

It's Time for Change!

The World March of Women 2000

BY THE CANADIAN WOMEN'S MARCH COMMITTEE

Cet article relate les étapes qui ont mené à la Marche des femmes de l'an 2000 et rapporte les activités du Comité canadien pour la Marche des femmes.

In solidarity with women from 157 countries, Canadian women are marching to demand that our federal government adopt immediate and effective measures to end poverty and violence against women in the year 2000. Across Canada, in all languages, communities, cultures, races, and sectors, women are calling on the Canadian government to radically change its way of governing, and to actively promote the public interest and adopt specific measures that will move us forward in the progressive realization of women's rights.

The World March of Women 2000 is a global campaign initiated by the strong vision of the Fédération des Femmes du Québec (FFQ), and has united over 5000 organizations across the planet around the goals of the March. The actions of the World March will culminate with a World Rally at the United Nations Building in New York on October 17th, 2000 in conjunction with solidarity events around the world. In recognition of the significance of this global movement, Secretary General Kofi Annan and leaders of both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have agreed to meet with an international delegation of Women's March participants.

The Canadian Women's March Committee

In Canada, the March has been coordinated by the Canadian Women's March Committee (CWMC), a diverse coalition borne out of several ad-hoc gathering of representatives from a variety of national organizations during the fall of 1998. Formal meetings of this committee began in January of 1999, and have continued on a regular basis since then. Currently, the CWMC is comprised of 36 women representing 24 national organizations that work directly on issues pertaining to women's equality, justice, and rights.

Statistics demonstrate that in all spheres of Canadian society, men have been allowed to discriminate, oppress and exploit women. Sexual harassment has been the unspoken norm of our working conditions. Public and professional institutions have collaborated in the subordination of women, allowing doctors, clergy, and teachers to abuse positions of power and sexually assault women

and girls. Women with disabilities have been particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and abuse within families and public institutions. Racism has intensified the oppression of Black women, women of colour and Aboriginal women. Racist biases in public services and in the justice system wind up protecting abusers and further punishing victims. Achieving social justice and the elimination of discrimination will ensure women's access to, and equitable treatment within, Canada's judicial system. It will also enable women to access appropriate health and social services, and to lead in the restoration and reform of valued social programs. This would also include the participation of Aboriginal women in the self-government process.

Given the current climate of economic globalization, international trade, and transcontinental treaties, women are facing a new set of obstacles in our struggle for equality and social justice. To counteract this powerful global tide, all levels of government in Canada must live up to commitments that have been made at the national and international levels to protect human, workers', and women's rights. Women in Canada and elsewhere have a difficult road ahead to achieving true equality. There is a strong desire amongst women in Canada to work more closely with one another and with women around the world on issues of relevance in today's society. To that end, the CWMC has been focused on the broad participation of women in all the March initiatives. The CWMC is committed to the broadening of the collective voice, having prioritized an outreach initiative to facilitate the participation of all women, including Aboriginal, Black, immigrant, refugee, disabled, and rural women, women of colour, young and older women.

Wanting to see Canadian women participate in the World March of Women 2000 in a significant and meaningful way, the CWMC is committed to bridging geographic and organizational gaps within the Canadian women's movement in order to generate as broad a participation base as possible. The CWMC has worked actively to link Canadian

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women to one another as well as to the international activities of the March, including the global support card campaign.

Women's lives today: how the new global order hurts women

The history of women's rights is one of struggle and hard won victories. Women have long joined together to fight injustice, poverty, violence and war. Because of this, women's lives over the past century have improved in many ways. The strength and tenacity of women everywhere brought us the right to vote. The adoption of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982 directs Canadian and provincial governments to respect and promote women's equality rights, in particular our right to life, liberty and security of the person without discrimination. More recently, women through feminist organizing struggled for and won state-funded maternity benefits.

Despite these victories, women's basic security and dignity continues to be threatened and denied. Indeed, in Canada, our federal government has radically altered social policies and programs across the country. Cutbacks and the erosion of programs in the areas of health care, education, social assistance, child care, (un)employment insurance, and social housing have directly impacted women. Rape crisis centres, transition houses for women, second-language training and specialized services to immigrant communities are some of the essential resources that have been attacked.

Creating more free markets, cutting taxes, reducing the size of government, privatizing public institutions, deregulating work, removing or ignoring rules that protect the environment, privatizing health care, opening our schools to big corporations—none of these policies imposed around the world by the new global order benefit women. On the contrary, they force women into non-standard and precarious jobs, push our wages down, erode our health and safety, increase the number of poor and condemn us all to much more unpaid work in the home.

68 steps on the march to Women's Equality

The CWMC has worked with individuals and groups across Canada to develop and present a set of demands to the federal government pertaining to the overarching themes of poverty and violence. Everywhere in the country, Canadian women are demanding that our government take immediate measures to eliminate poverty and violence against women. "It's Time for Change" is the Canadian Women's March Committee's blueprint for broad legislative reform. The document, which contains 68 demands, takes into consideration the needs of women from all communities across Canada, and proposes concrete measures that must be implemented in order to achieve justice and equality for all women, as well as the

universal respect of our human rights. These measures are organized around eight themes: protecting and promoting women's social, economic and cultural rights, women's work, the human rights of immigrant women, Aboriginal women, and lesbians, supporting the human rights of women around the world and encouraging women's active citizenship.

