

# 25

## YEARS:

# Ready or Not

2006 marks the 25th anniversary of Canada's ratification of the most comprehensive international treaty on women's rights, the **UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**. Canada ratified it in 1981 with the consent of all provinces and territories.

During the 2006 federal election, all major federal party leaders made public commitments to taking concrete and immediate measures to ensure that Canada fully upholds its obligations to women under CEDAW. Now, it is time for action.



The following areas of concern represent FAFIA's priorities for action. They are based on 23 recommendations made to Canada by the UN in 2003. Canada is due to report back to the United Nations in 2007.

## #1 Advancing Women's Social and Economic Security

Women in Canada who work full-time earn 71% of what men earn.<sup>1</sup> They also do significant amounts of unpaid care-giving work. Women are more likely to have incomes below the poverty line. **Canada needs to: 1/ implement the recommendations of the federal Pay Equity Task Force; 2/ increase the funds in the Canada Social Transfer and attach standards so that social assistance rates exceed the poverty line and eligibility rules do not exclude women in need.**<sup>2</sup>

## #2 Implementing Aboriginal Women's Human Rights

Aboriginal women in Canada continue to face systemic discrimination on the basis of their Aboriginal status and their gender. **Canada needs to: 1/ change the current law (Bill C31) so that Aboriginal women have the same right as Aboriginal men to pass on Indian status to their children and grand-children, regardless of previous history of 'marrying out'; 2/ grant First Nations women matrimonial property rights equivalent to the rights of other women in Canada;**<sup>3</sup> and 3/ provide financial resources to **Aboriginal women's organizations** at the same level as their male-led counterparts.

## #3 Improving Legal Aid for Women

Many women can not access legal aid for family and civil law matters,<sup>4</sup> the areas for which women most require legal assistance. Consequently, many women do not enjoy equal protection and benefit of the law. The Canadian Bar Association (CBA) has declared that legal aid is in crisis. **Canada needs to: 1/ provide sufficient designated federal funds for civil legal aid under the Canada Social Transfer and establish common standards for coverage, eligibility and levels of service.**

## #4 Responding to Violence against Women and Girls

Shelter and transition houses in Canada still struggle to get enough money to keep their doors open and serve all of the women who are experiencing violence. **Canada needs to: 1/ support front line women's services for women and children escaping male violence; and 2/ allocate an annual federal contribution of \$75 million for this front line work.**

## #5 Respecting Immigrant, Refugee and Migrant Women

Women who immigrate to Canada often possess higher levels of education than Canadian-born women, yet they experience tremendous difficulty integrating into the workforce because rarely are their credentials or work experience from abroad recognized in Canada. **Canada needs to: 1/ ensure that immigrant women have access to profession-specific language training and skills upgrading as well as back to work mentoring and bridging programs; 2/ eliminate the live-in requirement of the Live-In Care-Giver and Domestic Program and grant women under this program landed status upon arrival.**

## #6 Supporting Women's Organizing

With women making up only 21% of the federal Parliament, issues of significance to women do not always get the attention they deserve. Women's organizations play a vital democratic role in improving the lives of women. **Canada needs to: 1/ restore sufficient core funding to women's equality-seeking groups that work to eliminate discrimination, and improve the quality of life and choices available to women; 2/ increase the Women's Program budget of Status of Women Canada by a minimum of 25%.**

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> It is appropriate for the Government of Quebec to play the leading role in designing and delivering social programs and services for residents of Quebec.

<sup>3</sup> This legislation would eventually be replaced by new self-government legislation offering women protections. Both interim legislation and future arrangements under self-government must be subject to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including the equality sections.

<sup>4</sup> There is a designated federal contribution for criminal legal aid. Legal aid for family and civil law matters however are no longer designated in the Canada Social Transfer.