a study to explore the concerns of women's organizations and equality-seeking organizations. After hearing evidence, the Committee agreed to report to the House as follows:

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women was struck for the first time in the fall of 2004. In order to establish its work plan, the Committee undertook an extensive consultation with national and regional women's organizations. These organizations were invited to identify key issues of concern to women during a series of roundtable discussions throughout November and December.

Although the groups which appeared before the Committee represented a wide spectrum of perspectives, many witnesses pointed to the ongoing inequality between men and women. The overwhelming majority of witnesses expressed concern at the decreased prominence given to women's issues and substantive equality, and emphasized the importance of preventing these issues from sliding off the public policy agenda.

The Committee has heard that the women's movement has played an important role in keeping equality issues on the public agenda, but that these organizations have been weakened over the past decade as a result of decreased funding as well as a shift away from core/program funding toward project-specific funding. The Committee is awaiting the results of an evaluation being conducted by Status of Women Canada before addressing the question of core funding. As it considers its future work plan, however, the Committee feels that the testimony it has heard makes a compelling case for immediate attention to the funding available for women's groups and equality-seeking organizations. It is in this light that this current report is being tabled in Parliament.

WOMEN'S PROGRAM

The Women's Program at Status of Women Canada is the federal government's main funding program for gender equality. While other funding programs of general application provide sporadic financial support to equality-seeking organizations, the Women's Program provides approximately \$10 million annually to support projects aiming to advance equality for women. The objectives of the Women's Program are:

1. To promote policies and programs within key institutions that take account of gender implications, the diversity of women's perspectives and enable women to take part in decision-making processes;
2. To facilitate the involvement of women's organizations in the public policy process;
3. To increase public understanding in order to encourage action on women's equality issues; and
4. To enhance the effectiveness of actions undertaken by women's organizations to improve the situation of women.

AGENDA FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Ten years ago, Member States of the United Nations met in Beijing for the 4th United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women. Nations throughout the world agreed, at that meeting, to an ambitious plan of action to improve the situation of women, known as the Beijing Platform for Action (PfA). Nations were urged to develop national implementation plans to work toward gender equality. Canada developed a five-year plan, known as the *Federal Plan for Gender Equality*. Five years later, as Canada was preparing for the Beijing +5 review, Canada's *Agenda for Gender Equality (AGE)* was introduced.

Through the *Agenda for Gender Equality* the federal government committed \$20 million of funding to Status of Women Canada over five years. Half of this money was spent on the Women's Program to enhance voluntary sector capacity and to engage Canadians in the policy process so that women's experiences and perspectives could inform the public policy agenda. According to a brief from Status of Women Canada, the AGE infusion of \$10 million spread over 5 years increased the ability of Status of Women Canada to implement multi-year funding and to be responsive to new and emerging groups and issues.

This year marks the 10-year anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and the end of Canada's five-year *Agenda for Gender Equality*. Member States of the United Nations will be meeting in New York from February 28 to March 11, 2005 to review the

implementation of the Beijing PfA. As in Canada, much progress has been made toward gender equality in the world over the past decade, but change is slow, and challenges remain.

VOICES FOR CHANGE

Many of the witnesses participating in the roundtables identified issues around the funding of women's organizations through the Women's Program at Status of Women Canada as a priority area for action. The Committee heard that the move from core funding of women's organizations toward project funding in the 1990s had made it difficult to sustain a women's movement in Canada and made it increasingly difficult for the women's movement to advocate for greater equality between women and men. Typical of the testimony heard by this Committee is the intervention made by a representative of the YWCA Canada:

The last fifteen years...have seen a marked decline in the visibility of equity issues on the Canadian social agenda. This decline is directly correlated to the significant funding cuts experienced by women's groups in the early 1990s.¹

The overwhelming majority of witnesses called on the federal government to consider providing core/program funding to equality-seeking organizations to support organizational costs involved in the ongoing work toward gender equality. In a brief to this Committee, Status of Women Canada announced that it had begun an evaluation process which will involve surveying more than 500 groups who have applied for funding since 2001-2002. The department has also committed to inform this Committee of the results of this evaluation. In order not to pre-empt the findings of the evaluation of the Women's Program, the Committee has chosen not to proceed on the question of core/program funding for equality-seeking organizations at this time.

FUNDING OVERVIEW

Although the Committee will not embark on a detailed study of the implications of providing operating funding to equality-seeking organizations at this time, it feels compelled by the volume and consistency of testimony related to funding through the Women's Program to address the adequacy of funding immediately. As the table below indicates, the budget of the Women's Program, in current dollars, is lower today than it was in 1986. This decrease is even greater when considered in real terms (i.e. adjusted for inflation).

