



# BPW Canada

The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs  
La Fédération Canadienne des Clubs de Femmes de Carrières  
Commerciales et Professionnelles

## Brief to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women concerning Funding and Program Changes at Status of Women Canada December 13, 2006

The Canadian Federation of Business & Professional Women's Clubs (BPW Canada) and the International Federation of BPW Clubs were established in 1930 with the mission to work towards the improvement of economic, political, employment and social conditions for women in the workforce. We currently have clubs in more than 100 countries of the world, including over 40 across Canada.

We strongly oppose the changes being made to the Status of Women Canada mandate and budget, and firmly reject the notion that women are now "equal" in Canada.

- *FACT* – Statistics Canada estimates that almost a million women are either physically or sexually assaulted in Canada each year.
- *FACT* – Over 50% of one-parent families headed by women are poor. Almost half (41.5%) of single, widowed or divorced women over 65 are poor. (CRIA, 2005)
- *FACT* – Canadian women are seriously under-represented in public life, accounting for only 21% of MPs. Canada now ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> in the world among democracies in terms of women's representation in the national legislature, after Pakistan and Portugal. (Equal Voices)

Inequality is systemic in Canada, and will not be eradicated by the provision of direct services, as much as direct services are needed. Systemic discrimination requires concerted and continual advocacy efforts to change a system that is currently not working well for many women. Removing equality from the mandate of Status of Women Canada means the department no longer funds what it was created to do, advance women's equality.

Closing offices across the country will severely limit access to Status of Women programs. Suggesting this won't create hardship because application forms are available on the Internet belies the fact that many women, especially in rural and remote areas, do not have Internet access.

We find these changes shocking, especially given that December 10, 2006 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, of which Canada was a signatory. CEDAW goals have yet to be met – **even here in Canada**.

In contrast, the United Nations High-Level Panel on System-Wide Cohesion in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment recently endorsed Stephen Lewis's recommendation that the UN create an independent women-specific agency to address women's issues, a recommendation that we would expect the Government of Canada to support.

Astonishingly, however, while international organizations are moving in one direction – towards greater equality for women in the world – the Canadian government is moving in the other – cutting budgets and closing offices that have promoted efforts towards gender equity. We are shocked that the Conservative government seems prepared to walk away from its international commitments, like CEDAW. BPW Canada finds this situation totally unacceptable.

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