

Submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in the Workforce

Hello, my name is Mariam Pirzada and I identify myself as a feminist who wants women's issues to be recognized in order for them to be resolved. Oxfam had given myself the opportunity to discuss the Short Changed Campaign with MP Julie Dubrusin. I had agreed to this opportunity because I want to end the obstacles that are faced upon women, especially issues that women have been fighting for years. It is 2017, and one of the many issues that are still faced by women are the gender wage gap and not having their hard work valued. The gender wage gap has been a historical issue and unfortunately still is, regardless of the Canadian Human Rights Act of 1977, Fair Employment Practices Act, and the Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act in Ontario, in 1951 by the Federal government it is clear that the policies placed are not being applied. This matter needs to be solved immediately because it not only negatively impacts women's lives but also the people around them, for example a single mother trying to raise a family. Fortunately, Oxfam has not only recognized this issue but has taken a stand on ending this obstacle through the Short Changed Campaign.

While the government has taken some significant steps in realizing its feminist agenda, the area that is most lagging behind is women's economic security. As you can see, this study is timely and important.

In January, Oxfam revealed that two billionaires own more wealth than the bottom 30% of the Canadian population. Growing inequality undermines progress in tackling inequality and is particularly negative for women, who continue to make up the majority of the world's poor. Around the world, as in Canada, women are the lowest-paid workers, with minimal security and physical safety.

Our current economic model relies on women's cheap labour to maximize shareholders' profits, which explains why economic growth does not necessarily reduce inequality or even provide hope of escaping poverty. While economic growth increases when men and women participate equally in the economy, growth on its own is not efficient to move the needle on gender equality. I support Oxfam Canada's recommendations which outline the five areas we must focus in order for growth to be truly inclusive.

Number 1: The government should ensure that workers make living wages. Women make up 60% of the minimum-wage earners in Canada. Women are often forced into low-paid and insecure jobs because they have less of a safety net, in part because of difficulties accessing employment insurance; and if they receive benefits, these are too low for them to make ends meet. But nowhere in Canada does the minimum wage constitute a living wage. Without a living wage, women do not stand a chance of working their way out of poverty or achieving economic equality. *The government should commit to being a living wage employer and ensure that federal government contracts are only given to living wage employers. The provinces and private sector must follow suit. The government should also support women's organizing here at home by increasing the budget of Status of Women Canada to \$100 million a year; and abroad, by allocating \$100 million a year to women's rights organizations, networks, and movements.*

Number 2: The government should make pay equity a priority. Women are paid less than men in 469 out of 500 occupations monitored by Statistics Canada. The wage gap is even more accentuated for racialized, indigenous, and immigrant women. Also, as women face the added challenge of moving in and out of employment to take on care responsibilities for children, elderly, and the sick, often without employment insurance, their earning potential is much reduced. *The government should speed up the introduction of pay equity legislation. The government should use every tool available to ensure that all provinces enact pay equity legislation. In addition, the government should lower the threshold of employment insurance and tie it to need rather than earnings, and improve the Canada pension plan and guaranteed income supplement benefits.*

Number 3: The government must comprehensively address violence against women. Gender-based violence has a significant impact on women's security, and women's economic insecurity can make them more vulnerable to violence. Also, absenteeism and poor work performance as a result of violence can leave victims vulnerable to discipline and job loss. *The government should develop and implement a national action plan on violence against women. While the federal strategy on gender-based violence is a good first step, a comprehensive national action plan is needed to ensure women everywhere have the same levels of services and protection. We are*

also calling for legislation that gives victims of violence the right to time away from work without losing their job, as enacted in Manitoba.

Number 4: The government must invest in the care economy. In rich and poor countries alike, the responsibility for unpaid care work falls disproportionately to women. In Canada, women undertake 3.9 hours of unpaid care work every day, compared to 2.4 hours undertaken by men. Part of the challenge of shifting care responsibility between men and women is social norms. *The government should sustain and increase funding for child care so that quality care is accessible to all by 2020. This needs to be complemented by initiatives to ensure living wages and pay equity for child care workers, and supplemented with equitable family leave support and flexible work arrangements.*

Number 5: Addressing women's economic insecurity requires domestic and global leadership. In a globalized world, women's economic insecurity in Canada is caused by the same factors driving economic insecurity for women around the world. The global economy is built on the backs of women as corporations engage in a race to the bottom in wages and labour standards. No matter in which country, the government has to take responsibility and hold Canadian corporations to account for their footprint in the world. *The government should seriously consider corporate accountability as part of its feminist agenda and to commission a study to look at specific ways in which it can move forward in this area*

I fully support the recommendations and amendments put forward in the submissions by Oxfam Canada and look forward to seeing the committee recommendations.

Sincerely,

Mariam, Pirzada