

**CORRECTED VERSION**

**A STATEMENT BY  
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FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF  
WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH**

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**Canada**

Good morning.

I am delighted to join you in launching the second annual Women's History Month. This is an excellent occasion to focus on the contributions of women in Canada and in the Department, and to recognize their achievements, whether as employees or spouses or dependents, as a vital part of our heritage.

In 1909, Agnes McCloskey became one of the first three women to join External Affairs. She joined as a lady "typewriter"! By itself, this was quite an accomplishment in a Department that, at the time, only allowed men to join as officers. This practice persisted until well into the 1940s.

Undaunted at being refused admission as officers, women, such as Margaret Meagher and Pamela McDougall, entered External Affairs as clerks, rose through the ranks, and went on to become ambassadors. Pamela, who went on to fill deputy's jobs elsewhere in the Public Service, rendered a final contribution here by chairing the Royal Commission on Conditions of Foreign Service, a seminal work whose recommendations are still being implemented today.

In 1943, Agnes McCloskey became the first woman to represent Canada abroad as Vice-Consul at the consulate general in New York. In 1947, six women became foreign service officers. Five were clerks in the Department who were promoted to FSO 2; they included Marjorie McKenzie and Margaret Meagher. The sixth was Marion MacPherson, who was the first woman to have been recruited as an officer from outside the Department.

In 1954, Elizabeth MacCallum was appointed chargé d'affaires in Beirut, Lebanon. She was the first woman to head a Canadian diplomatic mission. On her appointment to Tel Aviv in 1958, Margaret Meagher became Canada's first woman ambassador. More than 25 years later, there were only two women heads of post—Irene Johnson in Philadelphia and Elsa Amadio in Milan. Their numbers increased a little more rapidly after 1984, so that by 1989 there were 13 women in charge of missions abroad. These numbers have remained more or less constant since then.

Certainly progress has been made, but there's still a long way to go for women to occupy head of mission positions and for them to be placed in headquarters executive positions in numbers proportional to their representation in the Department. And, more important, in numbers proportional to the contribution women have made and are making to the work of the Department.

The Department has not done quite so well when it comes to filling headquarters positions with women at the assistant deputy minister level or above. Sylvia Ostry became the first woman Deputy Minister for International Trade in 1984.

Margaret Catley Carlson, who joined External Affairs in 1966, was the first female foreign service officer not to resign upon her marriage in 1970 to a colleague in the Department. She later pursued her career outside External Affairs, first as President of the Canadian International Development Agency, and then Deputy Minister of Health and Welfare. Earlier this year, she moved to New York to become President of the Population Council.

Other women who have held assistant deputy minister positions in the Department include Louise Fréchette, who later became Canada's first woman Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in 1991. Jean McCloskey was the first woman Assistant Deputy Minister for the Asia-Pacific Branch. She was subsequently appointed President of Investment Canada, and recently became Associate Deputy Minister of the Department of Finance.

Today's women in External Affairs and International Trade Canada share a legacy of determination inspired by the women I have just mentioned and many others over the years. Their determination has helped us become more sensitive to gender-based stereotypes and discrimination. Women in this Department have made historic contributions to Canada's social and economic development through their paid and unpaid work. But, many of their accomplishments remain unrecognized, unknown or ignored in our history books—or even our departmental folklore!

The goal of women's history month is to write women back into history. The theme this year is "HERstory" of Work: Recognizing Women's Contributions. It is also intended to highlight the importance of increasing women's participation at all levels of the Department's workforce, and the need for innovative ways in accommodating professional careers and family and home responsibilities. As well, the theme underlines the need to gain a better understanding of, and give greater value to, women's accomplishments.

This commemoration is a tangible reminder of Canada's leading international role in promoting greater equality for women. Canada was instrumental in drafting the strategies for the advancement of women at the 1985 World Conference on Women and continues to play a lead role in pressing for action in international fora.

Today, women in this country are a permanent and powerful presence in the workplace. Women currently make up 45 percent of Canada's labour force and almost half of the Department's workforce. They accounted for almost three-quarters of all growth in employment in Canada between 1975 and 1991.

Closer to home, I also want to remind you that last April I announced the creation of an employment equity strategy for this Department that was designed specifically to address the issues of importance to women and to redress gender

imbalance. As a result of this initiative, I established a departmental advisory committee to deal with all aspects of employment equity.

This group is headed by Barry Carin, Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Policy and Trade Competitiveness Branch, and draws upon all ranks of the Department. It includes representatives from other departments and the private sector so that we can have the benefit of the experiences of others and the solutions they have brought to these common issues. The purpose of the committee is not just to study the issues, but to propose dynamic and innovative ideas to enable the advancement of women in the Department. I would urge interested employees to address their comments or questions to the Employment Equity Unit or to Barry. I look forward to receiving recommendations from this advisory group soon.

To date, progress in achieving equal opportunity in the workplace has been characterized by periods of advances and setbacks for women at work, waves that have propelled or held back entire generations or particular employment groups of women.

In Canada and elsewhere, women have for decades faced enormous difficulties when they began to enter the paid labour force. Often, the only careers available to them were extensions of their domestic roles—such as teaching or nursing—at much lower rates of pay than their male counterparts.

In spite of this, women are beginning to break down barriers which have delayed their full participation in male-dominated professions and levels, such as the foreign service and the executive group. Women engaged in fighting these obstacles are the trailblazers of today.

As I mentioned earlier, when women first joined External Affairs, they were hired as clerks even if they actually performed the duties of officers. At the time, this was not considered unusual or unfair. Nor was it considered out of the ordinary to demand that female rotational employees resign upon marriage—no matter whether their partner wished to accompany them, place their own careers on hold, and provide the support then expected of a rotational spouse. Many prominent women employees of the Department started out as members of the administrative support group. Some of these women are featured in the photo exhibit and are very much part of the Department's oral and written history.

Certainly the full acceptance of women into the foreign service on an equal basis with men is a relatively recent phenomenon. But we still must remember that, despite the introduction of added flexibility in the workplace, balancing work and family responsibilities remains particularly challenging, especially in the foreign service.

Women's History Month gives me and my colleagues the opportunity to recognize the impact that women have had and are having in our Department, both as employees and as spouses of foreign service personnel.

In honour of women, I would like to invite you to join me in celebrating their achievements by visiting the photographic exhibit, perusing the material available at the kiosks, and watching the video. I would also urge you to participate in other Women's History Month activities planned for the month of October, such as the two screenings of films and videos on October 8 and 22, a panel discussion October 18 on the evolving role of women in the Department, and a breakfast seminar with Pamela McDougall on October 29.

As an equitable and just employer I think we have come some distance in the past few years. We have, however, much, much further to go in advancing the situation of women. I intend to ensure that we make those advances and I expect and demand the same commitment from all members of the Department.

Although at the outset I made reference to employees, I want to pay tribute to all those women who contribute actively to the many demanding activities abroad that we ask our employees to take on. I also want to recognize the invaluable support given to employees by spouses and dependents by just being there.

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge the presence of representatives from the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Women's Studies Program at the University of Ottawa, the Canadian Women's Movement Archives, the Foreign Service Community Association and the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers for their participation in Women's History Month at External Affairs and International Trade Canada and to thank them for their generous contributions and enthusiastic support.

Many thanks to you all.