

# NEWSLETTER

## NCWC NEWS PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### Beijing + 10: A Decade of Progress?

Beijing + 10 has been both encouraging and also disheartening for women no matter where they live. Instead of being in a position to consolidate and build on a decade of action, apparently all that could be done at the 49th session of the United Nations' Commission for the Status of Women was to have a summing-up in a non-controversial Declaration. And shockingly, there was a serious attempt by one country to introduce an amendment in the proposed declaration with the sole purpose of curtailing women's Reproductive Rights world-wide. This is not what we imagined in 1995 in Beijing.

Ten years ago, when the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were developed, studied, and adopted, it represented the high point after years of steady evolution of commitment by the United Nations to agree on, and take action to improve conditions of life for women and the girl-child. It was an exhilarating moment in time for us. Did we realize that? Perhaps not in the sense that there would be little more progress possible for some years. But a quick look at events of the last decade has made it clear that although there has been some progress, the basic trend of events has not effected much improvement for women. And in some cases, conditions are worse than ever, with violence against women unchecked and rampant.

This has been the decade of success for Globalization with its structural adjustments and downsizing, its concentration on the bottom line, and above all, its growing gap in the living standards between the rich few and the poor multitude. Public programmes, social security net programmes, public ownership have all been under attack in Canada. Narrowly focussed market place priorities have been successful in dominating a lot of the public discussion on political action. This in turn, has meant that when negotiating trade treaties, there has not been much emphasis on ensuring that the terms of the treaties will actually enable impoverished citizens in developing countries to enjoy the promised increased prosperity. There has been even less action.

At the same time, there has been an increasing emphasis on public and private morality, or morals-driven legislation. There is justifiable concern that the increasing commercialization of the human image, especially of the female body, in advertising is debasing a



*Catharine Laidlaw-Sly*

commonly held sense of the individual's personal value, regardless of appearance or age. The proliferation of available pornography, particularly child pornography on the Internet, is just one aspect of this problem. Poor women and children are easily recruited for this so-called industry which thrives under the twin protections of right to free speech and right to privacy. However, this is the one area where the sense of public morality has had no success in producing effective legislation despite the widespread public concern.

Of course, for women, the right to make their own decisions on issues of appearance, education, employment, and reproduction are all areas where particular faith-driven (and faith-justified) legislation still exists. It is an amazing fact that all the faiths that are concerned about legislating human behaviour spend so much of their effort on female's lives and behaviour. This is a regrettable failure because it is predominately males who buy the sexual services of women and children, and who still prevent the girl-child from having an equal education and the adult female from exercising her right

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to hold public office or even vote. And it is males who still dominate government institutions world-wide although there are some countries where females are achieving better representation in elected bodies. (Canada is not a leader in this area).

Poverty, entrenched, growing and protected in our Globalized world is the chief factor that should be addressed by those looking to eliminate the sexual exploitation of women and children. In the last decade there has been little improvement. The fights over how women should behave, reproduce, and work still rage. And one cannot escape suspecting that it "pays" to have a supply of desperately poor female workers available, whom an employer can control in as many aspects of their lives as possible. Does this not sound like a sort of slavery?

There is an increasing awareness of the global reach that "trafficking" in women and children exerts. Hopefully, this awareness will result in concerted global action. One has to work to instill the necessary political will in our political leaders to address the poverty-driven causative factors that allow this trade in humans to flourish. It is not only the various branches of the sex trade that traffic in women and children. Trafficking in workers is a profitable sector; women are useful workers in a lot of industries like clothing manufacture or agriculture where low wages allow producers to market profitably to the more affluent customer. One also has to inspire in that consumer the necessary political will to demand clothing or food products that are produced under fair trade and International Labour Organization (ILO) compliant employment conditions. It is a small mark of progress that some mass marketing organizations now stock these products with an improving degree of visibility.

This public concern about morality, or ethical behaviour, has seen the spectacular and unscrupulous greed of some of the beneficiaries of Globalization punished. But while there has been a display of court cases and convictions with jail sentences for some of these business buccaneers, what has really been done to recover and restore some of the looted funds from employees' pension funds? Not much. And what legislation has resulted to prevent this "robbing of the workers" in the developed world?

At the same time that an employee has to worry about the fiscal soundness of an existing employees' pension plan, there is a drive to encourage employees to "take control of their future financial security". Doing this when one is subject to the effects of the bottom-line mentality that drives Globalization and the resulting structural adjustments is difficult to impossible. The growth in part-time and short-term contract employment has resulted in a new pink-collar work ghetto. This will not necessarily improve the financial security of the retired older female worker.

In the past decade, the workers' middle-class income status has been steadily eroded when measured against the earnings and worth of the wealthy. It has, in the space of a generation, become necessary for both parents to be in the paid work-force in order to support and educate their children. Women are particularly vulnerable to being caught in the part-time employment ghetto, because it gives them more time for their family responsibilities. But this is not progress because these women are once again more likely to be among the desperately poor in their old age. It is not progress to see that women in Canada on average earn only sixty-nine cents for each dollar earned by men. For a few years we were doing better than that!

On the whole, it is difficult to find much real progress. However, the awareness of women, their commitment, and their impatience have been well-served in this last decade. More women everywhere are less willing to endure the centuries-old abuse, deprivation and exploitation than ever before. The work of the United Nations, its agencies and organizations has made that important difference. The inclusion and encouragement of the work done by a literal myriad of Non-Governmental Organizations has made it more possible than ever for women to find a meaningful way to contribute to improving the conditions of life for all women, no matter where they live.

Some of the gains are real, others cosmetic. Women have made real gain as in the terms of the Treaty of Rome setting up the International Criminal Court. Finally, the use of violence, particularly sexual violence against women is among the listed War Crimes.

The use of a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women has been another positive development because there is now a comprehensive recorded account of the extent of abuse that women suffer world-wide. Among the more cosmetic gains is the lip service being paid to Gender Mainstreaming. It is worth noting that the Canadian Government felt obliged to claim that the most recent budget had been subjected to the necessary gender based analysis to render it equally fair to women and men in its recommended programmes. Time will tell whether the necessary analysis was done, but it is a slight gain that this aspect of budget-setting is now seen by male politicians, who still predominate, as necessary. And what is important is that it has come about as a result of the many representations made to our governments by women since the Beijing Conference.

On the whole therefore, although there is much to despair about, it still has to be acknowledged that without the impact made by the series of UN World Conferences on the Status of Women, without the consciousness-raising for millions of women that resulted from the conferences, and without the education of our politicians that followed, no progress would have been made at all, and none of us would have a global or local picture of what remains to be accomplished. So let us get on with the next decade. And whenever the next World Conference for Women is held, we can hope that some of the goals we set ourselves will be achieved. But let us never forget that real equality will not happen unless we are there, all of us, working together and creating an informed public consensus.

# Feminist Eye on Ottawa

## Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) Studies Gender Based Analysis

Over the past few weeks, the Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Women (PCSW) has been studying the federal government's use of gender based analysis (GBA). They have heard from a range of departments, including Finance, Justice, Social Development, Citizenship and Immigration and Health, to name a few. The Parliamentary Committee will be writing a report once they have heard from all relevant departments.

