



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 November 2024

English only

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-ninth session

10–21 March 2025

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Canadian Labour Congress and Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Progress on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Canada

In the past five years, there have been many notable accomplishments in the pursuit of gender equality, including a robust pandemic response to the precipitous drop in household incomes in 2020, the commitment of \$30 billion over five years to build a universal, publicly funded child care system, the introduction of a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and the first Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan. In 2024, the federal government introduced framework legislation to establish universal pharmacare, starting with free contraception and diabetes treatments.

But significant gaps remain in the pursuit of gender equality and women's rights in Canada—from the neglect of women with disabilities and challenges facing migrant workers to the surge in young women reporting poor mental health and the prevalence of online hatred and technology-facilitated violence directed toward women, girls and gender-diverse people.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and girls continue to confront discrimination and violence in their daily lives impacted by the persistent and damaging legacy of colonization and its manifestations in government and society. Anti-Indigenous racism in the health care system, for example, directly contributes to poor quality care or a complete lack of care, resulting in poor health outcomes and shorter life expectancies compared to the non-Indigenous population.

These challenges are now compounded by the cost-of-living crisis placing great stress on low-income households, especially those led by women. The proportion of women reporting great difficulty in meeting their financial needs increased by more than 30 per cent between 2021 and 2023—and by almost 80 per cent among racialized women.

Access to health care and community supports also remains a pressing concern in the aftermath of the pandemic as service providers struggle to recruit and retain workers. This challenge is even more acute in rural and remote areas. The workforce crises persist in all sectors of the care economy, leading to serious gaps in both quality and access for people who depend on care. Women are left to pick up the slack, with corresponding impacts on labour force participation and economic security.

As noted in Canada's April 2019 and June 2022 responses to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women's observations, and its own 2024 National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Canada has enhanced its capacity to advance gender equality by creating permanent corporate structures and processes to co-ordinate activities across government, and by investing in the expansion of gender-based analysis plus (GBA Plus) in policy and programming. New gender budgeting legislation and a Gender Results Framework to track government progress in meeting its gender equality goals are two key outcomes of this work. These steps have helped create the foundation for progress.

What is needed now is continued investment and political will to take the action necessary to tackle entrenched barriers to gender equality and guarantee the complete realization of women and girls' human rights as essential to all human rights and basic freedoms.

Call to action

Our call to action comes against a backdrop of rising populism and attacks on women's rights in Canada and around the world. In Canada, provincial governments have passed legislation and policies that violate human rights and undermine gender equality. From legislation that targets Muslim women's freedom of expression and autonomy, to policies that undermine the rights of trans and gender diverse children, Canada is not immune to the rising tide against equality and human rights.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) remains an active genocide in Canada, and it is through this genocide that many dimensions of violence, injustice and colonial destruction intersect. The 2019 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls produced numerous reports, including 231 Calls for Justice, laying out the necessary steps to end MMIWG. Since that time, the Government of Canada has accepted the inquiry's findings and developed action plans. However, to date the Government of Canada has fully implemented just two of the Inquiry's 231 calls for justice. Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people continue to go missing and are murdered at the same rate they were in the years before the Inquiry.

Without engagement with Indigenous women and interventions led by and for them, Indigenous women will continue to have their safety compromised, experience disproportionate involvement with the child welfare system, see themselves overrepresented in the justice system and have their social determinants of health negatively impacted. The failure to adopt an approach that includes Indigenous women is a fundamental barrier to the advancement of human rights in Canada.

Canada has been a vocal proponent of women's rights and gender equality, notably on the global stage. But in recent years, its feminist agenda appears to have stalled. Words alone mean little, but silence coupled with uneven or unfinished action speaks volumes.

Agenda for Change

There is a good deal yet to learn about the pandemic's gendered impact and potential long-term consequences for gender equality in Canada. There is also a good deal more to learn about the strategies that worked, in whole or in part, to address diverse women's needs during this crisis.

Strengthening foundational income supports as well as introducing targeted programs were essential in delivering needed financial aid to millions of women struggling with employment and income losses and the burden of care. These interventions offer important lessons for permanently strengthening income security and expanding coverage to better protect precarious workers including those with caregiving responsibilities.

Time-limited pandemic investments in the care economy, however, were not enough to stabilize the system, which had been drained and strained by years of austerity. All levels of government in Canada have key roles to play in creating more inclusive, gender-equal communities, including expanding the number of public/non-profit child spaces; scaling up community-based mental health services; raising the minimum wage and strengthening labour standards; expanding the stock of second-stage housing for women fleeing violence; and improving the wages and working conditions of care workers across the board.

A commitment to gender equality and women's rights requires moving beyond a fragmented approach of underfunding, privatization and exploitation in the care

economy. Investment in public services and infrastructure must be a priority going forward in Canada and globally.

Engaging with women's rights and gender equality organizations as equal partners in this work is also crucial to success. Real change can only be achieved by engaging with and promoting the work and leadership of these groups of women and their communities and supporting their capacity to engage through flexible and sustained support and funding.

Where programs, services, funding and research are concerned, there needs to be an intersectional lens to capture the diversity of women's lived experiences to help identify and dismantle systemic legacies of exclusion and oppression. To this end, governments must continue to tackle the data gaps and create more robust mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of policy and legislation. The imperative now is to apply the lessons of COVID-19 in service of a more sustainable, resilient and gender-just future, ensuring that those who bore the brunt of the pandemic are not again left behind, caught in the gender inequality trap.

The 30th anniversary of Beijing provides new opportunities to reconnect, regenerate commitment, charge up political will and mobilize the public. The Beijing Platform for Action, still forward-looking at 30, offers an important focus for rallying people around gender equality and women's empowerment. Its promises are necessarily ambitious. But over time, and with the energy of new generations, those promises can be kept.
