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Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget

By: CFUW (Canadian Federation of University Women)

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Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Implement comprehensive, participatory poverty eradication policies and invest in approaches that address structural root causes of gender inequality.

Recommendation 2: Fund women's involvement in all aspects of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, in line with the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy.

Recommendation 3: Increase funding and action on the 231 Calls for Justice for MMIWG2S and the epidemic of gender-based violence.

Recommendation 4: Phase out the use of correctional facilities for the purpose of detaining immigrants and fund alternatives to detention that treaty individuals with dignity and respect.

Recommendation 5: Produce a comprehensive maternal death prevention strategy, including a national program to collect and analyze disaggregated, anonymized data about maternal deaths and close calls.

ABOUT CFUW

Founded in 1919, CFUW is a self-funded, non-partisan organization of over 6,600 women and 94 Clubs across Canada that works to improve the status of women by promoting human rights, public education, social justice, and peace in Canada and abroad. CFUW Clubs grant over $1 million a year in scholarships and awards, and work actively in their communities to advance our mission of achieving equality and social justice through continuous learning and empowerment. CFUW holds special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and is the largest affiliate of Graduate Women International.

Each year at our Annual General Meeting, CFUW members propose and vote on Resolutions on a wide variety of topics, thereby establishing the federation's policy positions. In 2023, three Resolutions were passed by our membership, which have informed three of the following recommendations for the 2025 Budget.

Recommendation 1: Implement comprehensive, participatory poverty eradication policies and invest in approaches that address structural root causes of gender inequality.

The theme of this year's United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was "Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective."

Poverty remains a critical issue in Canada. Canada did reach its goal of reducing poverty by 50% by 2030 as a result of the additional benefits introduced in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic—thus demonstrating the efficacy of targeted income support programs. However, with the end of these benefits, the overall poverty rate then *increased* from 2020 to 2021, from 6.4% to 7.4%.[1] In March 2023, Food Banks Canada recorded an unprecedented 1.9 million visits to food banks, with one-third of clients being children, and one-quarter being newcomers.[2] 1 in 6 of those accessing food banks are employed, highlighting the prevalence of poverty among low-income workers.[3]

Poverty and gender inequality are intrinsically linked. For example, in Canada, people living in female-led lone-parent households had the highest rates of food insecurity in 2021—a staggering 34.1%.[4] At the same time, poverty eradication and achieving gender equality also go hand in hand, and the CSW68 Agreed Conclusions outlined several impactful recommendations in this regard. In paragraph (h), states are called upon to "implement comprehensive, participatory poverty eradication policies and invest in approaches that address systemic barriers and structural root causes of gender inequality to ensure an adequate standard of living for all women and girls."

[1] "Blueprint for Transformation: the 2023 Report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty," Government of Canada, 2023, https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/national-advisory-council/reports/2023-annual.html.
[2] "Hunger in Canada," Food Banks Canada, 2023, https://foodbankscanada.ca/hunger-in-canada/.
[3] Ibid.
[4] "Blueprint for Transformation."

CFUW urges the government to use the CSW68 Agreed Conclusions as a general blueprint for action and to focus Budget 2025 on fully eradicating poverty and realizing every individual's right to water, food, housing, and a decent standard of living—especially in Indigenous and marginalized communities.

Recommendation 2: Fund women's involvement in all aspects of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, in line with the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy.

This government knows that women's full participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction is key to lasting peace, which necessitates tangible, sustainable investments in the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.

In this time of increased conflict and rollback of women's rights in many countries, publishing and implementing the long-promised Feminist Foreign Policy, with the WPS agenda at its core, is an important step in pushing the feminist agenda forward on the global stage. While the existing Feminist International Assistance Policy is an important aspect of Canada's approach to foreign policy, a robust policy document is needed to establish Canada's feminist approach to *all* aspects of foreign policy, including diplomacy, peacebuilding and conflict reconstruction, and international trade and finance.

In addition to advancing the WPS agenda, the Feminist Foreign Policy should commit Canada to ensuring international trade agreements are used as tools to maximize efforts to achieve gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes consulting with civil society organizations in developing, monitoring, and evaluating the gendered impacts of trade agreements, and always including gender provisions within agreements.

We encourage the government to consult "Be Brave, Be Bold: Recommendations for Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy," prepared by the Feminist Foreign Policy Working Group with input from many Canadian NGOs, including CFUW.

Recommendation 3: Increase funding and action on the 231 Calls for Justice for MMIWG2S and the epidemic of gender-based violence.