This study is extremely timely given that gender based analysis was at the heart of the federal government's 1995 plan on gender equality. It may be one of the first times that federal officials are appearing before Parliamentarians to speak to the efficacy of gender based analysis as a tool.

To read transcripts of the various meetings with federal departments, go to: [http://www.parl.gc.ca/committee/CommitteeList.aspx?Lang=1&PARLSES=381&JNT=0&SELID=e22\\_.2&STAC=1127616](http://www.parl.gc.ca/committee/CommitteeList.aspx?Lang=1&PARLSES=381&JNT=0&SELID=e22_.2&STAC=1127616)

Members of the CWE have been attending or tuning into the live broadcasts of these meetings. A few highlights:

- Since 1995, the federal government has established gender based units in a variety of departments on a pilot project basis. Of these, the unit contained within the department of Justice has since been dissolved. When testifying before the PCSW, the department of Justice said that it is now the responsibility of every person in the department to apply GBA.
- The Finance Department has no gender based analysis unit and relies on the submissions from other departments and civil society in order to assess the impact of its budgets on women and men.
- The gender based unit in the department of Citizenship and Immigration is one of the more successful GBA units. This is because the new Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act requires that the department report annually to Parliament on the gender impacts of the new bill.

When speaking before the PCSW, federal officials emphasized the degree to which this requirement has legitimated their own work. However, it must be noted that despite the GBA unit, the sponsorship requirements within the Act remains discriminatory against women. This raises the question about the degree to which GBA (in and of itself) can be an effective tool for women's equality, without the mobilization of women's movements and the presence of feminist women and men in Parliament.

## From Your Editor

*By Jeanne Maranda*

The year 2005 will be a year to remember! Firstly, because it is the year of the proclamation of the Women's World Charter for Humanity, a most unique document that has been prepared by the women of the world since the year 2000, when women marched to eradicate poverty and violence. There were meetings in cities from different countries where five demands were put together, inspired by the universal social values of equality, freedom, solidarity, justice and peace. It will travel around the world and will arrive in Quebec City May 7th, where women from the whole province will be awaiting the Charter arriving by boat from Europe. They will be invited to form a huge chain that will circle the Parliament buildings. This gesture of solidarity is meant to attract the attention of our ministers so they will pay attention to our demands.

Secondly, Montreal will be hostess in June to the National Council Annual General Meeting. It will be our pleasure to treat you "à la française". We are looking forward to the event. Furthermore, may I say that I am grateful to the members of Council who sent many articles for the newsletter making it an interesting document to read. Please keep up the good work.

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed by contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of the National Council of Women of Canada, its members or federates.

### Editor

Jeanne Maranda

### Editorial Consultants

Mary Potter

Cathy Tillsley

Marianne Wilkinson

### Publisher and Printer

Bonanza Printing and Copying Centre Inc.

Articles may be emailed to the Editor at [editor@ncwc.ca](mailto:editor@ncwc.ca)

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## Genetic Diversity Update

By *Gracia Janes, Environment Convener*

This past spring environmentally concerned Canadians and farmers were jubilant, when agri-business giant Monsanto bowed to broad-based, world-wide, pressures and withdrew its application to market Round-Up-Ready wheat. Hold the cheers! Monsanto is part of another agri-industry push towards seed control that, according to the National Farmers Union, "threatens genetic diversity and a healthy and stable food supply."

Under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Canadian Seed Trade Association and other industry groups, e.g. Monsanto, the Government of Canada is conducting a seed sector review. The National Farmers Union warns us that review recommendations may well force farmers to pay a royalty to corporations on farm-saved seeds. Rumour also hints at this royalty being tied to farmer eligibility for crop insurance.

For hundreds of years farmers have protected genetic resources, i.e. seed stock, from year to year, and up until the 1990s, as the Farmers Unions points out, this was "a public endeavour" with farmers able to "access new seed varieties at low cost." The work, conducted by universities, Agriculture Canada facilities and volunteers across Canada, "helped preserve thousands of genetically diverse seeds."

Drastic cuts to this important program over several years and a May /04 Supreme Court ruling that Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser had infringed Monsanto's patent on genetically engineered canola (its cells and genes, but not the whole plant - which can't be patented) are now combined to make a very unsteady base for the future of our seed diversity.

It also appears to mean a profitable time ahead for the agri-business sector as Elbert van Donkersgoed, P.Ag. (hon.) Research Director of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario noted recently in his May/04 web-column Cornerpost: "Granting a patent on plants indirectly through patents on cells and genes also covers the seed and its offspring for 20 years. This will result in a greater transfer of economic value from the business of farming to the biotechnology inventors that exists in other fields of invention."

In 1988 the National Council of Women of Canada urged the Government of Canada to become a signatory to the FAO Convention of the Universality of Plant Genetic Resources; prepare a White Paper on Plant Breeders Rights, and initiate a full national debate on the subject; and to reject any changes in the present patent laws which would lead to the ownership of living organism."

In June and December of 1992, Canada signed and ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity that came out of the Rio Earth Summit. This Convention's objectives are "the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources."

Canadians must be alert to the outcomes of the seed review, which may well show the world how hollow or not Canada's commitment is to the protection of its genetic diversity of seed resources for present and future farmers and the public. (\* NCWC Policy Update will follow in March.)

## Internet Safety Advocacy for Women and Children

By *Rashmi Bhat, MFA, NCWC Youth Convener*

I have been a trained International Internet Safety Advocate through Haltabuse.org since February of 2003. In my 2 years of online casework experience, with 6 to 10 open cases a month, I have discovered a whole new world of covert systemic violence that I had not previously known existed. The 2004 cyber-stalking statistics just released at the California-based volunteer driven organization, clearly show the continued online victimization of predominantly girls and women. These victims of online harassment that are accessing caseworkers are mostly single and Caucasian. The harassers are known to them 50% of the time, and the harassers are predominantly male. The harassment mostly starts via email and in 40% of cases escalates to offline physical threats. Canada ranked first in number of cases outside of USA, followed by England, Ireland, and Australia. India, my birth country, ranked sixth. Having recently solved a case of online intimidation in Ireland, I can personally attest to the global 'without borders' nature of cyber stalking. Political borders only serve to make the prevention of online abuse more difficult, make the accountability of Internet Service Providers in deleting abusive accounts less certain, and allow huge gaps in training provided to law enforcement officers to pursue online crimes. In youth under the age of 18, the statistics slide towards boys being targeted for Internet luring more than girls. However, we have seen cases of Internet luring in Ontario over the past 2 years in which girls have been approached in school yards by men they met in online chat rooms. As of 1993, Canada has some of the harshest and most broad-based child-pornography and internet luring laws in the world. Under the Criminal Code of Canada offenders who possess images of children under the age of 18 engaging in sexual activity, may now be sentenced up to five years in prison. However, the implementation of these laws has been staggeringly meager. The Toronto police have publicly

declared they want sentences for child pornography to have a minimum mandatory jail time. They would also like to collect DNA for a national databank of child sex offenders and raise the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16. In December of 2004, a 31-year-old man from Edmonton was sentenced to seven years in prison after pleading guilty to having sex with a 13-year-old autistic girl he met through an internet chat room. Last week, a Texas man Dale Eric Beckham, 31, was charged with luring a child under the age of 16 in Ottawa by computer, and abducting a child under the age of 16. However, the sexual activity between the 31-year-old man and the 14-year-old boy in the Texas man's hotel room in Ottawa can remain consensual under Canadian law. NCWC adopted as policy in 2002 to raise the age of consent to sexual activity to 16. In Texas the age of consent is 17. There is a growing trend of men from USA luring youth from Canada and meeting them in their hometowns in Canada.

