



# Statements and Speeches

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## EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

An Address by the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women to the United Nations Decade for Women, Copenhagen, July 15, 1980.

...There can be no effective development, no real progress within any society which leaves behind half its population. Yet, the chilling reality is that the general global situation of women has worsened. Studies indicate that women are the most unequal among unequals — and this, after five years of conscious effort on the part of us all. Continuing and accelerated change is needed. It is not sufficient for us to meet and discuss and propose measures and programs of action. We need effective follow-up on the recommendations which will emerge from this world conference.

Women are not alone in their struggle for equality and development. The United Nations is engaged in important activities on behalf of women. In this regard, the Centre for Humanitarian Affairs and Social Developments plays a vital role as a catalyst for action in the field of women.

Less than a year ago, the UN established the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. We are confident that it will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of international action by emphasizing areas needing special attention and by minimizing any duplication with existing programs.

Canada is committed to the goals of the United Nations Decade for Women. We will work with other states for the adoption of the Program of Action for the Second Half of the Decade, which is the most important goal of the conference.

Women's groups in Canada have reviewed the plan and have urged me to join with you in striving for its acceptance by all countries here, and for the development of mechanisms for strong, follow-up action by countries and United Nations agencies, mechanisms which will ensure the implementation of the plan. Perhaps the Status of Women Commission could have its functions strengthened to enable it to perform this role.

The time for effective action is now. We have no choice but to move ahead with determination. The 1980s must bring an end to women's social and economic victimization.

It is not easy to redirect those aspects of social, religious, and cultural traditions that are weighted against women's advancement; nor is it simple to change the present under-valuing of women's economic contribution that is supported by certain of these traditions.

In the first years of the Decade, and in some cases even earlier, Canada removed discriminatory language from its laws. That, of course, is not enough. The complex chal-

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challenge facing us now is to ensure that women benefit as they should from all government programs and policies. These programs and policies must now work to increase women's social and economic independence, or else we have failed to meet the goals of the UN Plan of Action.

**The royal commission**

Thirteen years ago, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was established by the Government of Canada. Its recommendations laid the groundwork for change in the laws and programs of government for the ensuing ten years. As a result, programs were developed, and new institutions emerged. These are the national mechanisms to integrate status of women concerns into all areas of government policy-making. For example, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and a Status of Women department within government to initiate and contribute to policy development were established. Arising from the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, the federal Human Rights Commission has included in its statutes, the concept of "equal pay for work of equal value", a historical move forward for improving women's economic status. Already cases are coming before the Commission to move this principle into practice.

**The plan of action**

In 1979, our Government issued a plan of action, called *Towards Equality of Women* which addresses women's issues in all spheres of government activity. We are already making changes as a result of the plan. In the areas of sexual assault, and violence against women, we are preparing for discussions with the provinces to discuss better ways of assisting victims. We are also developing a program of affirmative action in the public service; legislative changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act, and Pension and the Income Tax Act. But the events and conditions are already beginning to overtake this plan, and it is my intention to review and revise it to ensure that there is true movement in all policy areas of the Federal Government. Canadian women's groups' recommendations were the solid base on which this plan was built, and their continued vigilance in monitoring our actions will play a crucial role in ensuring its implementation. As well, we count heavily on women's groups to continuously bring new issues and problems to our attention.

Given the federal structure of our country, all three levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal, must be committed to policies that will positively affect women. In fact, one of my priorities as Minister Responsible for the Status of Women is to discuss with my colleagues in the provinces the means they have established for ensuring that women's concerns are understood and respected in all provincial policies. Some provinces have established the structures to do this, others have not. Let me emphasize that I believe it is essential that governments establish goals and standards so that they can measure progress in these areas that affect women.

We agree with the attention paid in the draft program of action to national mechanisms and stress that in Canada there must be commitment at the provincial level too, or progress for women will be slow and haphazard.

Happily, I am able to table here today, along with *Towards Equality for Women*, the plans of action of five of our ten provinces. As I have said, the provinces have a major role in affecting progress in employment, health and education, the sub-themes of

this conference.

In studying the draft program of action in preparation for this conference, I have given a great deal of thought to the three major sub-themes of the conference. Employment issues are of special concern to me because of my responsibility for employment matters in my own country. Health and education are vital, too. They relate to matters we all strive for — good health and access to as much education as we desire.

**Employment**

As the Minister of Employment and Immigration, as well as the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, I have the responsibility for ensuring that women's employment is assured through appropriate training and job creation and, as well, that special compensatory programs are conceived to strike out past inequities. In the past, many of our training and job-creation programs did not meet the needs of women in the workplace. That is a condition I hope to change. I firmly believe that unless special programs are developed, women will fall further behind, will remain in their traditional sectors and will not be equipped to participate in the economic expansion we anticipate in our western provinces, particularly in energy-related industries. That is why a new program of wage subsidies of up to 75 per cent is available to train women in non-traditional jobs. Also we have established a community service program which will finance such projects as child-care and transition houses, giving support for women to enter the workplace.