¹ Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO), *Evidence* (18:30) 7 December 2005. Ms. Darlene Bessey (President, YWCA Canada)é

Funding to the Women's Program

Fiscal Year	Base Budget \$\$\$\$	Family Violence \$\$\$\$	Total Budget \$\$\$\$
1973-1974	223,000	----	223,000
1974-1975	250,000	----	250,000
1975-1976	406,000	----	406,000
1976-1977	955,000	----	955,000
1977-1978	800,000	----	800,000
1978-1979	726,000	----	726,000
1979-1980	876,000	----	876,000
1980-1981	1,286,500	----	1,286,500
1981-1982	2,780,300	----	2,780,300
1982-1983	2,967,200	----	2,967,200
1983-1984	4,245,000	----	4,245,000
1984-1985	9,300,500	----	9,300,500
1985-1986	12,538,000	----	12,538,000
1986-1987	12,426,900	----	12,426,900
1987-1988	12,435,000	----	12,435,000
1988-1989	12,435,000	⁽¹⁾ 820,000	13,255,000
1989-1990	12,435,000 *(2,000,000)	⁽¹⁾ 820,000	11,255,000
1990-1991	10,435,000 ** (400,000)	⁽¹⁾ 820,000	10,855,000
1991-1992	10,035,000	⁽¹⁾ 820,000 ⁽²⁾ 46,000	10,901,000
1992-1993	10,035,000	⁽²⁾ 1,130,000	11,165,000
1993-1994) (Renewal Year)	10,035,000 (1,003,000)	⁽²⁾ 1,160,000 (116,000)	10,076,000
1994-1995	9,032,000	⁽²⁾ 1,044,000	10,076,000
1995-1996	9,032,000 ** (433,000)	⁽³⁾	8,599,000
1996-1997	8,599,000 ** (434,000)	----	8,165,000

Fiscal Year	Base Budget \$\$\$\$	Family Violence \$\$\$\$	Total Budget \$\$\$\$
1997-1998	8,165,000	⁽⁴⁾ 250,000	8,415,000
1998-1999	8,165,000 ** (165,000)	⁽⁴⁾ 250,000	8,250,000
1999-2000	8,000,000	⁽⁴⁾ 250,000	8,250,000
2000-2001	8,000,000 1,000,000 (AGE)	⁽⁴⁾ 250,000	9,250,000
2001-2002	8,000,000 1,750,000 (AGE)	⁽⁴⁾ 250,000	10,000,000
2002-2003	8,000,000 2,500,000 (AGE) 441,620 (VSI)	⁽⁴⁾ 250,000	11,191,620
2003-2004	8,000,000 2,500,000 (AGE) 359,000 (VSI)	250,000	11,109,000
2004-2005	8,000,000 2,500,000 (AGE)	250,000	10,750,000

Source: Table provided by Status of Women Canada, January 2005.

- * Budget cut
- ** Budget cut (publications & Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sports (CAAWS))
- *** February 1993 Budget
- **** February 1993 Budget (Approx. 5% cut)
- ***** Program Review II — 2% cut
- (1) First Family Violence Initiative
- (2) Second Family Violence Initiative
- (3) Family Violence Initiative Sunsets
- (4) Family Violence Initiative (for 5 years)
- AGE Agenda for Gender Equality
- VSI Voluntary Sector Initiative

THE COMMITTEE'S POSITION

With a total female population of close to 16 million, the funding disbursed by the Women's Program to groups working toward gender equality is less than \$1 per girl and woman. Testimony received by the Committee suggests that the amount of \$2 per woman and girl would be a more adequate level of funding,² however the Committee is not prepared at this time to propose a specific funding amount. The members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women believe, however, that in light of the persistent

² Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO), *Evidence* (11:25), 30 November 2004. Ms. Sungee John (Interim President, National Action Committee on the Status of Women).

inequality between women and men, the current funding amount is clearly insufficient. As a result:

The Committee recommends that the federal government increase funding to the Women's Program at Status of Women Canada by at least 25% for investments in women's groups and equality-seeking organizations. These groups contribute to the development of innovative, healthy communities which ensure full access by both women and men. This Committee further recommends that the disbursement of funds within Status of Women Canada should incorporate recommendations anticipated from the Women's Program evaluation expected in the summer of 2005.

We are quickly approaching the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. The meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women from February 28 to March 11, 2005 will be highlighted by an evaluation of progress made by nations in implementing the Platform for Action developed ten years ago in Beijing. In preparation for this evaluation, and in light of the compelling testimony from equality-seeking organizations from across the country, members of the Committee urge the federal government to implement its recommendation as soon as possible.

This Committee believes that civil society plays an important role in the work toward gender equality. The Committee is convinced of the importance of continuing to strive for equality between men and women. This sentiment was beautifully expressed by one of the witnesses appearing before this Committee. We give her the final word:

We're like eagles, we have two wings, a male and a female. We'll never go anywhere if one of those wings are wounded. We will not have the far sight. We'll only be nearsighted and grounded until we can lift, as men and women, equally, and fly like an eagle.³

³ FEWO, *Evidence* (12:35), 9 December, 2004, Ms. Gasongi (Gina) Simon (*Executive Director, National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence*).

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report within one hundred and fifty (150) days.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (*Meetings Nos. 7 to 13, and 16*) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Anita Neville, M.P.

Chair