While reading about cases that make the news, I think about the numerous cases of online harassment that do not make the news. Cyber-stalking is a growing trend. It is a term used for situations where an online incident escalates to a point where a victim fears for his or her life. Cyber-stalking is analogous to traditional forms of stalking - it incorporates persistent behaviours in the aggressor that instill apprehension and fear in the recipient. I believe cyber-stalking needs to be understood and prevented through a feminist gender analysis lens of questioning and equalizing the power differential between men and women. In my experience, it is not currently being seen as an issue of equality by governing bodies globally. There is a small but growing percentage of Internet violence being committed by women, mostly against ex-husbands and ex-partners. However, child pornography and Internet luring has been concentrated among males, and if female involvement exists, it is mostly secondary to her male spearheading partner-in-crime.

In my position as the Youth Convener for NCWC, I hope to better understand and report on the lack of equal opportunity and gender-based inequality as contributing factors to the contravention of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). We are currently running an online pilot survey on Equal Opportunity at [www.ncwc.ca](http://www.ncwc.ca). The survey will be closed on May 21, 2005.

## COUNCIL OF WOMEN AWARD NOMINEES

*By Mary Potter, NCWC Vice-President*

NCWC nominated Catharine Laidlaw-Sly for the UNIFEM Canada Award in February of this year. Unfortunately she did not win.

Gracia Janes has been nominated for the Thérèse Casgrain Award and we await the results of her nomination.

## Martha's Monthly March 2005

### Where is the word "Women" in Alberta's Policies??

(Martha is the name of a group of feminist activists who provide a feminist analysis of public policy decisions in Alberta. Based on the model of feminism for St. John's Status of Women Council, the group picks a policy each month, produces a well researched back grounder and includes a sample letter to send to Premier Klein. Premier Klein refers to ordinary Albertans as "the Marthas and the Henrys", hence the choice of name.)

Martha has been following the UN conference on the Advancement of Women called Beijing +10 that started Feb 28 and continued until March 11. This UN conference is reviewing the progress of the Beijing conference of 1995 and the promises made for women's equality. It got Martha thinking about how her own province has been doing on equality for women and particularly on the issue of violence against women. Well, Martha found out more than she bargained for when she went looking for some simple answers to how much her government spends on women's shelters. The Auditor General noted that in 2003-2004 the Ministry of Children's Services spent \$17 Million on "Prevention of Family Violence." Martha assumed that this is where funding for shelters falls, but this was not made clear. (Auditor General report (see page 88)) Interestingly, that amount of money is quite similar to the amount pledged by Alberta Lottery fund for "Racing Industry Renewal Initiative." This effort to "re-brand" horse racing got \$17,900,000 in the 2001-2002 fiscal year. (see page 91 of the Gaming Annual Report)

There seems to be a little "re-branding" going on in the Government of Alberta as well. Our government has re-branded women's issues and violence against women into concern for children. We have no Ministry for the Status of Women, as there is in most provinces. If you dig, you can find "women's issues" under Alberta Community Development but don't get too excited; "women's issues" stop at the Person's Day Scholarships. Martha went digging deeper and found the Finding Solutions Together report from the Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying (held in May 2004). The word "Women" is all but eradicated from the entire Family Violence report. In fact, the word "women" appears only four times in that 28-page report.

Why is gender obscured as a basis for analysis in the Government of Alberta document? What happens when a government stops recognizing women as victims of domestic assault and just sees "Children and Families" as the victims? When we overlook the gender of more than 85% of the victims of assault then we overlook many important needs. In Alberta it has meant that our government has offered woefully poor resources to women's shelters, transition homes for women, and financial resources available to women leaving abusive relationships.

## Notes from CPFQ-PCWQ

By Elizabeth Hutchinson, President CPFQ-PCWQ

### Government matters

In the late fall of 2004 the Québec Conseil du statut de la femme (CSF) published a document entitled '**Vers un nouveau contrat social pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes - For a New Social Contract of Equality between Women and Men**'. This was in response to a request from the then minister responsible for the status of women and the CSF was asking for opinions and reactions from interested groups and individuals before it was discussed by a parliamentary commission in January 2005. We were invited to send in written submissions or to participate in a consultation on line by answering a questionnaire on the minister's web site before December 17<sup>th</sup>. The important point for us was that the CSF actually provided a summary version in English! I received the full report and synthèse en français as well as the English summary in the mail, and they were all available on the government web site at [www.mrci.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.mrci.gouv.qc.ca) as was the consultation questionnaire. Since our existence had been acknowledged by the provision of material in English, including an English version of the questionnaire, we felt that it was most important to make our voices heard. This information was sent to all members of CPFQ-PCWQ who have email with a suggestion that they participate in the consultation and several people filled in the questionnaire, either in French or in English.

The next stage of the consultation took the form of a Commission parlementaire which began on January 25<sup>th</sup> in Québec City. Full details including a list of those appearing as well as texts of their briefs were to be found on the National Assembly website (<http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fra/37legislature1/commissions/cas/index.shtml>). I was interested to see what, if anything, was reported in the English media but was only able to find one article in the Montreal Gazette. This reported the contribution of Mme Justice Claire l'Heureux-Dubé who defended the CSF and opposed some men's groups who had complained that the courts were prejudiced against them. The NetFemmes (francophone) list carried considerable discussion as did the French press.

The most recent government document to arrive was a 'Plan d'action gouvernemental 2004-2009 en matière de **violence conjugale**', which was also to be found on the web site [www.mrci.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.mrci.gouv.qc.ca). This is a topic which is of great concern to all of us and members were encouraged to pay attention to what our government is proposing to do. It would again be interesting to follow how it is reported in the English media but I have so far seen no reference to it.

## !?!?! DID YOU KNOW !?!?!?

By Elizabeth Hutchinson, President CPFQ-PCWQ

- If you are mailing letters/parcels to destinations outside Canada and the total postage is more than \$5, you do not have to pay GST and PST. However you must bring the letters, etc., to the post office and buy & put the stamps on the letters there in the post office.
- If you are mailing letters/parcels to destinations outside Quebec and the total postage is more than \$5, you do not have to pay PST. Likewise, you must buy & put the stamps on the letters there in the post office.

This information comes from the CPFQ-PCWQ Newsletter and applies to residents in Quebec. It might be worth asking questions in other provinces.

## The end for GM crops: Final British trial confirms threat to wildlife

By Steve Connor, Michael McCarthy and Colin Brown  
22 March 2005

Yet another nail was hammered into the coffin of the GM food industry in Britain yesterday when the final trial of a four-year series of experiments found, once more, that genetically modified crops can be harmful to wildlife.

