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# news release

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## MINISTERS SAY WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

To mark International Women's Day, External Affairs Minister Barbara McDougall, the Minister for External Relations and International Development, Monique Vézina, and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, Mary Collins, issued the following statement:

On March 8, Canadians join the rest of the world in celebrating International Women's Day. This is an occasion to reflect on the progress made to advance women's equality and an opportunity to assess the challenges facing women in Canada and around the world.

The Government's theme for this year is "Women's Rights are Human Rights," which ties in with the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights taking place in Vienna, Austria in June 1993.

Canada has been, and continues to be, a strong and consistent supporter of women's human rights in many international forums including the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States, La Francophonie and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Canada has actively participated in the UN Commission on the Status of Women and was instrumental in drafting a UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Furthermore, Canada co-sponsored the UN Commission on Human Rights resolution on sexual violence against women in the former Yugoslavia, which was adopted in late February 1993, and has provided special funding to help women and children in Bosnia-Herzegovina who are victims of sexual assault.

Since 1984, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has had a Women in Development Policy to promote the full participation of women in all its development programs. This policy was revised in 1992 to stress the role of women as equal partners in the sustainable development of their societies. Toward this end, CIDA has funded a number of

initiatives that target the civil and political rights of women and strengthen their role as decision-makers.

Canada's efforts to encourage and sustain international progress on women's equality issues are a natural complement to work being undertaken in these areas in Canada. Such initiatives include the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, Canada's employment equity policies, and the recently begun review of Canada's refugee determination policy to take gender persecution into account.

- 30 -

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## HIGHLIGHTS OF CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

### United Nations

- Member of UN Commission on the Status of Women: 1958-1960, 1970-1976, 1981-1992.
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: Adopted by the UN in 1979; Ratified by Canada in 1981; Third report on Canada's implementation efforts submitted to UN in September 1992.
- UN World Conference on Women, 1985: Canada played substantial role in drafting Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. This action plan promotes the advancement of women around the world to the year 2000. Progress on these strategies will be examined at the fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.
- UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women: Draft of this Canadian-initiated declaration will be considered by the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 1993; Canada's Department of Justice prepared a draft manual for practitioners in the field of domestic violence, which is being reviewed by various UN bodies.
- Women's Rights as Human Rights: At meetings of the UN Commission on Human Rights, the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the Preparatory Committees for the June 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights, Canada has consistently stressed the concept of women's rights as an integral component of universal human rights.
- Canada has actively promoted institutional reform at the UN to ensure that women occupy 25 per cent of senior-level positions in the UN Secretariat by 1995.
- UN Conference on Environment and Development, 1992: Canada was one of the leaders in ensuring that one of the principal documents included a specific chapter on women.
- UN Development Fund for Women: Canada is a major donor to core funding (\$1.5 million in 1991-92) and the current director is Canadian.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Via this avenue, Canada contributed \$250,000 in December 1992 to assist women and children in the former Yugoslavia who have been victims of sexual assault.

### Commonwealth

- Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers: First meeting took place, at Canada's suggestion, in 1985; Canada hosted the third meeting in 1990.
- Ottawa Declaration on Women and Structural Adjustment: This Canadian priority issue was adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1991 and is on the agenda of the next meeting of Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers in Cyprus, July 5-8, 1993.
- Harare Declaration, 1991: Canada was instrumental in securing adoption by Commonwealth Heads of Government of this declaration, which enshrines women's equality as a fundamental principle of the Commonwealth.

### Organization of American States (OAS)

- Inter-American Commission of Women: Since becoming a member in 1990, Canada has ratified the three OAS conventions on the rights of women and, in 1992, was elected to the Commission's Executive Committee. Canada has been a key player in the development of a draft Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence Against Women -- the first such regional legal instrument.

### Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

- Canada has consistently sought to ensure the integration of women in all the work of the OECD and has been an active member of the OECD Working Party on the Role of Women in the Economy since its establishment in 1974. Canada is currently a member of OECD's Development Assistance Committee Expert Group on Women in Development.

### La Francophonie

- Canada has played a leading role in encouraging the integration of women's issues into La Francophonie's activities. In 1991, Canada announced it would sponsor a network of legal aid centres to meet the needs of women in various countries of La Francophonie. A Canadian-sponsored symposium will be held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, May 24-26, 1993, to assess the three pilot centres now being established in Benin, Morocco and Cameroon.

## Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)

- CSCE Conference on Human Dimensions, 1991: Canadian initiative called on participating states to recognize that full and true equality between women and men is a fundamental aspect of a democratic society.

## Canadian International Development Agency

### Women in Development: Current Projects

- Sri Lanka: The Women in Development Fund has been used to support initiatives such as a non-governmental organization called Lawyers for Human Rights and Development, which provides assistance to women victims of human rights violations, women in custody and detention, and women in abusive family situations.
- Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Women in Development Program: Through the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), CIDA is supporting the building of institutional capacities to address Women in Development issues and to incorporate women in regional and national decision making.
- International Non-government Organizations (INGOs): CIDA supports several INGOs that specifically address women's human rights. Three of these regional groups are the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) and *Comite Latinoamericano para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer* (CLADEM).