

ANNUAL BRIEF

FOR PRESENTATION TO

THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER

2007

BY

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA

KAREN DEMPSEY, PRESIDENT

OCTOBER 2007

**THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA
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Preamble

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) is pleased to present its new and updated policy positions in this Brief to the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada.

Founded in 1893, the National Council of Women of Canada is a non-profit organization of women representing a large number of citizens of diverse occupation, language, origin, and culture, reflecting a cross section of public opinion. NCWC is composed of 17 Local Councils, 5 Provincial Councils, 1 Study Group, and 24 Nationally Organized Societies. NCWC was incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1914.

NCWC policy is formulated by local or provincial council initiatives, by affiliate members, or through the work of conveners. Policy additions and changes are proposed, circulated, and voted on by the general membership. Council may only address existing policy when speaking to government, media, and the public. This Brief, comprising new policies and updates, is therefore the united voice of the federated membership of the National Council of Women of Canada.

There was an issue studied by members of the NCWC this year that did not result in the adoption of policy, namely, the removal of displays of sweets and candies from counter areas at check-out lanes. This issue, however, will likely be reintroduced as our members are very concerned about the prevailing increase in childhood obesity and the long-term health of our children, as well as preventing the down-stream high costs to our health care system.

NCWC is a federate of the International Council of Women (ICW), an international non-governmental organization (NGO) holding Consultative Status (Category I) with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). Founded in 1888, the International Council of Women is composed of National Councils in 74 countries, bringing together women of all nations, races, creeds, and cultural traditions.

Since 1997 NCWC has also been recognized as an NGO holding Consultative Status (General) with ECOSOC, which enables NCWC to bring a specifically Canadian perspective to the work of the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women. Since 2001, NCWC has had status as an Observer NGO with the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States.

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**2007:01 CONCERNING PROPOSED REFORM OF THE
CANADIAN SENATE**

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as policy that the Canadian Parliament continue to be made up of an elected House of Commons and an appointed Senate; and be it further

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to reject proposals for an elected Senate; and be it further

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to undertake a thorough review of the process of appointment to the Senate to include:

- a) continuing to support women by having women comprise 50% of the Senate within five (5) years**
- b) reviewing criteria for termination of service of Senators**
- c) considering the appropriate length of tenure for Senators**
- d) developing criteria for selection which reflect diversity and regional differences, with adequate representation of different sections of the population.**

Rationale: It was felt that the strength of the Canadian Senate has always been its ability to provide sober second thought about the substance of new legislation, and a longer term approach to issues, because of its relative immunity from the kind of political pressures which arise from the need to be re-elected.

In 2006 the Government of Canada proposed to introduce voting on preferred candidates for appointment to the Senate, which would be an attempt to make constitutional change without bringing in a constitutional amendment. The issue would then become who selects the candidates, which is exactly the problem that those considering Senate reform wish to overcome.

It was also felt that with an elected Senate, the Canadian Parliament would consist of two elected bodies, which could very well result in struggles for power between the two bodies and sometimes in stalemate.

Retaining an appointed Senate would not preclude a thorough review of the appointment process, including criteria for selection and length of tenure, the importance of regional representation and equal representation of women.

Please Note: Our NOS affiliate, the Salvation Army, abstained on the vote of this resolution, Resolution 1.

2007:02 REGULATION OF CANADIAN MINING COMPANIES OPERATING OUTSIDE CANADA

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as policy that mining companies registered in Canada be required to follow the same social and environmental standards in their operations outside Canada as are obligatory within Canada; and be it further

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to implement in full the recommendations of The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, as made in June 2005 in regard to the corporate social responsibility of Canadian mining companies operating outside Canada.

Rationale: Canada accounts for approximately 60% of the overall investment in mining activities world-wide, however, Canadian-registered companies engaged in mining developments outside Canada have no obligation to adhere to the laws or ethical standards which govern mining within Canada but can choose on a voluntary basis to follow the Voluntary Principles on Human Rights and Security.

Canadians expect that companies operating on Canadian soil will do so in a manner that respects both the environment and the rights of workers and their communities and we expect no less of Canadian companies in operations outside Canada.

Since a great proportion of the mining interests of Canadian companies operating outside Canada are located on lands of indigenous peoples causing dangerous contamination of their water and destruction of their land, these companies must adopt standards that respect laws protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. The legal immunity they have damages Canada's reputation abroad and denies the indigenous peoples access to our courts for redress or compensation.

