

West Coast LEAF attending parallel conference on the 54th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

February 26, 2010 – West Coast LEAF Legal Director Kasari Govender will be in New York next week attending parallel sessions of the 54th conference of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

The UN Commission on the Status of Women is dedicated to gender equality and advancement of women and is the principal global policy-making body. Every year, representatives gather in New York to evaluate progress, identify challenges, and formulate policies to promote gender equality worldwide.

The Commission will be reviewing the world's progress in fulfilling the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, an important document on the state of women's rights around the world which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year.

From February 27 to March 5, Govender will be attending parallel sessions organized by equality-seeking non-governmental organizations from around the world.

On February 28, Govender will be meeting with Helena Guergis, the Minister of State for the Status of Women.

What: 54th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
When: 1 - 12 March 2010
Where: New York City

In preparation for the UN event, the Canadian Labour Congress and the Feminist Alliance for International Action have prepared a report to describe Canada's lagging performance in achieving women's equality. The report is called "Reality Check: Women in Canada and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Fifteen Years On: A Canadian Civil Society Response". It was released on February 22 and was endorsed by West Coast LEAF.

West Coast LEAF's mission is to achieve equality by changing historic patterns of systemic discrimination against women through BC-based equality rights litigation, law reform and public legal education.

Highlights of the report “Reality Check: Women in Canada and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Fifteen Years On: A Canadian Civil Society Response”:

Canada’s achievements towards women’s equality, over the past decades have been considerable. However, during the period of 2004-2009, women’s achievements in all twelve areas of critical concern outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action have slowed or been turned back. In 2004 the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index, Canada was ranked 7th, in the 2009 Gender Gap Index, Canada ranked 25th and in 2009, Canada was ranked 73rd in the UN Gender Disparity Index.

Issues of concern include:

- Between 2006 and 2008, the word “equality” was removed from the mandate of Status of Women Canada, 43% of the budget was cut, 12 out of 16 regional offices were closed and approximately 50% of staff was laid off
- At the same time, funding criteria from SWC was changed to preclude support for advocacy or lobbying, meaning that important national women’s rights organizations dedicated to advocacy, law reform and systemic change, such as the National Association of Women and the Law, lost all of their funding.
- In 2006, funding agreements that had been negotiated with provinces and territories to provide five billion dollars for childcare and early learning programs were eliminated
- In its 2006 report, the National Council of Welfare described as “cruel” the welfare incomes for women and girls living in poverty
- Between 2006 and 2009, poverty levels and the lack of social assistance to women in Canada were raised by virtually every United Nations body that reviews Canada’s human rights performance, including the CEDAW Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Human Rights Committee, and the Human Rights Council.
- In 2009, the Native Women’s Association of Canada issued a report documenting the disappearances and murders of 520 Aboriginal women and girls over the last thirty years. 43% of disappearances and 50% of murders occurred during or since 2000.
- Over the past decade, after many years of gradual progress, the gender pay gap in Canada has remained more or less stuck.
- A 2000 Vancouver study on youth homelessness by McCreary Centre Society found that 84% of Aboriginal homeless girls had experienced sexual abuse.