

Champions for



Women's Rights

The co-leads of a series of resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council are championing Canada's role in women's issues.

From a young age, Michael McCulloch was aware of the marginalization of women in the world around him. His mother had been a brilliant student, graduating from high school at 15, but higher education was not an option for a young woman coming from a poor family in Ottawa in the 1950s. Instead, she went to work to help pay for her brothers to attend college.

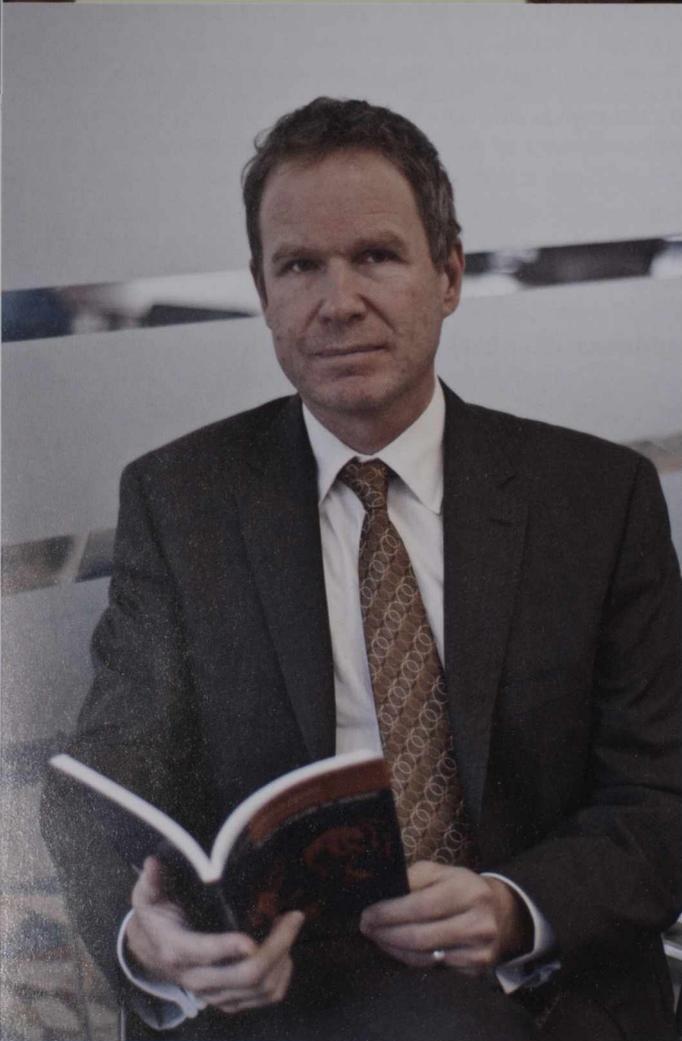
It was the sort of discrimination that McCulloch saw four years ago, as DFAIT's health adviser, while monitoring an initiative under the Glyn Berry Program for Peace and Security in a Ugandan refugee camp. There, Grade 6 classrooms were filled mostly with boys, while the girls by that age were being pulled out of school to care for siblings, work for their families or be married.

Today, as a member of DFAIT's Human Rights division, McCulloch is working with Manon Boisclair, second secretary at Canada's Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva, to try to put an end to such discriminatory measures against women. As champions of a series of resolutions on the elimination of violence against women at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), McCulloch and Boisclair are reinforcing Canada's leadership role in promoting and protecting women's rights.

"The lives of women and girls have traditionally been valued differently from men's and boys'. When the humanity of any group is devalued, this creates an environment where discrimination and violence are more likely to occur," says McCulloch, 49, who joined DFAIT in 2007 and also teaches part-time at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs and the School of Public Policy and Administration at Carleton University. "We want people on the ground to know that the international community is concerned about women's human rights and that violence against women and girls is never acceptable under any circumstances."

Boisclair, 40, who managed the Glyn Berry Program and the Global Peace and Security Fund for DFAIT in the past and moved to the mission in Geneva in 2009, works on advancing the women's human rights agenda, including by introducing the annual resolution on the elimination of violence against women at the HRC.

The work is "challenging, interesting and rewarding," says Boisclair, who also follows human rights issues in sub-Saharan Africa. "Women in parts of this region continue to be subjected to horrendous forms of violence, which is heartbreaking and frustrating to see in 2011," she says. "But some forms of violence against women still exist everywhere today."



Michael McCulloch and his colleague Manon Boisclair (top) are reinforcing Canada's leadership role in promoting and protecting women's rights. - photo (McCulloch): Michel Pixel/DFAIT