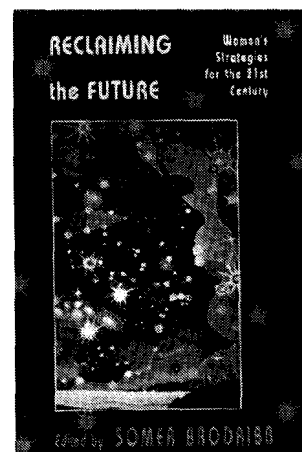
The Committee has identified 13 urgent demands to which we are requesting a positive response from the federal government by 15 October 2000. The national lobbying campaign directed at Members of Parliament has been a major strand of the March in Canada. On October 17, 2000 the National Women's Lobby will allow an opportunity to meet and, in many instances, follow up with Cabinet Ministers and MPs to further discuss our demands. The Committee also expects to meet with the Prime Minister.

The World March of Women 2000 is an unprecedented global campaign calling for the recognition of women's lives, the prioritization by national and international governing bodies of our dignity and security, and the incorporation of a broad range of perspectives of women from every community into all decision-making bodies. These are not extraordinary goals—but they do require extraordinary effort—and the participation of all women, both here in Canada and around the world.

The Canadian Women's March Committee, comprised of 24 national organizations, has for two years served as the coordinating body of the World March of Women 2000 in Canada. To reach us, please call 416-482-4460 or write to march@web.net.

Reclaiming the Future: Women's Strategies for the 21st Century

**Edited by
Somer Brodrigg**



"Reclaiming the Future: Women's Strategies for the 21st Century (gynergy books) takes on the questions of globalization, diversity, technology, nationalism and violence and dares to imagine how women's activism can effect their future course."

— Charlotte Bunch, Rutgers University

"IT'S TIME FOR CHANGE!"

Eliminating violence against women requires fundamental change in many areas, not only the criminal law system, but also in social security policies, housing, equal pay, and the eradication of racism, for example. Social and economic inequality places women in situations where they are more vulnerable to abuse, be it sexual harassment in the workplace, violence in the home or sexual abuse in private and public institutions. This is why the Canadian Women's March Committee has identified no less than 68 demands in "It's Time for Change!"

In preparation for the Canadian Women's March on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on October 15th, and the National Women's Lobby on October 17th, we have identified thirteen immediate demands for which we expect a response from the federal government by October 2000. We are demanding that the federal government take immediate steps to eliminate poverty and violence against women. We call on the government to make changes that will truly advance women's equality rights.

THE FEMINIST DOZEN

13 IMMEDIATE DEMANDS TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO END POVERTY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

1. Restore federal funding to health care and enforce the rules against the privatization of our health care system, beginning with Alberta.
2. Spend an additional one per cent of the budget on social housing.
3. Set up the promised national child-care fund, starting with an immediate contribution of \$2 billion.
4. Increase Old Age Security payments to provide older women with a decent standard of living.
5. Use the surplus from the Employment Insurance Fund to increase benefits, provide longer payments periods, and improve access, as well as improve maternity and family benefits.
6. Support women's organizing for equality and democracy by:
 - a. allocating \$50 million to front-line, independent, feminist, women-controlled groups committed to ending violence against women, such as women's centres, rape crisis centres and women's shelters;
 - b. recognizing and funding the three autonomous national Aboriginal women's organizations to ensure full participation in all significant public policy decisions as well as provide adequate funding to Aboriginal women's services, including shelters, in all rural, remote and urban Aboriginal communities;
 - c. funding a national meeting of lesbians to discuss and prioritize areas for legislative and public policy reform;
 - d. providing \$30 million in core funding for equality-seeking women's organizations, which represents only \$2.00 for every woman and girl child in Canada—*our Fair Share*.
7. Fund consultations with a wide range of women's equality-seeking organizations prior to all legislative reform of relevance to women's security and equality rights, beginning with the Criminal Code, and ensure access for women from marginalized communities.
8. Implement progressive immigration reform to: provide domestic workers with full immigration status on arrival; abolish the "head tax" on all immigrants; include persecution on the basis of gender and sexual orientation as grounds for claiming refugee status.
9. Contribute to the elimination of poverty around the world by: supporting the cancellation of the debts of the 53 poorest countries; increasing Canada's international development aid to 0.7 per cent of the Gross National Product.
10. Adopt national standards which guarantee the right to welfare for everyone in need and ban workfare.
11. Recognize the ongoing exclusion of women with disabilities from economic, political and social life and take the essential first step of ensuring and funding full access for women with disabilities to all consultations on issues of relevance to women.
12. Establish a national system of grants based on need, not merit, to enable access to post-secondary education and reduce student debt.
13. Adopt proactive pay equity legislation.

Excerpted from "It's Time for Change: Demands to the Federal Government to End Poverty and Violence Against Women," published by the Canadian Women's March Committee.