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“Reality check” on women’s equality Labour, women’s groups will tell UN Canada is lagging

OTTAWA – Labour and women’s groups have issued a report which they say is a “reality check” describing Canada’s lagging performance in achieving women’s equality. The report will be used at the Beijing +15 meeting at the United Nations in New York, March 1-12.

“Canadian women have lost ground in many areas in the past 15 years,” says Barbara Byers, CLC Executive Vice-president. “Our government has sent a report to the United Nations that paints a rosy picture on women’s equality in Canada. We have written our own document and it is a reality check on what the government is saying.”

The UN meeting in March will evaluate progress, identify challenges, and recommend policies to promote gender equality and the advancement of women. This year holds special significance because it marks the 15th anniversary of the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women.

Mary-Lou Donnelly, President of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, says, “As teachers, we see the ravages of poverty every day in our classrooms, and rates are increasing at an alarming rate while the support mechanisms are disappearing or non-existent. With more women and girls living in poverty and being denied fundamental human rights, how can we build for a strong and prosperous Canadian future?”

Patty Ducharme, National Executive Vice-President, Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), adds, “Although Canada has made commitments to implement equal pay for work of equal value, the federal government hasn’t lived up to its commitments. A case in point is the federal government’s removal of the right to pay equity for federal public sector workers in 2009, with the adoption of the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. We raise this issue in this report and it will be front and centre for us next week at the United Nations in New York.

Kate McInturff, Executive Director of the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), says, “Five years ago, Canada was ranked amongst the top ten countries in the world for its achievements in women’s human rights; in 2009 Canada had fallen to 73rd in the UN Gender Disparity Index. Changes to gender architecture, shifts in policy and programming within the government, and the government’s response to the economic crisis have been felt by the most vulnerable women and girls in Canada.”

The joint report is called Reality Check: Women in Canada and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Fifteen Years On, A Canadian Civil Society Response. It was coordinated and produced by the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action and the Canadian Labour Congress, and is endorsed by a variety of other organizations.

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