**Affirmative action**

Strong measures are required to overcome centuries of tradition in the workplace. That is why affirmative action programs are a necessary component in our strategy for change.

For the past few years the Federal Government and at least one province has had voluntary affirmative action programs in the private sector. We are, at the federal level, as "towards equality" states, seriously considering mandatory affirmative action programs for companies with contracts with the Federal Government. We have already announced our intention to implement affirmative action in the public service.

It is important to note that there is significant commitment within the Canadian labour movement for affirmative action, a commitment registered by the work of the Canadian Labour Congress' Committee on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Women Workers.

There is also a growing recognition of the need to eliminate systematic discrimination in the labour force. We have tried the voluntary approach but only 15 contracts have been signed to date. This argues for effective measures in the private sector.

Our Government considers the development of equal rights for women one of the most important areas for action, and that is why we are developing new programs over the next few years. We recognize that the considerable inequalities which continue to exist between men and women are directly related to the segregation of the jobs they do. It is my conviction that this can be diminished by measures such as equal pay for work of equal value, affirmative action and specially directed training programs for women.

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**Education and training**

Clearly, education is a key to closing the door on this inequitable job structure. In our country, education falls within provincial jurisdiction and whereas there are areas of commonality, it is also true that not all ten education systems are the same. Education for both girls and boys, is compulsory and free in Canada up to the age of 16. Depending on the province, this can mean 11 or 12 years of compulsory schooling. In addition to our free primary and secondary schools we are proud of the university and community college systems which we have developed. Significant improvements during the past five years are now evident in the percentages of women in some professions. For example, in law and medicine women now make up more than 30 per cent of the graduates. The Federal Government contribution to vocational training is approximately \$800 million, and an additional \$3 billion is spent financing post-secondary schools. In terms of vocational training we have made some progress, though not as much as in the professions. Women account for about 42 per cent of the enrolment in trades training, but I must admit, this percentage is largely in traditional areas. In apprenticeships in non-traditional areas, only 3 per cent of apprentices are women.

**Sex-stereotyping**

The most significant thing we have learned in education is the enormous negative impact of tradition including sex-stereotyping, on choices made by our young people both girls and boys. Provincial governments, individual school boards, and numerous non-government organizations in Canada have studied the effects of sex-stereotyping in textbooks and teaching aids. Guidelines have been prepared by a wide cross-section of concerned groups, to eliminate sex-stereotyping from our school texts. This is an area where real reform is necessary.

On a wider level, a number of studies have been done on the effects of sex-stereotyping in the media. As a result of our national plan of action, the Canadian Radio, Television and Telecommunications Commission set up a task force in September 1979 to develop guidelines to encourage the elimination of sex-role stereotyping in the broadcast media. The task force held meetings and received briefs from across Canada. We expect their reports soon. And indeed, my own Commission is in the midst of preparing guidelines for the elimination of sexual stereotyping in all forms of government communications.

Canada supports very strongly the inclusion of the programs of action, a concern that women be protected by governments from sexual assault and physical violence. As well, we echo the concerns expressed about women's health and safety on the job.

Our plan also signalled the need for modernization of our rape laws to ensure high levels of conviction of rapists and a less traumatic trial for the women who have been assaulted. Likewise, we are searching for means to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace, which is a growing concern of women and their employers.

Family violence unfortunately exists in all societies. Our Advisory Council and our office have publicized the extent of family violence in Canada — and we are working on measures to ensure better services to women who are its victims. To do this we must have the close co-operation of the provinces.

My country is also most interested in addressing the matter of women's occupational health. In my view, it would be helpful to us in Canada, and in other industrialized member states, if the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies, particularly the World Health Organization, were to include in its work plans reference to occupational safety and state-of-the-art reports to facilitate the sharing of information to promote a safe working environment for women and men to protect the human rights of female workers, and promote reproductive health for workers of both sexes.

Convention  
Despite the diversities of political systems and traditions, there is a dramatic uniformity in the changes we seek to improve the situation of women in all our countries. Our common commitment to end discrimination against women is expressed in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

I am delighted to advise you, Madame Chairwoman and fellow delegates, that Canada will be signing this convention this week. This convention, so many years in the drafting, (and I am proud to note that Canadian representatives participated actively in its drafting), affirms the commitment of our separate governments and of the United Nations as a whole, not only to respect and equalize the rights of women and men, but, in my opinion, it also gives full recognition to what all of us gathered here have known and what many others have steadfastly refused to accept — that women have borne the burdens of discrimination in many ways, and for centuries. They have been under-privileged and under-valued. They have endured unjust and inequitable situations for no other reason than that they were born female. Having given recognition to the situation, we now must remedy it. Canada is signing this convention not as a symbolic gesture, but as a pledge of action to all Canadian women — indeed, to all Canadians.

Our common interest in removing discrimination against women must be met by increased recognition on the part of all nations, that in international development co-operation, the impact of development projects or programs on women must be better understood. This will provide insights for the design of future programs, particularly those for women as the specific target population.

