

## **UN Commission on the Status of Women 64 Written Statement submitted by the Canadian Federation of University Women**

### **Advancing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains as relevant in 2020 as it was in 1995. It continues to provide inspiration and a blueprint for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Significant progress has been made for some women but evaluation of progress must also reflect the lives of millions of women and girls who are still deprived of basic human rights and do not have the opportunity of full participation in their communities. Globally, to varying degrees, deeply entrenched societal and systemic inequalities exclude women and girls from the very activities that could contribute to their personal wellbeing and hinder the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At this 25-year point of reflection, the Canadian Federation of University Women joins the collective global voice of women's non-governmental organizations in reaffirming the Beijing Declaration and urges member states to take decisive and substantive action toward achieving both the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The 2015-2019 Government of Canada must be applauded for appointing a gender balanced cabinet, establishing a federal department of Women and Gender Equality, promoting gender-based policy analysis, launching a Feminist International Assistance Policy and for landmark proactive pay equity legislation. Even though these measures fall short of their intended impact, they reflect the aspiration and priority of improved status of women within the Canadian Government. Substantive gains will require long term and continued commitment, particularly in the areas of pay equity, universal child care, clean growth, climate change, and indigenous issues.

This statement will focus on Education and Training of Women, Women and Health, and Women and the Economy which are central themes to advancing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of progress in closing the gender gap must use an intersectoral and intersectional lens. Intersectionality is important because it allows us to identify forms of discrimination that

are related to each other, and account for these relationships when working to advance social and political equity.

### **Education and Training of Women**

The Canadian Federation of University Women recognizes the critical role education plays in changing lives, and embraces education as essential to gender equality and empowerment. We award over one million dollars annually to support women and girls in educational pursuits. Women must have access not only to the traditional constructs of primary, secondary and post-secondary education but to all forms of education and to innovative platforms for delivery of education. We urge member states to recognize the importance of technical and vocational training as reflected by UNESCO's International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training. We urge member states to increase funding for training and education programs that will significantly improve the participation of women, girls and gender diverse people in the labour market.

Within the global context, a major challenge to education and training exists for the 10 million girls who are refugees (Women's Refugee Commission, Facts and Figures). In this crushing and growing humanitarian crisis, the lack of access to education is one more way in which girls are victimized, thus shaping their lives forever. UNHCR makes a compelling call to action in the "Her Turn" initiative. We urge member states to make education for women and girls who are refugees a priority.

### **Women and Health**

Violence against women and girls is a major public health issue and the burden of suffering from violent victimization is compounded in refugee camps and other marginalized communities. Gender based violence exists in every country in the world and is a persistent problem. It has lasting impacts on women and girls' physical, sexual and mental health. We recognize that domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual violence, harassment, and violence perpetuated on women and girls as acts of war, all constitute violence against women. We call on member states to use all instruments available to stop violence against women and girls and to provide protection to them.

Also crucial to the health of women is the availability of the whole range of health services and in particular, sexual health and reproductive services. The focus on Women and Health within the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was on reducing maternal deaths. There is still work to be done in this important area but the agenda of women's health needs to be broadened. In a 2015 Oxford Martin Policy Paper, recommended interventions include increased funding for women's health

research, improved management of preventable death and disability in women and a gendered approach to the collection and utilization of health data.

Women must be healthy to realize our individual and collective full potential. We urge member states to view investment in the health of women and girls as non-negotiable.

### **Women and the Economy**

Empowering women economically is not only the right moral thing to do, but it is a key component to building strong economies. UN Women published Facts and Figures indicate that 26% could have been added to the global GDP by 2015 if women and men played an identical role in labour markets. Member states have the opportunity to plan for the future, ensuring that economic policies including trade agreements reflect strategies that promote decent work for women, prepare women for emerging economic realities and support women as entrepreneurs. Women can have valuable roles not only as workers but also as shapers of economic policy and drivers of sustainable development and growth. Intentional focus must be given to women who work in low wage sectors of the economy, and to work that exploits women and girls and or compromises their health. The World Trade Organization's programs that empower women serve as an example of how to improve the participation of women, girls and gender diverse people in the global economy.

Governments have a crucial role in addressing practical barriers to paid work and progressive policies on such issues as ensuring safe work environments, pay equity, early child learning and child care. Provision must be made within the care sector to decrease the burden of caregiving on unpaid caregivers and family members. What can never be forgotten from the agenda of economic empowerment of women is the unpaid work that makes all paid work possible.

Stakeholders in the economic empowerment of women, including male allies, must vigorously promote the adequate education and training of women to enable their full participation in the workforce and their benefit from economic growth and development. We continue to endorse the Beijing Declaration, Annex 1, number 27, a stated determination to "promote people-centred sustainable development, including sustained economic growth, the provision of basic education, life-long education, literacy and training, and primary health for girls and women".

## **Conclusion**

The intersection between education, health, economics and gender equality are at the heart of advancing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We urge member states to commit to gender equality in education by adopting laws, policies and action plans with strong and transparent monitoring and accountability mechanisms. We urge member states to commit to significant investments in research and programs for women and girls health. We urge member states to implement proactive pay equity policies and fund early learning and child care programs to order to allow for women and girls full participation in the workforce.

The Canadian Federation of University Women, as a nonpartisan, self-funded, voluntary organization of concerned women must advocate for those without a voice. We cannot be complicit by silence to the business of arms trade or the urgent need to address environmental issues that threaten to compromise all other social gains. Our organization has a 100-year history of national and international leadership in advocacy for women. We are proud to be a member of the National Council of Women of Canada, the Canadian Beijing +25 Network and international coalitions advocating for equality and empowerment of women namely, Graduate Women International and the International Alliance of Women. We will continue to hold member states, including the Government of Canada accountable for their international commitments and the accelerated action needed to realize gender equality and empowerment.

## **Statement endorsed by:**

Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women

Graduate Women International

International Alliance of Women

The National Council of Women of Canada

YWCA Canada