

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN ROUNDTABLE REPORT

### Canadian Coalition in Support of Women in Afghanistan

On December 2, 1999, a group of women traveled from Toronto to Ottawa to have a meeting with Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy regarding the human rights catastrophe facing the women of Afghanistan. In the three year period since the Taliban had taken over much of Afghanistan and imposed draconian, health damaging, life-threatening rules on the women and girls of Afghanistan, Canadian women had begun to form groups to speak out for these women, to promote awareness about their plight and to work for change.

Seven women met in Toronto on November 4, 1999 to discuss the need to take the issue forward. The founding group included:

- Sally Armstrong, Chatelaine Magazine
- Carol Dahlquist, the Canadian Unitarian Council
- Bev LeFrancois, Halton Rape Crisis Centre
- Marilou McPhedran, York University
- Margot Franssen, The Body Shop
- Sharifa Sharif, Afghan Women's Solidarity
- Maryham Mahboob, Zarnegaar Newspaper

This group took their concerns to the meeting with Mr. Axworthy on December 2, 1999. At that meeting Mr. Axworthy shared the concerns of the group and made several suggestions.

- To form a national coalition that would unite all the groups speaking for the women of Afghanistan in Canada.
- To create an awareness building campaign across Canada.
- To create a resolution for the International Status of Women meeting in New York, February 2000, get the resolution on the agenda and get it passed.
- Lobby the American government to get the women on the same agenda as bin Laden.
- Hold a national conference.

The Minister said that if those steps were followed he would take the issue to the Security Council when Canada became president of the council on April 1. On March 31, the group filed the following report to the Minister.