

The Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights



La Coalition spéciale pour l'égalité des femmes et les droits de la personne

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Women's Groups Urge Social Infrastructure Spending and EI Reform, Warn against Pay Equity Rollbacks in Upcoming Budget

OTTAWA, January 20, 2009 –

Advocates for women's equality have sent an open letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and opposition leaders, urging them to consider measures that affect women in the upcoming budget.

"Women are half the population of Canada and they cannot afford to ignore us," said Aalya Ahmad of the Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights. "Currently, women are less able to access EI, and are more likely to be in precarious work and to be penalized in the job market when child care is not available."

"Women are going to bear the brunt of this economic crisis, particularly marginalized women," said Jane Warren of Feminists for Just & Equitable Public Policy. "Disabled women, for example, are likely to suffer further marginalization, with increased barriers to education, resources, employment and opportunities, even over and above the barriers faced by able-bodied women."

The coalition is calling for spending on social infrastructure projects in addition to traditional infrastructure spending; for example, a national child care program that would support Canadian parents' participation in paid employment as well as creating jobs in a traditionally female-dominated sector. "It's shovel-ready and a sound long-term investment," said Emily King of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. "Good quality child care has been proven to return substantial, measurable benefits to society on a number of levels."

Many organizations are concerned that the Conservative government, with its track record of opposition to women's equality, will use the economic crisis to push for more regressive measures.

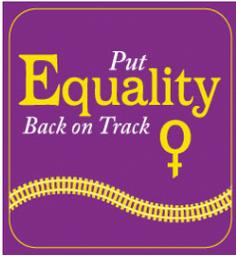
"We're watching this budget very carefully," said Johanne Perron of the New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity. In the November economic statement, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty proposed to make pay equity a bargaining chip between employers and unions. "To date, the government has not yet rescinded this proposal," said Perron. "That worries a lot of women."

"The equality of women is non-negotiable, even – especially - in tough economic times."

See the full text of the open letter to Mr. Harper, opposition leaders and Status of Women Minister and critics below. For more information, please contact Aalya Ahmad, co-coordinator of the Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights at 819-503-6969.

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Email us at coalitionforwomensequality@gmail.com



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Dear Mr. Harper,

In anticipation of the upcoming budget, the Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights would like to call your attention to budgetary measures that would strengthen our economy by strengthening the equality of women in Canada.

Women across the country are extremely concerned about Mr. Flaherty's proposal in the November economic statement to make pay equity a bargaining chip between employers and unions. To date, the government has not yet rescinded this proposal.

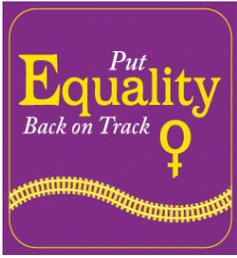
The Ad Hoc Coalition urges you to oppose any such proposal in the upcoming budget. In the 21st century, women's equality is not, and should never be, a bargaining chip. It is irresponsible to continue to impose discriminatory wages upon half the population by ignoring the remedy, particularly in a time of economic crisis. Equal pay for work of equal value is one of the "fundamentals" of a healthy economy. This can be attained by implementing a pro-active pay equity law, as the 2004 federal Task Force recommends.

Canadian parents need a national child care program that meets the "QUAD" principles (Quality, Universal, Accessible, and Developmental). A faltering economy can only benefit from improving people's access to the labour market, which would be greatly facilitated by having dependable child care services. Currently, soaring child care costs and lack of spaces keep many women who choose to work unemployed or underemployed.

A monthly handout cannot substitute for a child care program that allows real choice. We can and should do better for our families. The Ad Hoc Coalition urges you to consider the long-term stability of the economy in supporting a quality child care and early childhood education program that meets our children's developmental needs.

Women are particularly vulnerable in the current economic crisis as we do not have adequate access to Employment Insurance and what access there is cannot sustain us through a period of unemployment. Although women pay into EI, most women don't qualify for benefits. 70% of part-time workers are women and almost two thirds of minimum wage earners in Canada are women. With wages far below the poverty line already, many women can't live on 55% of their salary, even for a short period of time. To stimulate the economy and prevent poverty, improve access to EI and increase the level of benefits for part-time, contract and self-employed workers in the upcoming budget.

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Finally, the Ad Hoc Coalition strongly encourages you to ensure that the stimulus package includes investment in social infrastructure. Social infrastructure investments stimulate the real economy, not the speculative economy, by creating jobs, not giving CEOs bonuses or across-the-board tax cuts. Social infrastructure can provide affordable housing and anti-poverty programs, support green technologies and environmental incentives, and improve conditions for First Nations in their territories and Aboriginal people across the country, in particular Aboriginal women, who disproportionately suffer from poverty and violence. Any stimulus package that does not take social infrastructure into account is short-sighted and short-changes Canadian taxpayers. Social infrastructure creates jobs and strengthens economies, not only during this period of financial crisis, but for the future.

On behalf of the Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights, thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Aalya Ahmad

Coordinator of the Ad-Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights

cc.

Michael Ignatieff

Jack Layton

Gilles Duceppe

Helena Guergis