International Development  
Since 1976, Canada, in its development assistance programs has been trying increasingly to emphasize the equal partnership of women and their families in the development process. Thus, projects and programs involving participation of women in the poorest regions have been encouraged, whenever possible, within the priority sectors defined with recipient country governments.

Canada, through its International Development Agency (CIDA), has had projects with women as the specific target population at least since 1966. In recent years, greater awareness of women-in-development issues with the Agency has resulted in the elaboration of specific policy directives which guide project and program planning. In 1979-80, 31 projects in 22 developing countries focused on women and addressed the three action areas being discussed: health, education and employment. For the remaining part of the Decade, CIDA is in the process of elaborating a women-in-development strategy which will identify areas in CIDA programs requiring greater attention, in order that benefits to the women and their families can be maximized.

**Immigration**

Canada is a country with a diversity of cultures and groups. Men and women from all over the world have built our country, and we are proud of it. Our record of assisting refugees has been a good one. But we recognize that even these efforts pale in the face of the millions of world refugees seeking new homes. Women immigrants and refugees have their own particular difficulties and we are increasingly aware that better assistance is required to meet their needs — better language training and better settlement programs to help them and their families integrate more easily into the community. But the problem of refugees is becoming one of major significance in the international arena. Several initiatives and commitments must be made to come to grips with the political and economic reality of vast numbers of people uprooted from their traditional homes. This is an area where we must take a stand.

**Refugees**

This conference will consider the specific problems of refugee women, who comprise the majority of the ten-million refugee population throughout the world. These women have suffered the tragedy of disrupted family life; many have lost their families. We cannot consider their difficulties in a vacuum but within the context of the over-all situation. Their problems are, nevertheless, particularly pressing. I think for example, of the high proportion of women and children among Afghan refugees in Pakistan and among the refugees in Somalia and also of the brutal attacks against women fleeing Vietnam by sea.

We must intensify our international efforts to resolve the situations which are producing refugees and to find homes for those displaced or in refugee encampments. Similarly, we must also support international efforts towards the elimination of *apartheid* and towards a just and peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

Our views on the causes of these conflicts and on possible remedies may diverge but what is important is that this conference should avoid polemics and instead strive in a positive and constructive spirit to work out a comprehensive and practical plan of action. Only in this fashion will the conference succeed in impressing upon the competent political organs of the international community the urgent necessity of creating conditions which will permit the extension of the benefits of this plan to women everywhere in the world.

**United Nations**

With reference to the Voluntary Fund, the Canadian International Development Agency will review specific projects for contribution in the bilateral programs within mutually established country program priorities and available resources.

Canada's ability to contribute to the implementation of the Decade program has been enhanced by our election to the Status of Women Commission. We intend to work towards a much stronger integration of women's concerns in the activities of UN agencies. More specifically, we seek support for a position which urges the systematic meshing and dove-tailing of concerns and objectives for the Decade Plan of Action with the other major programs of the UN for a greater impact.

We will be examining the positions of our own delegations to UN conferences to ensure that our concerns at a national level are reflected in our international activities.

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Canada is committed to a better future for women. We know that our commitment requires tremendous re-direction of financial resources. The assumptions of women's equal place in society, and their need for economic independence, points to a substantial revision of pensions, social security programs and taxation systems.

Moreover, for a better society with women as equal partners with men in its governing as well as in its functions and offices, men must share the responsibility of home and children. We commend the stress placed on this in the formulation of family responsibilities by the Program of Action.

By the end of the Decade we will have completed a careful review, with the provinces, of how all our social and economic policies promote or impede the possibility of women's economic independence.

There are, of course, many areas that cannot be legislated but good legislation can lead the way to changed attitudes in certain instances. Most prominent of these is the area of family responsibilities, the need for both parents to share the job of raising their children. This would require an examination of maternity leave provisions so that they can become parental leave.

Government cannot interfere in a family's sharing of assets during a marriage. However, it can, and will look at the ways in which the Income Tax Act encourages provisions for the economic security of the parent (usually the mother) who is caring for the children.

We are only beginning to understand the risks a woman takes when she leaves the work force to care for her children, or when a husband falls ill, dies, or the marriage fails. The overwhelming statistics describe the real poverty most of these women will suffer. Sixty-eight per cent of single parents' incomes is below the poverty line.

There is still a long way to go in providing the social supports, like child care. We still do not recognize the value of women's unpaid work in the home.

It is through women's economic independence that families will be strengthened. The burden of support will be shared. We intend to strive in this direction, although we know that old attitudes stand in the way, and new problems, such as economic restraints, or poor economic times, mitigate against the costly business of giving women their due. We know that equality comes with a price tag, but if the price is not paid, then our concerns are no more than lip-service, and women's economic position will continue to be perilous.

The struggle for equality, development and peace will be long — but as Nellie McClung, one of Canada's first fighters for women's suffrage, and from my own city of Winnipeg, said: "To bring this about — the even chance for everyone — is the plain and simple meaning of life."