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**Brief submitted to the Committee on the Status of Women as part of its study on  
the economic security of women in Canada**

**Subject: Canada Research Chairs Program**

Almost all Canadian universities participate in and benefit from the Canada Research Chairs Program. Established in 2000 by the federal government and administered by the Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat, which operates under the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, it receives \$265 million a year to support excellence in research through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). It is a major program that covers all areas of academia in Canada, and it is supposed to play a key role in the educational training of all Canadians. Unfortunately, that is not the case. For 17 years, the Canada Research Chairs Program has operated in an inequitable manner, showing a marked preference for white male researchers without disabilities. The Program's website is an illusion—I would even go so far as to say a lie. The photos that are posted on the website (a ratio of five women to four men, of whom one is not white) give the impression that the Program is equitable. But the statistics show another story: in reality, no progress toward more balanced representation has been made since the Program was first established. The reasons for this imbalance can be traced to the structure and regulations governing the Program.

In 2003, I was one of seven women professors across Canada who submitted a formal complaint to the Canadian Human Rights Commission against Industry Canada regarding the discrimination inherent in how the Canada Research Chairs Program was developed and implemented. We filed this complaint on behalf of women, visible minorities, people with disabilities and Indigenous peoples in Canada. An agreement, negotiated and agreed to by both parties in 2006, outlined Industry Canada's responsibility to resolve the issues plaguing various parts of the Program. Given that Industry Canada has completely disregarded the terms of the agreement, that Canadian universities are not penalized if they do not pursue the objective of achieving equity, that the objectives themselves are far from being clear and equitable, and that

the members of the four groups identified previously are just as disadvantaged now as they were in the past, we are in the process of either filing a new complaint or participating in a mediation exercise.

Overall, the Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat has failed to accomplish its task, outlined in the agreement, to ensure that the terms of the agreement are met in a “speedy and forward-looking manner.” Given that the Program is under federal jurisdiction, it is important to immediately ensure that it is operating in an equitable manner in all areas and for all Canadian citizens, in part by following the conditions outlined in the Human Rights Settlement of 2006. To ensure that the results are fair and reasonable, the global and specific objectives for the Program must be reviewed, as well as the methods and criteria used to set these objectives. Universities should also have their own equity policies, and penalties should be imposed when universities fail to respect their policies or the Program’s policies. The impact of the terms of the Program should be measured to determine their effect on the members of each of the aforementioned groups. I would also like to note that underfunding SSHRC puts the members of these groups at a further disadvantage, because most of them are professors in these disciplines (and are also responsible for the largest portion of university teaching).

The Canada Research Chairs Program plays a significant role in Canadian society on a daily basis, not only as regards education systems at every level and the annual investment of millions of dollars, but also as regards the culture of the country as a whole. A vast number of “experts” are regularly asked by the media to weigh in on events that occur in our country. Quite often, these experts are Research Chairs. The lack of diversity within the Program means that the opinions expressed by these experts may well be unrepresentative and biased.