



February 1, 2017

The Honourable Christy Clark, MLA
 Premier of the Province of British Columbia
 Box 9041 Station PROV GOVT
 Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

John Horgan, MLA
 Leader of the Official Opposition
 Room 109, Legislative Buildings
 Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Premier Clark and Mr. Horgan,

We write to ask you to commit to implement, fully and without delay, the enclosed recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The recommendations were issued on November 18, 2016 after the Committee's review of Canada's compliance with the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) at its 65th session.

We cannot stress enough the importance of implementing these recommendations. Women's equality in Canada has regressed over the last two decades. In 1995, Canada held 1st place on the United Nations Gender Equality Index; Canada is now at 25th. Recently, the World Economic Forum ranked Canada 35th on gender equality out of 144 countries. To make matters worse, equality for women in BC is lagging behind the rest of Canada on multiple measures. For example:

- BC consistently has among the highest poverty rates in Canada, and poverty rates for single women, and particularly single women caring for children, are shockingly high. Further, BC is the only province in Canada without a poverty reduction plan.
- Families led by women parenting alone experience the highest rates of food insecurity in BC, and the rate is higher than the Canadian average for comparable households.

- The average earnings of women in BC are well below the Canadian average female earnings and the pay gap between male and female workers in British Columbia is larger than the national average.
- At BC's current minimum wage, the earnings of a full time, full year worker are below the poverty line and the majority of minimum wage earners are women. In addition, BC maintains a lower liquor server wage despite research showing that dependency on gratuities increases the risk that these mostly female workers will be subject to sexual harassment.
- Mothers' workforce participation rates in BC, access to regulated child care spaces in BC, and provincial public investment per space are all below the Canadian average. Meanwhile, parent fees for regulated child care are higher than the national average.
- Front line services for women and children harmed by violence have been chronically underfunded, despite the fact that BC has a growing rate of domestic violence-related homicides.
- BC remains the only province without a human rights commission, which means there is little to no systemic education and monitoring related to gender discrimination in key areas such as employment, housing and public services.
- British Columbia's per capita spending on legal aid, services that are crucial to enable women to enforce their legal rights and leave violent relationships, is far lower than the national average.

We know that Canada and British Columbia can do better.

However, Canada, and in particular British Columbia, has a serious implementation gap. For years, Canada and British Columbia have ignored UN treaty body advice and recommendations, to the detriment of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents and to the detriment of British Columbia as a whole. Canada has no national mechanism for monitoring and facilitating implementation of treaty body recommendations, and British Columbia has no provincial mechanism for implementation of recommendations within its jurisdiction. Further, there is no mechanism for co-operation between federal and provincial governments on implementation in areas where co-ordination among all levels of government is critical. Because of this, treaty body recommendations tend to be ignored rather than realized in a substantive way through government planning, policy, and programs.

The Canadian and British Columbia governments can take a huge step forward for women and for human rights by immediately beginning to plan for implementation of the CEDAW Committee's most recent recommendations. The CEDAW recommendations cover a wide range of issues crucial to women's advancement, many of which are all or partly within provincial jurisdiction: access to legal aid; the gender wage gap and pay equity; housing and poverty reduction; child care; political participation; violence; the socio-economic conditions of Indigenous women; the needs of women with disabilities; detention of racialized women and women with mental health issues; access to abortion; harm reduction strategies; and much more.

Given the legal responsibility and leadership role of the Government of Canada, we have called on the federal government to establish an accountability mechanism and to, in cooperation with the provinces and territories, develop a national gender equality plan so that we can move forward in a coordinated and strategic way to fully implement women's human rights and advance women's equality. British Columbia's commitment and cooperation will be crucial to ensure that implementation is meaningful for women in our province.

The CEDAW Committee recommends two mechanisms for implementation of the *Convention* rights and treaty body recommendations:

- an effective mechanism for ensuring accountability and the transparent, coherent and consistent implementation of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* throughout all jurisdictions (at para 11); and
- a comprehensive national gender strategy, policy and action plan that addresses the structural factors causing persistent inequalities for women and girls, including those who are Indigenous, Afro-Canadian, racialized, disabled, immigrant, refugee and LGBTQ (at para 21).

Coordinated, robust work to advance women's equality is particularly timely in light of burgeoning attacks on women's rights and dignity globally. We urge you to publicly commit to take a leadership role and lead British Columbia to provide a model for other provinces by working with the federal government to take progressive, determined action to implement the CEDAW Committee's concrete and detailed recommendations. We need action now that demonstrates British Columbia's genuine commitment to fulfilling women's human rights.

We look forward to your response and to working with you on a new plan for women's equality in British Columbia and for the realization of women's human rights.

Sincerely,
The BC CEDAW Group*

This letter is endorsed by:

Battered Women's Support Services
 BC Poverty Reduction Coalition
 BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre
 BC Society of Transition Houses
 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – BC Office
 Canadian Federation of University Women BC Council
 Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
 Disability Alliance BC
 Downtown Eastside Women's Centre
 Hospital Employees' Union
 Ending Violence Association of BC
 First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
 Isabel Grant, Professor and Co-Director, Centre for Feminist Legal Studies, Peter A. Allard School of Law, University of British Columbia
 Justice for Girls
 Living Wage for Families Campaign
 Lynne Kent, Chair, Learning Disabilities Association of BC
 Margot Young, Professor of Law, Allard Hall Law School, University of British Columbia
 Poverty and Human Rights Centre
 Single Mothers' Alliance BC
 Susan Boyd, Professor Emerita, Peter A. Allard Law School, University of British Columbia

Together Against Poverty Society
University Women's Club of Vancouver
Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter
Vancouver Women's Health Collective
West Coast LEAF
Women Against Violence Against Women Rape Crisis Centre
Women Transforming Cities

**The BC CEDAW Group is a coalition individuals and organizations committed to advancing the rights of women and girls in British Columbia. Formed in 2002, the Group has participated in United Nations periodic reviews before a variety of treaty bodies, reporting to the UN on BC's progress. The 2017 BC CEDAW Group includes the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, Hospital Employees Union, Justice for Girls, Poverty and Human Rights Centre, Vancouver Committee for Domestic Workers and Caregivers Rights, Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter, West Coast LEAF, Single Mothers' Alliance BC, and the Vancouver Women's Health Collective.*