The crisis of gender-based violence in Canada has reached epidemic levels, victimizing women and girls—particularly Indigenous, rural, racialized, newcomer, 2SLGBTQQIA+, and disabled individuals—in every community. Indigenous women and girls continue to be victims of violence at a significantly disproportionate rate, and many of their cases continue to go unsolved.

The data is staggering, yet only reveals a fraction of the issue given the underreported nature of gender-based and colonial violence: A woman or girl is killed every 48 hours in Canada.[5] These women

[5] "Femicide in Canada," Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, 2024, https://femicideincanada.ca/.

and girls are disproportionately killed by men they know, most often a partner or family member.[6] In 2018, 44% of women who had been in an intimate partner relationship had experienced some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime, increasing to 61% among Indigenous women and 67% among LGB+ women.[7] Rates of intimate partner violence were almost twice as high for rural women than urban women in Canadian provinces in 2019.[8]

Both the Mass Casualty Commission on the 2020 shooting in Nova Scotia and the Renfrew County Inquest made specific recommendations for governments to follow, including declaring gender-based and intimate partner violence an epidemic. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released 231 calls for justice, only 2 of which have been completed. CFUW calls for an additional $1 billion to be committed to preventing gender-based violence and supporting survivors in 2025-26, with survivor-led, evidence-based initiatives.

Recommendation 4: Phase out the use of correctional facilities for the purpose of detaining immigrants and fund alternatives to detention that treaty individuals with dignity and respect.

In 2022-2023, over 5,000 foreign nationals and permanent residents were detained by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), without facing criminal charges. These detainees are kept in Immigration Holding Centres and correctional facilities, which often impose restrictions that deny them of their liberty and dignity.

Many individuals flee war, racial/religious/sexual persecution, or torture to seek a safe haven in Canada, only to experience restrictive conditions like being handcuffed and placed in solitary confinement with no outside contact. This policy creates serious consequences for immigrants' mental health. Research by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch found that detention can exacerbate existing psychosocial disabilities in detainees and trigger new ones, namely depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress[9].

CFUW welcomes that all provinces have now cancelled their contracts with CBSA to incarcerate immigrants in provincial jails. But the 2024 Budget announcement that the government will use federal prisons to detain immigrants instead is alarming. There are alternatives to detention that are proven to be effective and less harmful, as demonstrated during the pandemic when other options were used. We urge the government to fund and utilize alternative options to monitor immigrants that treat them with dignity and respect, including electronic monitoring and community case management and supervision programs.

[6] "Femicide in Canada."
[7] "What is gender-based violence?", Government of Canada, 2024, https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/about-gender-based-violence.html.
[8] Ibid.
[9] "'I Didn't Feel Like a Human in There': Immigration Detention in Canada and its Impact on Mental Health", Human Rights Watch, 2021, https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/06/17/i-didnt-feel-human-there/immigration-detention-canada-and-its-impact-mental.

Recommendation 5: Produce a comprehensive maternal death prevention strategy, including a national program to collect and analyze disaggregated data about maternal deaths and close calls.

From 2000 to 2021, Statistics Canada reported 508 maternal deaths (deaths from obstetric causes occurring during pregnancy or within 42 days of delivery or end of pregnancy).[10] The true number of maternal deaths is believed to be higher, but is unknown due to the lack of robust and consistent data on the matter. For example, the "Trends in Maternal Mortality" report by the WHO and other organizations estimated Canada's 2017 maternal mortality rate to be over 60% higher than that reported by Statistics Canada.[11] The estimate would put Canada's maternal mortality rate in the top third of countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2017.[12]

In the United Kingdom, maternal deaths have been tracked and investigated by the country's MBRRACE (Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries) monitoring program since 1952. By investigating maternal deaths and tracking demographic indicators, the program has allowed for a better understanding of how to prevent such tragedies, as well as highlighting the deep-rooted health inequalities at play.

Canada currently lacks similar systems and strategies to monitor maternal deaths, particularly from an intersectional perspective. CFUW urges the federal government to commit to funding a comprehensive maternal death prevention strategy. The strategy should include initiatives to combat maternal health inequalities and a similar program to the UK MBRRACE model to collect and analyze consistent disaggregated and anonymized data about maternal deaths and close calls.

[10] "Number of maternal deaths and maternal mortality rates for selected causes", Statistics Canada, 2023, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310075601.
[11] "Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2020: estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division", World Health Organization, 2023, https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240068759.
[12] Chelsea Gomez and Tara Carman, "Canada significantly undercounts maternal deaths, and doctors are sounding the alarm", CBC News, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-maternal-deaths-undercount-1.6600905#:~:text=Deaths%20of%20mothers%20are%20less,and%20adverse%20outcomes%20are%20preventable.