



OXFAM CANADA SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATUS OF WOMEN FOR ITS STUDY ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY

March 15, 2017

In January, Oxfam revealed that 2 billionaires own more wealth than the bottom 30% of the Canadian population. Rising economic inequality has the most negative consequences for women, who continue to make up the majority of the world's poor. Around the world, and in Canada, women make up the vast majority of the lowest-paid workers, many in jobs that offer minimal security and physical safety. We therefore call for progress in the following 5 areas.

1. The Government must ensure women make living wages

Women make up 60% of 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, they are too low to make ends meet. But nowhere in Canada does 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.

We are calling on the government to commit to being a living wage employer and ensure federal government contracts are only given to living wage employers. Provinces and the private sector must be strongly encouraged to follow suit. We also ask the government to support women's rights organizations, because of the crucial role they play in advocating for changes to advance women's economic equality. The Government should enable Status of Women Canada to provide this support by increasing its budget to \$100 million annually.

2. The Government should make pay equity a priority

Women on average only earn 74 cents for every dollar men earn, which amounts to 14 additional years of work for women to earn the same life-time earnings of men retiring at 65. 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, their earning potential is much reduced. Senior single women are among Canada's poorest. The wage gap is even more accentuated for racialized, Indigenous, immigrant women and women living with disabilities.

We are calling on the government to speed up the introduction of pay equity legislation. The federal government should use every tool available to ensure all provinces enact pay equity legislation. In addition, the government should lower the threshold of EI and tie it to need rather than earnings, and improve the Canada Pension Plan and Guaranteed Income Supplement benefits.

3. The Government must comprehensively address violence against women

Rates of domestic and sexual violence remain persistently high in Canada. Gender-based violence has a significant impact on women's security and women's economic security 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.

We are calling on the government to develop and implement a national action plan on violence against women to ensure women everywhere have the same levels of services and protection. We are also calling for federal legislation that gives victims of violence the right to time away from work without fear of losing their job, as was enacted in Manitoba.

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 relative to 2.4 hours undertaken by men. Investments in public services and the care economy (child care, elder care, health, education) stimulate employment, contribute to more inclusive growth and help level the playing field for women by narrowing the gender pay gap and improving women's access to decent jobs. Canada's investment in child care of 0.25% of GDP is far below the OECD average of 0.7% and services for seniors, such as community and home care, continue to fall short of demand.

We are calling on the government to 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. We are also calling for an increase in services for First Nations and seniors. Canada should also sign and ratify ILO Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers.

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 are engaging in a race to the bottom in terms of wages and labour standards, no matter which country. The government has to take responsibility and hold Canadian corporations to account for their footprint around the world.

We are calling on the government to seriously consider corporate accountability as part of its feminist agenda and commission a study to look at specific ways in which the government can move forward in this area. We are also calling on the government of Canada to gradually increase its international assistance envelope to meet the UN target of 0.7% and invest 20% of all Canadian aid to advancing women's rights and gender equality, including women's labour rights and economic empowerment.