



## International Women's Day 2007

### **A Message from Linda Silas President of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions**

The last few months have been, without exaggeration, terrible times for the women's movement in this country. There is a little humour book called *I'm Not a Feminist, But...* It has quotes such as "Is it because 70% of the world's people living in poverty are female that men accuse women of being needy" or "Why are women warned to stay in at night for their own safety when home is the place where they are most likely to be assaulted". I have quoted from this book to get your attention. As an organization still representing 95% women, we need to be alert to what exactly is happening in our country, to equality actions such as pay equity and legal rights for women.

In 2006, the federal government made a number of important changes affecting women's equality rights. These include a 40% cut to Status of Women Canada and the elimination of twelve regional Status of Women Canada offices. These measures signal a profound rejection of the realities of women's lives. The justifications for these measures by federal Minister Beverley Oda are that women are strong, already equal, and don't need these critical policy and legal supports. Or as comedian Rick Mercer put it – baby, you've come far enough. Although we acknowledge that women in Canada have won formal equality rights, we know that much more work must be done to make these equality rights a reality for all women in Canada. One indicator of this is women's wages.

On average, women still earn 71 cents on the male dollar, making Canada 38th in the world in terms of the wage gap ratio. Racialized and Aboriginal women earn significantly less. Their average annual income, respectively, is \$16,621 and \$13,300. Further, even though 70% of mothers are in the paid work force, Canada still does not have in place a national child care program. According to the Toronto Community Foundation, over 10,000 children are on a waiting list for subsidized child care spaces in Toronto alone.

Access to justice is now denied to women on many fronts. In the last year, the federal government abolished the funding for the national child care program, decided not to adopt an improved federal pay equity law, eliminated all funds for the Court Challenges Program, removed the goal of equality from the mandate of the Women's Program at Status of Women Canada, and prohibited the use of federal funds to engage in advocacy at any level of government, lobbying and most research. Other policy decisions have also contributed to denying women's access to equality and their rights.

This Women's Day, join CFNU, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Feminist Alliance for International Action and the Women's Equality Coalition in calling on federal government to:

- Reverse its policy decisions on childcare, pay equity, the Court Challenges Program, Status of Women Canada, and the Women's Program.
- Respect the UN Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women recommendations, by improving the living conditions and



respecting the human rights of Aboriginal women, effectively addressing violence against women and women's poverty, improving maternity and parental benefits, funding civil legal aid, changing immigration laws to respect the rights of live-in caregivers and ensuring a more equitable participation of women in the political institutions.

Download and print the below file on sticker sheets to pass out and wear proudly on Women's Day and beyond.

In solidarity,



Linda Silas, RN, BScN