Canada does not yet have laws to ensure that Canadian mining companies overseas conform with human rights standards and that these companies conduct their activities in a socially and environmentally responsible manner.

**2007:03 MIGRANT FARM WORKERS AND EMPLOYMENT
INSURANCE**

Resolved **that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as policy support for the exclusion of migrant farm workers in the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (CSAWP) from mandatory participation in the Employment Insurance (EI) program; and be it further**

Resolved **that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to exclude migrant farm workers in the CSAWP from mandatory participation in the EI program.**

Rationale: Canada is a signatory to the United Nations International Bill of Human Rights which states in Article 7: “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.”

Migrant workers in the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (CSAWP) are obliged to participate in the Employment Insurance (EI) program, even though only a small minority have been able to access any benefits from this program.

Further, the terms of their contract specify that when their work term is finished, they must return home, and EI benefits are not payable to laid off workers who are not resident in Canada.

2007:04 CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION (CMHC) LOW-COST MORTGAGE INSURANCE AND ACCUMULATED SURPLUS

- Resolved** that the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) adopt as policy that:
- a. low cost mortgage insurance remain available through a government-owned corporation; and**
 - b. if at any time the Government of Canada decides to make use of the Reserves in the Mortgage Insurance and Securitization division, this money be used for building affordable and specialty housing in a number of areas, including the following: assisted housing; social housing; co-op housing; First Nations on and off Reserves; rental accommodation; nursing and retirement homes; chattels such as mobile homes; and be it further**

- Resolved** that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to ensure that:
- a. low cost mortgage insurance continues to be available on an on-going basis for specialty housing in a number of areas, including the following: assisted housing; social housing; co-op housing; First Nations on and off Reserves; rental accommodation; nursing and retirement homes; chattels, such as mobile homes;**
 - b. in the event of reallocation of the surplus presently held in the Mortgage Insurance and Securitization division of CMHC, either by privatization of CMHC or by allocation to General Revenues, this surplus be used exclusively to fund affordable and specialty housing and that this money be in addition to the amount allocated on a regular basis for affordable housing programs; and**
 - c. CMHC not be privatized but remain as a government-owned Corporation.**

Rationale: The low cost mortgage insurance, presently provided by CMHC in a number of housing categories that are not served by private firms, is at risk now that the Government of Canada has moved to end the semi-monopoly by contracting out business to competition.

The Mortgage Insurance and Securitization division is sitting on reserves of at least \$5 billion which cannot, according to the CMHC Charter, be shared with other divisions of CMHC, but which might be re-allocated to General Revenue by special legislation, an eventuality which would provide no benefit to low cost and specialty housing in Canada, which is in short supply across Canada.

In the event of a partial or complete privatization of CMHC, the following would result:

- a) the availability of low cost mortgage insurance for specialty housing would be threatened, and
- b) the surplus in the Mortgage Insurance and Securitization division could be diverted into General Revenues.

The mandate for and scope of CMHC activities extends beyond mortgage insurance and securitization, to cover its Mission of enhancing the quality, affordability and choice of housing in Canada, and privatization is likely to put these activities at severe risk.

2007:05 IMPROVE LEGIBILITY OF LIST OF INGREDIENTS ON FOOD LABELS

Resolved **that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as policy that the list of ingredients in food labeling be easy to find and legible for all; and be it further**

Resolved **that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to require food manufacturers to make the ingredient list as easy to find and as legible as the nutrition labeling for food products.**

Rationale: Consumers state that the list of ingredients is the most important information on a food label. Consumers over age 50 consistently select larger print (**10 pt**) as the minimum size acceptable on consumer product labels. However, Canadian regulations state that each ingredient be listed in descending order of proportion by weight with a minimum type height of 1.6 mm (1/16 inch) i.e., **6 pt**. The Food and Drug regulations for mandatory nutrition labeling on pre-packaged food specify format elements which make it easy to find and legible.

**2007:06 INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY
MECHANISM FOR FEDERAL WOMEN'S PRISONS**

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as policy the establishment of an external, independent and autonomous mechanism of oversight for correctional institutions for federally sentenced women, with accountability to the Parliament of Canada; and be it further

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to establish an external, independent, autonomous mechanism of oversight for correctional institutions for federally sentenced women which has a capacity to order and enforce meaningful remedies and compensation and which is accountable to the Parliament of Canada.