The study was the fourth in a series that has, in effect, sealed the fate of GM in the UK - at least in the foreseeable future. They showed the ultra-powerful weedkillers that the crops are engineered to tolerate, would bring about further damage to a countryside already devastated by intensive farming.

Only one of the four farm-scale trials, which have gone on for nearly five years, showed that growing GM crops might be less harmful to birds, flowers and insects than the non-GM equivalent - and even that was attacked as flawed, because the weedkiller the particular conventional crop required was so destructive it was about to be banned by the EU.

Even so, a year ago the Government gave a licence for that crop - a maize known as Chardon LL, created by the German chemical group Bayer - to be grown in Britain, thus officially opening the way for the GM era in Britain, to loud protests from environmentalists.

However, only three weeks later Bayer withdrew its application, suggesting the regulatory climate would be too inhibiting. That followed the withdrawal from Europe of the world leader in GM crops, the American biotech giant Monsanto, which also seemed to have tired of the struggle.

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Since then, the GM industry in Britain has withered on the vine, despite the fact that some members of the Government, and Tony Blair in particular, were privately great supporters of it from the outset. Official policy is portrayed as being neutral and based simply on scientific advice.

But yesterday's results make it even less likely that other big agribusiness firms will want to come forward and go through the extensive testing process - and public opposition - that bringing a GM crop to market in Britain would involve.

The Conservatives spotted a political opportunity from the latest test results and the shadow Environment Secretary, Tim Yeo, will pledge to prevent any commercial planting of GM crops until science shows it would be safe for people and the environment, and there is a liability regime in place to deal with any cross-contamination.

The fourth and final mass experiment involving GM crops has found that they caused significant harm to wild flowers, butterflies, bees and probably songbirds. Results of the farm-scale trial of winter-sown oilseed rape raised further doubts about whether GM crops can ever be grown in Britain without causing further damage to the nation's wildlife.

Although the experiment did not look directly at the catastrophic demise of farmland birds over the past 50 years, ornithologists said the results suggested that growing GM oilseed rape would almost certainly exacerbate the problem.

David Gibbons, the head of conservation at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, said the herbicides used to spray GM rape killed broad-leaved wild flowers such as chickweed and fat hen, which are important to the diet of songbirds such as skylarks, tree sparrows and bullfinches.

"For most farmland birds, broad-leaved weeds are a particularly important part of their diet. There are a few birds that will take grass seeds but, by and large, it would be hard to see how the loss of broad-leaved weeds would be beneficial to them," Dr Gibbons said. "Broad-leaved weeds are particularly important to farmland birds and the widespread cultivation of this crop, in this way, would damage hopes of reversing their decline."

The trial of winter oilseed rape involved planting conventional and GM forms of the crop in adjacent plots at 65 sites across Britain. Scientists then carefully monitored wild flowers, grasses, seeds, bees, butterflies and other invertebrates. Over the course of the three-year experiment, the scientists counted a million weeds, two million insects and made 7,000 field trips. Although they found similar overall numbers of weeds in the two types of crop, broad-leaved weeds such as chickweed were far fewer in the GM plots. The scientists counted fewer bees and butterflies in the GM plots compared to plots of conventional oilseed rape.

Les Firbank, of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Lancaster, who led the study, said that there was about one-

third fewer seeds from broad-leaved flowers in the GM plots compared to fields with conventional oilseed rape.

"These differences were still present two years after the crop had been sown ... So we've got a significant biological difference that is carrying on from season to season," he said. GM oilseed rape is genetically designed to be resistant to a weedkiller that would kill the non-GM crop. It means that farmers are free to use broader-spectrum herbicides. The three previous farm-scale trials into crops investigated spring-sown oilseed rape, maize and beet. These showed that growing GM rape and GM beet did more harm to wildlife than their conventional counterparts. "All of the evidence that we've got from the farm-scale evaluations points out that differences between the treatments are due to the herbicides. It's the nature of the chemicals and the timing at which the farming is done," Dr Firbank said. Christopher Pollock, chairman of the scientific steering committee that oversaw the farm-scale trials, said: "What's good for the farmer is not always good for the natural populations of weeds, insects, birds and butterflies that share that space."

Farm-scale trials of GM crops are unique to Britain and represent the first time that scientists have evaluated the environmental impact of a new farming practice before it has been introduced, Professor Pollock said. Results of the latest trial are published in Proceedings of the Royal Society B.

## Women's World March Charter 2005

*By Jeanne Maranda*

According to plan, the Women's World March Charter has left Sao Paulo, Brazil on International Women's Day and will travel through 53 countries before its final destination in Burkina Faso on October 17, 2005. The contents of the Charter were put together after much consultation by 6000 women from 163 countries around the world. It is expected in Quebec City on May 7 and will proceed to Turkey and Greece.

In Montreal, on March 8, in unison with the launching of the Charter in Brazil, 300 women accepted the invitation of la Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ) and met in Emilie-Gamelin plaza. The president declared that since the World March in 2000, women have made their demands into a new vision of the world. She reminded the crowd that the demands in the Charter are worded under five major themes: equality, freedom, solidarity, justice and peace. Here in Quebec, she added, the women will continue to fight for labour laws, immigrant women issues and violence against women.

In Sao Paulo, on International Women's Day, women and men paraded in the streets, dancing and singing. "We, women, wish for a better and just world for our children to grow up without fear and in peace". It is the wish of all women of the world.

## Turning Promises into Progress

By Carolyn Tateishi, FAFIA/AFAI

### Statement of the Linkage Caucus From the 49th Session of the CSW March 11, 2005

Thousands of advocates for women's rights from all over the world who gathered at the United Nations in March successfully gained full and unequivocal reaffirmation of the Beijing Platform for Action in a Political Declaration adopted March 4th. Women came in record numbers to the ten-year review of the Platform at the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Government ministers from more than eighty countries spoke, reflecting the global importance of gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition to the focus on the inter-governmental process, thousands of women gathered in several hundred NGO side events to share successful practices, analyze gains and losses during the decade, and strategize the way forward. The life and vitality of how women are working to implement the Beijing Platform at all levels "local to global" was best reflected in these events. The diversity of women represented women from every region of the world, and young women, in particular also demonstrated the strength of the global women's movement. Working together, governments and women's rights advocates rallied to defend the human rights of women and to reaffirm the Beijing Platform despite opposition from the United States. The U.S. government initially refused to unequivocally reaffirm the Platform by offering an amendment that not only threatened consensus but also represented an attack on women's human rights. The US stood alone as every other government refused to bend to intense pressure from the U.S. In addition, 10 resolutions adopted at the CSW covered the following topics: Gender Mainstreaming, HIV/AIDS, Women in Afghanistan, Women in Palestine, Indigenous Women, Women and Natural Disasters, International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), Economic Advancement of Women, Trafficking, and a proposal to consider appointing a Special Rapporteur on Laws that Discriminate Against Women in 2006. Many of these cover areas of great concern to women that are often addressed by the CSW. The resolutions on Indigenous Women and on Women and Natural Disasters, however, are new and represent important gains based on organizing done at this review. The Economic Advancement and Trafficking resolutions, while covering important issues, were introduced and used by the US to continue to try to impose their narrow perspectives and to undermine aspects of the Beijing Platform. Because many governments rejected parts of the US approach, the trafficking resolution eventually passed in an altered form and the Economic Advancement resolution was adopted with several good amendments that the US opposed.

The Political Declaration establishes a strong link between the Platform and the Millennium Declaration,

the subject of a five-year UN review in September 2005. Throughout the CSW, governments recognized that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the time bound targets for eradicating poverty and implementing the Millennium Declaration, cannot be achieved without advancing the human rights and empowerment of all women in all their diversity.

The UN Secretary General, in his statement at the CSW, highlighted the seven strategic priorities proposed in the MDG Task Force Three on Gender Equality, and affirmed the critical importance of taking focused action on:

- Expanding efforts to combat violence against girls and women
- Guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Guaranteeing women's and girls' property, land and inheritance rights
- Eliminating gender inequality in employment, such as eliminating the earnings gap
- Increasing the number of women in national and local governments
- Investing in the infrastructure necessary to reduce women's and girls' time burdens, so that, for example, the amount of time women spend on gathering fuel, water, and other basic necessities is drastically reduced
- Expanding girls' access to education, secondary as well as primary

These are a good start that all governments should be urged to support along with the Beijing Platform as critical to the Millennium Summit. However, paper commitments alone are not enough; sufficient resources must be made available to achieve these goals in a timely manner. The Millennium review summit in September presents an important forum for governments to advance women's rights and gender equality. The forward momentum of women's equality must also be carried into the World Summit on an Information Society (WSIS) II in 2005. Furthermore, proposals to reform the UN must reflect gender perspectives, and action taken on UN reform must include women as decision-makers. The UN, in its institutional structure, must reflect a greater commitment to gender equality. Therefore, it is critical to increase funding for and status of the women-specific units of the UN, including the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues (OSAGI), the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), and the CEDAW treaty monitoring committee.

The purpose of a stronger UN is to promote peace, security, human rights, and sustainable development, issues of critical importance to women as well as men. None of these goals can be achieved without women's equality. In addition to the Beijing Platform, other documents and their interpretations, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and all human rights treaties as well as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, provide guidance on how to address the linkages between gender equality, development, human rights and peace. We call on governments and the UN to include civil society representatives, especially women's organizations as equal participants in the UN reform process and the Millennium Summit. Furthermore, we call on governments to demonstrate political will immediately by taking concrete actions to implement the Beijing Platform and reporting their progress on these actions at the Millennium Summit in September. No more empty promises: the time for action is now!

## DRILLING IN THE ARTIC !!!!

*By Tim Gray, Director, Boreal Programs  
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society*

On March 17th, the U.S. Senate opened the door to drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) by a margin of one vote. Should this first step lead to the opening up of this magnificent wild stretch of coastline along the Arctic Sea to oil and gas development, we stand to lose one of our richest and most remarkable natural phenomena – the annual migration of the 120,000 animal Porcupine Caribou Herd between Alaska and Yukon.

Like our colleagues at the Ontario Clean Air Alliance, we believe that pushing into the last wild corners of the planet in search of fossil fuels is not the path to a sustainable energy future. We share their belief that we should instead be working on strategies to dramatically reduce our dependence on fossil fuels by increasing energy efficiency and conservation and fully developing sources of clean, renewable power. It is estimated that the oil that could be extracted from the ANWR area would be used up in just six months at current rates of U.S. consumption. Is this worth destroying an ecosystem that has evolved over 27,000 years?

As a Canadian, you have a say in this issue. In 1987, the Canadian and U.S. governments signed an agreement to protect the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou herd. Canada has lived up to its side of the agreement with the establishment of Ivvavik and Vuntut National Parks in Yukon. Now it is time for our government to call on our American friends to respect this agreement and permanently protect the critically important ANWR calving grounds. You can send a letter to Prime Minister Paul Martin right now from our website at [www.cpaws.org/borealaction](http://www.cpaws.org/borealaction).

Thank you for speaking out for a brighter energy future!



The Kyoto Protocol, ratified by Canada in December 2002 came into force on February 16. This is good news for the planet, as 141 countries around the world (with the exception of the United States - the largest single polluter) have pledged to work together to reduce emissions of greenhouse gasses.

But Canada has yet to put forward an effective, coherent plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

If emissions continue as usual, they will rise to 810 million tonnes per year by 2010 - 30% above our legally binding Kyoto target of 570 Mt, leaving a 240 million tonne/yr gap. The government has called on individual citizens to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions by one tonne per year - 20% of the average individual emissions.

But the largest polluters haven't been asked to do their part. So far, the government has relied mainly on voluntary measures that have been largely ignored by big business. Half of greenhouse gas emissions are from large industrial polluters, but the government is reportedly reducing their reduction target from 55 to 45 million tonnes per year - about 10 % of expected industrial emissions. The government may also back off on its commitment to improve the fuel efficiency of new vehicles by 25 percent by 2010.

That is why we, as Canadians, have to ask our elected officials to take The 240 Million Tonne Challenge.

Visit the Greenpeace Canada website to send a free fax to your Member of Parliament, asking them to support the 240 Million Tonne Challenge.

## Eye on Ottawa

### Post Budget Analysis

#### Smoke and Mirrors Hide the Martin/Harper Budget

This budget is a surprising disappointment for those who believed Paul Martin in the last election and voted Liberal to get progressive policies and stop the Conservatives. The budget delivered Conservative priorities.

#### REWIND:

"To those who would vote NDP, yes we have our differences, but we share many of the same goals and our visions fall within the same frame." Paul Martin begging for the support of progressive voters in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. 27 June 2004.

#### FASTFORWARD:

"In fact, I'm a lot happier than I thought I'd be. The major priorities in this budget are Conservative priorities." - Conservative Leader Stephen Harper on Paul Martin's first budget since the 2004 election. 23 February 2005

Below is a brief analysis of key issue areas that makes the point that this is truly a Martin/Harper budget.

#### POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Progressive voters wanted:

- Relief for tuition fees, which have doubled on average in the last 11 years, with a plan to reduce fees by 10 per cent and then freeze them.
- A national grants program.

The Martin/Harper budget delivered:

- Nothing. No measures to deal with the rising tuition fees or students with massive debts.

#### ENVIRONMENT

Progressive voters wanted:

- A plan and appropriate funding to clean the air and meet Canada's international commitment at Kyoto to reduce climate changing gases by 240 mega-tonnes by 2012.

The Martin/Harper budget delivered:

- A broken promise to present a plan to meet Canada's Kyoto commitment

- An inadequate allocation of funds to meet our Kyoto commitments
- Status quo for federal government subsidies for unsustainable energy production
- No support for consumers to buy green cars.
- Inadequate support for development of new renewable energy.

#### CITIES

Progressive voters wanted:

- Measures to reduce smog in big cities by getting commuters out of cars and onto affordable, modern public transit.
- Fewer boil water alerts and stopping untreated waste going into our rivers and oceans through a permanent national infrastructure program.
- Taking the burden off municipal tax bills by immediately dedicating half of the federal gas tax to municipalities for green transportation infrastructure.

The Martin/Harper budget delivered:

- Less than one-third of the promised 5 cents a litre federal gas tax (only \$600 million to cities in 2005) with no plan to meet the 5 cents a litre promise until 2009-10.
- No tax-exemption for workers using public transit.
- A renewal for this year of the shared infrastructure programs, with no long-term strategy.

#### CHILD CARE

Progressive voters wanted:

- Long-term funding to create an additional 200,000 high quality, affordable, not-for-profit child care spaces within four years.
- Funds to the smaller provinces to help with quality early learning child care programs in rural, remote and northern communities in every region of Canada within a decade.

The Martin/Harper budget delivered:

- \$700 million in an unaccountable child care trust fund in 2005-06
- No plan to prevent for-profit child care providers coming in to Canada and setting up "big box" style

child care centres with public funds. This threatens quality and leaves parents with less real choices.

- Inadequate money for smaller provinces to build their own quality child care infrastructure.

## FOREIGN AID

Progressive voters wanted:

- A serious effort to reach the Federal Government's international commitment of 0.7% of Gross Domestic Product going to foreign aid
- to help stop the 50,000 deaths that occur around the world daily due to preventable disease and poverty.

The Martin/Harper budget delivered:

- A small increase to the foreign aid budget, that may reach 0.4% of GDP by 2010, but no timeline to get anywhere near 0.7% or the levels that the Brian Mulroney Conservatives spent on foreign aid.
- A lot of talk about helping the poorest countries in the world with their debts, but not in the form of debt cancellation.
- Instead the Liberals are giving millions to the World Bank to suspend developing countries' debt service payments for only 5 years.

## HOUSING

Progressive voters wanted:

- to re-start a 10-year national housing program to build 200,000 affordable and co-op housing units (including homes for seniors, people with disabilities and students) and a commitment to renovate 100,000 existing units, and provide rent supplements to 40,000 low-income tenants.

The Martin/Harper budget delivered:

- Nothing. No affordable housing plan.

## TAXATION

Progressive voters wanted:

- No more corporate tax reductions, recognizing that Canadian corporate taxes are 11% below US corporate tax levels.
- An increase in the Child Tax Benefit to \$4,900 per child and altering the program to permit Canada's poorest families, who don't pay tax, to qualify.
- Remove the GST from family essentials, starting with children's clothing and medicine, school supplies, books, magazines, women's hygiene products, and medical equipment.

- Cancel all tax treaties with tax havens like Barbados, so Canadian corporations can't establish shell companies and then bring profits home tax-free.

The Martin/Harper budget delivered:

- Corporate tax cuts worth \$4.6 billion.
- An increase in RRSP contribution limits that exclusively help those with a salary of over \$122,000.

Open Letter to the  
Honourable Anne McLellan, Deputy Prime Minister  
Prepared by: National Association of Women and the Law

Dear Anne McLellan:

On the occasion of International Women's Day, we are writing to urge you to immediately facilitate the establishment of a \$10 million fund for research and education related to violence against Aboriginal women. As Minister for Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we are certain that you can appreciate the importance of affirming the value of the lives of the some 500 Aboriginal women who have been disappeared/murdered over the past three decades.

For almost a year now, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has led the campaign to establish the Sisters in Spirit Fund. While there has been some indication of support from the federal government and Parliamentarians, nonetheless, funds have not been forthcoming despite promises to the contrary.

The systemic killing of indigenous women in Canada, particularly those who are young and impoverished, has been well-documented by a recent Amnesty International report. With this knowledge, it is now the responsibility of the federal government to honour their commitment to Aboriginal women's organizations who are working to end the violence through the Sisters in Spirit campaign.

As allied women's/human rights organizations, we are respectfully asking that you, in your capacity as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, assume the federal government's responsibilities towards the Native Women's Association of Canada with respect to the requested \$10 million so that they can:

- ✓ conduct research to document the number of and circumstances around Aboriginal women missing or killed in Canada;
- ✓ do public education work regarding the underlying causes of violence against Aboriginal women;
- ✓ offer educational workshops on missing women and their families; and
- ✓ establish a hotline and registry to report disappearances and register statistics

We look forward to your quick action regarding this matter so the security and safety of all Aboriginal women in Canada can be realized.

Sincerely,

Andrée Côté  
Director of Legislation and Law Reform  
National Association of Women and the Law

Cc: The Right Hon. Paul Martin, Prime Minister of Canada  
The Hon. Ralph Goodale, Minister of Finance  
The Hon. Andy Scott, Minister of Northern and Indian Affairs  
The Hon. Liza Frulla, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women



## BITS & BYTES

By Mary Scott

We have all heard the expression "the digital divide". What does it mean and is there a gender digital divide? As we review the literature and research on this topic, we can see that yes there is a major

difference in the access to the internet, depending on where you live, and if you are male or female.

We can also agree, I think, that men and women use the internet differently. Guys are into making things work, the technology to have the biggest, fastest, coolest computer. Gals are wanting to send messages to friends, to stay connected. Recently, my grand daughter, age 11, was playing her new game called the Sim's family. It was all about building families, relationships and communities - quite amazing actually. Her brother, age 13, said "What's the point of the game." He just didn't get it and it was certainly different than the types of violent video games boys play.

We know that more than 80% of people in the world have never even heard a dial tone, let alone surfed the Web. And the gap between the information haves and have-nots is widening. First the figures. The statistics on the basic building block of connectedness - that is, phone lines - are stark. According to the latest UN Human Development Report, industrialised countries, with only 15% of the world's population, are home to 88% of all Internet users. Less than 1% of people in South Asia are online even though it is home to one-fifth of the world's population.

The situation is even worse in Africa. With 739 million people, there are only 14 million phone lines. That's fewer than in Manhattan or Tokyo. Eighty percent of those lines are in only six countries. There are only 1 million Internet users on the entire continent compared with 10.5 million in the UK. Even if telecommunications systems were in place, most of the world's poor would still be excluded from the information revolution because of illiteracy and a lack of basic computer skills.

One of the key elements of the concern over the digital divide is the recognition that women within developing countries are in the deepest part of this divide, further removed from the information age than the men whose poverty they share. In China, for example, women Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) users comprise a mere 7% of users (UNIFEM, May 2001).

There is an increasing consensus among the international development community that this gender gap is a major source of gender inequality and one of the major obstacles to mainstreaming a gender perspective in development. Despite this basic agreement on the existence of the gender digital divide, there is a wide divergence of perspectives on the causes and manifestations of and the solutions to this divide. Amongst

gender and communication activists and organisations in both the North and South, approaches to the divide range from the Marxist perspective, which sees technology as an expression of male power and capitalist domination, to a postmodern approach in which both technology and gender are cultural processes subject to negotiation, contestation and, ultimately, transformation. Multi-lateral and bi-lateral agencies and governments have tended to focus on women's exclusion from technology with increased access and further equal opportunity policies as appropriate solutions.

Women's access to and control of ICTs has featured most prominently in both the theory and practice on the gender digital divide. Women's access to and control of ICTs is dependent on factors such as gender discrimination in jobs and education, social class, illiteracy and geographic location - factors that mean that the great majority of the world's women have no access to ICTs. Despite the emphasis of policy makers on getting women connected, many civil society actors have argued that the issues of access and control are more complex than just connectivity. Policy makers tend to think that by bringing connectivity to a country, its benefits will reach everybody without further intervention. Yet the practical and daily constraints to women's access to and control over new ICTs are well known. The high cost of computers and connectivity keep them far outside the reach of most women. ICT infrastructure is largely urban-centred. Internet content is overwhelmingly in English. And we know that women's lives are very full, just to survive - who has time to sit in front of a computer?

While there is a great deal of effort and investment for expanding access to ICTs for women by multi-lateral and government agencies, there is far less attention being paid to the extent to which gender concerns are shaping the regulatory and policy environments that will ultimately determine the utility and relevance of these technologies. Whether at global or national levels, women are under-represented in all ICT decision-making structures including policy and regulatory institutions, ministries responsible for ICTs, and senior management of private ICT companies.

The main problem is that decision-making in ICTs is generally treated as a purely technical area where civil society viewpoints are given little or no space, rather than as a political domain. Most ICT policy currently rests on the assumption that women must adapt to technologies, rather than have ICT policy adapted to meet the interests of a diverse range of women.

Want to read more? Check out the following:

Report - Bridging the Gender Digital Divide UNIFEM and UNDP, 2004  
(<http://tinyurl.com/5grxv>)

The Digital Divide Network -  
(<http://www.digitaldivide.net/>)

The WSIS Gender Caucus - World Summit on the Information Society  
(<http://www.genderwsis.org/>)

## Making a difference: YWCA's Women of Excellence Award Winner Margaret MacGee says she is motivated by the sense of making a difference in Society.



Issues keep coming  
London Free  
Press, April 11,  
2005

Honouree :  
Margaret MacGee  
Category:  
Community  
volunteerism and  
humanity

Accomplishments - 25 years of advocacy, including chairperson of the London, Ontario and National Block Parent programs; member of the federal task force on federally sentenced women and director of the John Howard Society; director of several assisted and non-profit housing bodies; past president of the London Council of Women, the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario and the National Council of Women of Canada and member of the International Council of Women.

### Question: What motivates you?

*"You like to think that maybe somehow you're making a difference for society and that you're helping to correct wrongs."*

### Do you have any creative outlets that either you do yourself or you like to attend?

*"I used to sing all the time. I was a church soloist and sang in a choir. I'm not doing that now, but that filled a part of my life because it was a few hours when I was completely out of everything else that I was doing. I like to knit and we have a summer property that we go to."*

### What women do you admire?

*I didn't have a woman that I really wanted to model myself on. Now, I had lots of women who really were very supportive and who I learned a great deal from. One was Lottie Brown of the National Council of Women of Canada. She taught me quite a bit. And I always was an admirer of Jane Bigelow because I thought she called it as it was."*

### What has been the high point and low point of your life?

*"The three years I served as the President of the National Council of Women of Canada were the most fulfilling years." The low point was in 1983 during the first National Block Parent meeting which Margaret had worked on for years to organise. When it came time to sign the declaration for the first National Block Parent Week, the Quebec delegate refused. "I think that was the most horrifying moment I had. I knew I had to have their signature or what was the purpose of having the whole meeting? And they did. They relented overnight and signed it the next day."*

### What do you still want to achieve?

*"The poverty of older women is a really serious problem in Canada and we (the NCWC) did a project called Securing Our Future in which we have a chance to make young women of today see that...they have to make the decisions to start saving money...and of course, I'm still trying to get equality for Federally Sentenced Women (who don't have access to the same programs and placements as male inmates). I hope we can do something with that. Then there's all the issues that come along. The London Council of Women have just taken up another cause and that's insulin pumps, which are not covered by OHIP."*

### How do you try to achieve a balance between your work (volunteer or paid) and your personal life?

*"I suppose I let my volunteer stuff take over. I would admit that. But as I'm slowing down, I am addressing more of the personal side."*

### What was the last movie you saw?

*The Miss Marple TV movie series.*

## ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

By Elizabeth Fleming

Few Manitobans have had such a painful struggle to gain access to government information as Mimi Raglan. Ms Raglan told her family's story to Kerri Irvin-Ross, the government backbencher who conducted a public hearing as part of the Manitoba government's review of its Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) last May.

Ms Raglan's mother was admitted to hospital. Concerned about their mother's medical care, family members asked staff on several occasions for her health-care record but were refused access. All staff had to do was to tell them to ask their mother's permission – something, they say, she would gladly have given. Their mother died after 18 days. The family was then allowed to see the health-care record.

Alarmed at what they considered to be the inappropriate care of their mother, the family initiated a complaint through Manitoba Health's internal investigation agency, Protection for Persons in Care. They received a summary of the investigation but were told to apply formally under FIPPA for the full report. That was three years ago. Ms Raglan has had to contend with numerous delays because of frequent barriers put up by Manitoba Health and the vast backlog of complaints in the ombudsman's office. She persisted throughout. The ombudsman's report arrived in January followed by about 90 per cent of the investigation report from Manitoba Health. Ms Raglan is now seeking a meeting with the minister of health.

### Barriers

Ms Raglan recommends amending the FIPPA so as to reduce the barriers; imposing a fine up to \$50,000 for wrongfully refusing information – the same as the penalty for wrongfully revealing information; equipping the ombudsman with the resources to eliminate time extensions on files; and ensuring that the privacy restrictions do not apply to public servants in the performance of their professional duties.

The Manitoba Access to Information Network (MATIN) includes the Manitoba Library Association, Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba, Manitoba Eco-Network and the Manitoba branches of Consumers' Association and Canadian Taxpayers Federation. MATIN notes that in this day and age there are no technical barriers to instant and routine access to information. MATIN recommends giving the access and privacy duties of the ombudsman to an information commissioner who would have the power to order the release of information which the commissioner deems is not specifically exempted in the act.

One area much in need of development is the training of public servants in general and FIPPA officers and co-ordinators in particular. Some have the support of their head of department to do a great job in assisting the public. For example, the co-ordinator for one department asked regular applicants to contact him informally first. He knew the FIPPA and his department well enough to find the information and avoid mountains of paperwork. There would still be the option of a formal request if he were unable to deliver but the informal route is quicker and more satisfactory all round.

Other administrators, like the one who was asked for Manitoba's statistics on conviction rates on domestic violence charges, are quick to ask for a formal FIPPA request. Yet the same question to the attorney general's assistant yielded a prompt referral which led to the necessary data. The minister of finance's office was not so helpful. A report on ministerial responsibility for Crown corporations is staying firmly locked in his office even though a second opinion by one knowledgeable reader says it does not fall under any mandatory exemption in FIPPA.

Staff may be unaware that requested information is already publicly available. One official gave partial access to a researcher's request. He withheld the pro forma (performance projection) for the Royalwood joint venture housing agreement not knowing that the minister had tabled it in the legislature and it was already sitting, neatly catalogued, on a shelf in the legislative reading room.

### Information

A frustrated Canadian university professor once noted that Manitoba Lotteries Corporation was so averse to providing financial information that it was easier to conduct gambling research using United States data.

Access to information is essential in a democracy. How else can the public hold its elected representatives accountable? How else can opposition parties, researchers, the media do their jobs? It is also in governments' interests to be open in order to avoid the inevitable whiffs of scandal and nasty surprises which arise when those in government believe that no one is looking. The public depends on opposition critics to ensure that timely access to information is maintained throughout and that the ombudsman's office is performing well.

On his recent retirement, Manitoba ombudsman, Barry Tuckett, was highly critical of the government for wasting time and taxpayers' money to fight his advice with lawyers instead of just admitting its mistakes. He urged the government to make a written commitment to abide by the ombudsman's advice.

Former Premier Gary Filmon once stated his government's firm commitment to access to information in a memo to all deputy ministers. The result was increased awareness and respect by the administration for the public's right to information. Such a commitment would make a welcome start for Manitoba's new ombudsman.

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# Bell Sympatico Ad Fiasco

By Audra Trower Williams  
*Babble Moderator, Lefty Lucy Communications Halifax.*

Gosh, I love the internet. Even when I'm not on the internet, I'm benefiting from it. Just this weekend I hung out with my friends who I met on the internet watching movies ordered from the internet, knitting with yarn bought on the internet, using patterns printed from the internet. But last week the internet kicked ass in entirely even more awesome and less yarn-related way.

It began when our webmistress, Jane, started this thread in the labour and consumption forum of babble, after having received a troubling flyer from Bell Sympatico. The ad read "you'll do anything to protect your kids from inappropriate content. So will we." It featured a drawing of a female figure from what appeared to be a children's science textbook. The breasts, vulva, ovaries and uterus appeared to have been slashed away with an Exacto blade.

Now, I spend a great deal of time horrified by the mainstream media. Actually, I think I spend all of my time horrified by the mainstream media. So sometimes it's hard to have the energy to even react. But this ad made me feel like I'd been kicked in the stomach.

The reaction from the babblers was both fast, and furious. We began discussing our many issues with the ad: the image of a woman hacked into pieces; the reinforcement that the female body is somehow offensive; and the notion that students need to be protected from sex education.

We weren't all reaction, however. Babblers aren't like that. Folks sprang into action, too, seeking out the contact information for those responsible for the ad, copying and pasting letters of protest they'd sent off to Bell, and sharing what instantly became identifiable as the form letter we were all getting back from the company. One young babbler even culture-jammed the ad, changing the copy to read "You'll do anything to uphold outdated patriarchal concepts. So will we. Women's bodies: disgusting, unnatural and inessential (except in relation to a man)."

It began to get more interesting. Several new babblers registered on the site after having found the site through a Google search for more information about the ad. Grace Macaluso, a reporter from the Windsor Star posted in the thread saying that she was working on a story about the ad and looking for people to interview. We were on fire. In addition to the babble discussion, those of us with blogs posted the ad there, too, telling our sisters to pass it on. Women-run blogs like Liz Vang, Ecstatic Spiritualism, Heart of Canada, Faithalicious and The Breast Site all initiated discussions about the ad along with pleas that their readers send complaints to Bell as well. The Toronto Women's Bookstore sent around an email to everyone in their address book. The word spread quickly.

At first, Bell didn't seem terribly concerned. Babblers and other bloggers were getting the same pat answers on the phone and over email. Bell didn't find the ad offensive; its intention was to poke fun at over protective parents, etc. etc. Their official line was, "Our advertisement was a tongue-in-cheek attempt to show the lengths some people will go to in order to protect their children from 'inappropriate' subject matter" √ the implication being that textbook diagrams of the human anatomy are the furthest thing from "inappropriate." That explanation, which was clearly in direct opposition with the ad's copy, just frustrated us more. It wasn't just the babblers who were upset about the underlying messages of this campaign. Ontario MPP Lorenzo Berardinetti and his wife Michelle also found the ad deeply troubling, and attempted to communicate this to Bell.

Like the rest of us, they spent a lot of time on hold. Like the rest of us, they knew they had to do something. So last Wednesday, Berardinetti presented a petition against the ad in the Ontario Legislature, stating: "We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to forward a copy of this advertisement to the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services and the Ministry of the Attorney General for review and possible legal action against Bell Canada Sympatico and its agents."

Somewhere between the heavy flow of emails and petitions, Bell started to Get It. People were disgusted, and the whole thing wasn't going away. Word began to spread that Bell was going to pull the ad, and make a public apology. The publisher of rabble.ca, Judy Rebeck, was one of the people on the receiving end of that apology. Charlotte Burke, Senior Vice-President of Consumer Internet Services, called Rebeck to let her know that she understood the ad had to be pulled, and that she was terribly sorry it had been printed in the first place.

"In all my years as an activist, this has never happened," Rebeck said. "The object of protest calling to apologize? This has never happened."

All the talk of "pulling the ad" and "public apology" was dizzying, initially. Actually, it still is. It's fantastic when a bunch of people gets really ticked off about something and forces organizations or businesses to acknowledge their screw-ups. Actions as simple as writing an email or making a phone call can sometimes feel like they require more energy than they are worth. Well, when senior VPs of huge corporations are calling us to say they are sorry, that's a pretty clear indication that if enough people do talk, they will listen. "It just shows that collective action does have an impact," continued Rebeck, who recently published *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*. "When I'm out promoting the book, the number one question I am asked is 'Why aren't young women calling themselves feminists?' Well here is an example of young women organizing, and having an immediate impact."

*Continued on back page*

**Bell Sympatico Ad Fiasco**  
*Continued from page 15*

After speaking to Bell, however, it's clear that the impact could be greater. When pressed for details about both the pulling of the ad, and the public apology, Bell spokesperson Mohammad Nakhooda admitted that the campaign was actually scheduled to end "around the same time" as they decided to pull it. When asked what form the public apology was going to take, Nakhooda seemed confused and referred to the letter that had been emailed or faxed to the people who had complained. He said that aside from notes sent to people who had complained, the company would not be releasing any public statement in regards to the ad. I think they need to do more. If Bell really are concerned with the portrayal of women in the media, then I'd like to see them make a sizeable donation to MediaWatch. I think it's fine that they admit their mistake; now I'd like to see them fix it. Michelle Berardinetti agrees. "I'm happy the ad was pulled", she says. "But now I'd like to see them do a gender positive ad, and revise their advertising policy. They need to promise that this sort of thing doesn't happen again."

Maybe we can help make sure that it won't. The petition drafted by Berardinetti and her husband is now in the hands of the Ministries of the Attorney General and of Business and Consumer Affairs, who will review the ad, and determine if any legal action needs to be taken against Bell for violating ad standards.

So now I think we need to take a bit of time to be proud of ourselves over what's happened so far. And then I think we need to take a bit more time make it clear to those offices, and to Bell itself, that we're not satisfied yet. And then we can pat ourselves on the back some more.

ITEM	COST	QUANTITY	AMOUNT
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Yearbook	\$25.00		
A Splendid Vision	\$35.00		
*Donation	Amount		
*Donations to the NCWC are not tax deductible at this time.			<b>Total:</b>
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**Our lives begin to end the minute we become silent about things that matter.**

**Martin Luther King**

*Looking to the Future*



Please Contact us directly via:  
 E-mail: [ncwc@magma.ca](mailto:ncwc@magma.ca)  
 Phone: 613-232-5025  
 Fax: 613-232-8419  
 Website: [www.ncwc.ca](http://www.ncwc.ca)

Write to us at:  
 251 Bank Street, Suite 205  
 Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1X3