Rationale: Women prisoners are being subjected to sexual harassment but are unable to properly address this due to lack of an effective complaint mechanism as confirmed at an October 2003 and an October 2006 Stakeholders Meeting with Correctional Service Canada and the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

Judicial oversight is more likely than administrative tribunal to provide a meaningful sanction and redress for rights violations in prison including an independent Canadian inspectorate of women's prisons.

In October 2006 the stakeholders' organization, of which the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) is a member, was unanimous in the proposal that an independent external accountability mechanism for federal women's prisons be put into place.

The United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), in reviewing Canada's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, called upon Canada to implement the recommendations of the Canadian Human Rights Commission (2003) and, in particular, to establish external redress and adjudication processes for prisoners (UNHRC 2005).

Please Note: Our NOS affiliate, the Salvation Army, abstained on the vote of this resolution, Resolution 6.

2007:07 PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as policy that the Government of Canada implement the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) by protecting children from violent video games; and be it further

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada, in cooperation with the provinces and territories, to implement the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) by:

- a) enacting legislation that will support the social and emotional development of Canadian children by providing and ensuring that policies and standards to control the rental and sale of violent video games in Canada are enforced;
- b) establishing commissions for further research and offering appropriate education programs;
- c) launching a concentrated adults and children media education and awareness campaign to parents across the country for the protection of young people under the age of 18 years from the use of realistically violent video games; and be it further

Resolved that the National Council of Women of Canada urge its Provincial and Local Councils of Women to urge their respective governments to launch a concentrated media education campaign for adults and children to make them aware of the dangers of violent video games and to provide appropriate educational programs in school systems.

Rationale: Canada ratified and is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which requires that the best interest of children, their well-being and healthy development, be a primary consideration in all government decisions that affect children.

The rights of protection, for example, the right to be protected from abuse and neglect is a category of right under this document and Article 17 recognizes "the important function performed by the mass media," and calls on those governments who have signed and ratified the Convention to encourage the media "to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child," and calls on governments to encourage the development of guidelines to protect children from harmful material.

Bullying and other violence among and by young people is increasing in intensity. The convergence of media platforms and availability of wireless and hand held communications technologies are challenging former protection strategies such as “watershed hours” and “putting the TV in a well-trafficked area of the home.”

The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), since its 1999 *Report on New Media*, has not regulated new media activities on the internet (including web sites and video games) under the Broadcasting Act.

2007:01UP WOMEN AND HIV/AIDS

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada adopt as policy that the needs of women with HIV and AIDS be fully addressed; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada reiterate to the Government of Canada the need for research, clinical trials and equal access for treatment for women with HIV/AIDS; and to provide education programs for the public and professionals to identify and support women with HIV/AIDS; and be it further

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to:

- a) provide anonymous HIV testing in all areas under its jurisdiction**
- b) continue promoting the equality of women so that abused women are not vulnerable to HIV infection from their partners; and**
- c) provide funding for targeted programs that address drug use and its risks which acknowledge sex trade as the ripple effect of addictions; and**
- d) be more proactive in the global efforts to provide Anti-Retroviral Treatment for AIDS; and**
- e) provide more effective prenatal care for aboriginal women, as they are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, so that their children are less likely to be born HIV+; and**
- e) strengthen the penalties for knowingly infecting a partner; and be it further**

RESOLVED that the National Council of Women of Canada request Provincial Councils of Women and, where appropriate, Local Councils of Women to urge their respective Provincial Governments to:

- a) provide anonymous HIV testing in all provinces; and
- b) provide funding for more treatment centres and training for more HIV specialists; and
- c) provide funding for needle exchange programs, detox centres and addiction centres; and
- d) provide more effective prenatal care for aboriginal women, as they are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, so that their children are less likely to be born HIV+.

Rationale: In 1992, the National Council of Women of Canada urged the Government of Canada to increase research into HIV/ AIDS in women, allow women access to clinical trials, and ensure that women have equal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS. In 1999 the National Council of Women of Canada urged the Government of Canada to increase funds for HIV/AIDS programs for women; develop educational programs for the public, physicians, healthcare workers and other professionals to identify and support women with HIV/AIDS.

The facts are 1): Women continue to be under-diagnosed and anonymous testing is not consistently offered in all provinces and territories.

2) Women continue to be unable to negotiate safer sex because of situations of domestic violence and gender inequality.

3) Medical care and treatment continues to be inaccessible and unaffordable for many women.

4) Many women become infected due to risky drug use practices combined with risky sexual behaviours.

5) Aboriginal Canadian women are disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS.