



Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses

Federal Government of Canada
Pre-Budget Consultations 2006

**Submission by the Ontario Association of
Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH)**

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Introduction

On behalf of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) we are pleased to take part in the pre-budget consultation of the Government of Canada.

OAITH is a 75-member network primarily of first-stage emergency shelters for women and their children across Ontario. OAITH is the largest women's shelter association in Canada. On behalf of our frontline member agencies, we work to outline the concerns of all women and children experiencing violence in Ontario. Many of their concerns are linked to social policy, and in particular to the decisions of policymakers with regard to budget allocations for social programs and other supports that affect women and children.

This is no less true today than it was almost 30 years ago when our Association began.

How your decisions can make a positive difference

When political representatives listen to what women in abusive relationships and women's advocates say, they hear calls for the most fundamental of human and equality rights: freedom from violence, basic needs like food and housing, support for their children, community women's services, changes to family and criminal law systems, access and equity for marginalized women, training and education, childcare, decent work and fair wages. These are some of the key measures that we must take to end violence against women, and they must all be addressed. Piecemeal solutions won't work.

The Government of Canada has an opportunity each year to make decisions that could make a difference to whether or not women can expect to exercise their fundamental right to be free of violence. As the elected government, you have the power to influence or change how women and children are treated in all public policy areas that either support or restrict their ability to escape.

Since 1995, at least 246 women and children have been murdered in Ontario alone in situations where their intimate partners were either charged or committed suicide. They have been shot, stabbed and slashed, poisoned, bludgeoned with hammers or kicked to death, drowned and set on fire. This last November, five women were murdered during Woman Abuse Prevention Month in Ontario. One was set afire inside a car in a murder-suicide; one was stabbed to death in a Southwest Ontario hospital; one was an Aboriginal woman shot to death on her Northern reserve; one was dismembered and her body parts dumped in Toronto neighbourhoods, one woman's cause of death was never reported.

Since January of 2006, seven women and eight children have been murdered. In Ottawa, you will have heard about the murder-suicide of Francine Mailly and her three children, shot to death by her estranged husband who died of smoke inhalation in a fire of his own creation.

These tragic and terrible murders are only the tip of the iceberg. Many more women escaped death only with immediate emergency medical care and many thousands more experienced brutal physical attacks, sexual assaults and psychological terrorism.

This toll of death and destruction continues to rise because as a society we are still not willing to get beyond the oft-heard, and easily offered expressions of abhorrence to

violence against women, to get beyond a narrow criminal justice system focus and to finally take all of the actions necessary to end it.

The upcoming budget is the most viable opportunity for the new Canadian government to intervene to protect and support women and children before they are added to the murder list. Make a difference with this budget.

What can Canada do about violence against women?

There are many areas of federal government responsibility that affect whether or not women and children can escape from violence: transfers for social programs, housing policy and funding, implementation of *Charter* rights, including domestic and international agreements to achieve equity for and among women, immigration policy, Aboriginal issues, responsibility for civil and criminal legislation and transfer funding.

Social Assistance Programs:

In 2003, OAITH surveyed its members to find out what were the most serious barriers are to leaving abusive relationships in the Province of Ontario. Our responses showed that both poverty and lack of affordable safe housing for women were high on the list of reasons why women and children were forced to remain with or return to an abuser. Lack of childcare was also a frequent barrier to women leaving welfare, finding jobs or accessing training and education that could provide a permanent escape from violence.¹

For many women, spending time on social assistance is critical to getting away from violent partners. Even when women may eventually have access to property and assets through legal processes, initially they often have no source of support to live or raise their children. While some women may have good permanent jobs that they can keep, others will be forced by their circumstances to leave employment until they can re-settle in a safe place. Many will need to build their lives again from nothing.

According to Statistics Canada, economic conditions for women who are the sole support of their children—as almost all women are after separation from an abuser—are grim across the country. In 2003, 52.5% of lone female households lived below the poverty line.²

Of course, not all women who live below the poverty line share equal levels of poverty. For many the economic barriers to escaping an abuser are much worse.

Campaign 2000 reports that poverty rates for Aboriginal children, for example, are twice that of other children and that almost half of these children live with a lone parent.³ It should be no surprise, then, to find that Aboriginal women are more vulnerable to violence against women, experiencing three times the rate of violence committed against other women, according to Status of Women Canada.⁴ Poverty rates for women of colour,

¹ *Choose to Change This*, OAITH November 2003, pgs. View at www.oaith.ca, Briefs and Publications section.

² Persons in Low Income Before Tax, 1999 to 2003, Statistics Canada. (View at Statscan)

³ *Decision Time for Canada: Let's Make Poverty History*, Campaign 2000, 2005 National Report Card. Pg. 3 (View at Campaign 2000)

⁴ Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile. Status of Women Canada. Pg.14 (View at Status of Women)

women with disabilities and immigrant women also far exceed those of all women in Canada, making it more difficult for these women to leave abusers and to raise their children in safety.

According to Campaign 2000, children with disabilities, children in racialized families, and immigrant families faced poverty rates 10 to 20 percentage points higher than other poor families. For newly arrived (1996-2001) immigrant families the poverty rate was 30 percentage points higher.⁵

All of the women on social assistance that we see in Ontario shelters live in poverty. Calculations by the Hands Off Campaign, which has been asking for an end to the claw back of the federal National Child Benefit Supplement, indicate that sole parents (mostly women) in Ontario live 48% below the poverty line after this benefit has been taken from their children.⁶

In 2005, OAITH participated in a research study of the experiences of abused women and their children on welfare in Ontario. Entitled *Walking on Eggshells: Abused Women's Experiences of Ontario's Welfare System*,⁷ the report of the research found that women's experiences were "profoundly negative," and that they longed to leave welfare and find work. Women routinely went without food, medicine, clothing, and other basic needs so that they could better feed their children and pay rent. They said that living on welfare was like being abused and that they often felt that the "best" decision they could make was to return to the abuser.

Employment no guarantee of economic security

We now know that working does not necessarily mean an end to poverty, even if women are not subject to a claw back of the NCBS for their children. Many women we work with in shelters are still trapped in minimum wage, part-time unstable jobs that prevent them from leaving abusers or remaining independent after they escape. As sole support mothers, they too are most likely to live 48% below the poverty line after separation. Indeed, women have not made much substantive progress in matching their male counterparts in terms of wages, regardless of the rhetoric of equal pay. Overall, in 1994 for example, women earned 60.5% of the wages of men; 10 years later in 2003, that percentage has risen by only 3 percentage points to 63.6%.⁸ Even when women work full-time, full year, they still fall 25% below average wages for men.

Women need a liveable minimum wage that the Government of Canada can provide. We must remember that this rate is a ***minimum*** wage and as such, must rise to cover the basic needs of families to *at least* bring them up to the poverty line in Canada. For women and children who are attempting to build lives free of violence, this is critical to their freedom.

⁵ *Decision Time for Canada: Let's Make Poverty History*, Campaign 2000, 2005 National Report Card. Pg. 6 (View at [Campaign 2000](#))

⁶ Hands Off Campaign Poverty Graph 2: The Poverty Gap for Ontario Families on Social Assistance or Working for Minimum Wage.

http://www.incomesecurity.org/campaigns/documents/LICO_Graph_2_OW_%20Min_wage.pdf

⁷ *Walking on Eggshells: Abused Women's Experiences of the Ontario Welfare System*. Janet Mosher, principal researcher. York University. 2004. View at: http://www.oaith.ca/pdf/Walking_on_Eggshells.pdf

⁸ Statistics Canada. Average earnings by sex and work pattern. <http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/labor01a.htm>

In addition to a liveable minimum wage, women in particular need to know that government will live up to its promises to ensure equal pay for work of equal value and employment equity as fundamental rights within government labour strategies.

It is time to stop asking women to choose between violence and poverty in Canada and to put in place stronger social programs to help them escape.

What the Government of Canada can do in the upcoming budget:

1. Raise the Canada Child Tax Benefit to \$4,900.
2. Prohibit the practice of provincial discretion to claw back the National Child Benefit Supplement from families on social assistance and disability assistance across Canada.
3. Provide national standards on transfers to provinces with regard to spending of funds for social assistance that require funding amounts be raised to reflect true costs of living and that reflect additional costs of living for people with disabilities and other communities (e.g. rural and remote communities) that incur additional costs of living.
4. Raise minimum wage to \$10 per hour, indexed to cost of living.
5. Expand eligibility for Employment Insurance for unemployed workers.
6. Move aggressively to advance pay and employment equity within all employment sectors.

Affordable housing

Lack of affordable housing for abused women is linked to their lack of economic security and their increasing poverty. It is also a function of the ongoing failure of both provincial and federal governments to respond to an increasing crisis in social housing across Canada.

According to Campaign 2000, of families with children in Canada, 21.4% live in unaffordable housing costing more than 30% of their income. Among low-income families with children, 66% live in unaffordable housing.⁹ Campaign 2000 also reports that only 10% of housing that was promised has been realized since the Affordable Housing Framework Agreement was created in 2001.¹⁰

Federal and provincial programs to increase affordable housing have so far netted little in real housing options for abused women. In the last two *Statistics Canada* surveys of women's shelters and second stages across Canada, conducted every two years, lack of housing was one of the top three issues for women leaving Canadian shelters.¹¹ In 2003,

⁹ *Decision Time for Canada: Let's Make Poverty History*, Campaign 2000, 2005 National Report Card. Pg. 8 (View at [Campaign 2000](#))

¹⁰ *Decision Time for Canada: Let's Make Poverty History*, Campaign 2000, 2005 National Report Card. Pg. 8 (View at [Campaign 2000](#))

¹¹ *Canada's Shelters for Abused Women, 2003/04. Transition Home Survey*. Juristat, Statistics Canada. Pg.

90% of OAITH members reported that lack of affordable housing was driving women back into abusive relationships.

The Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) also reports that high levels of discrimination and poverty make adequate housing inaccessible to many women, especially Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, immigrant women, women of colour and poor women.¹²

Isn't it time to stop asking women to choose between violence and homelessness?

What the Government of Canada can do in the upcoming budget:

7. Step up any current efforts to build affordable housing.
8. Make a commitment in the upcoming budget to dedicate 1% of this budget and each future budget to building housing for low-income families until all Canadians have safe, affordable housing.

Child Care

As noted at the beginning of this submission, lack of child care also keeps women in abusive situations where children are exposed to abuse. In a survey of our members, 89% of respondents indicated that in their communities, abused women did not have the child care needed to access work opportunities or education after leaving an abuser. This is disgraceful. While we urge women to escape, we provide little support for them in their efforts to protect their children and create non-violent homes.

We have no quarrel with providing more federal support to families with children, but the \$1200 per year currently offered to create a “universal child care plan” will do nothing of the kind.

Many women cannot find quality, affordable and safe child care in their communities because it does not exist. Aboriginal women have indicated the need for culturally specific child care services, currently almost non-existent, that the previous Liberal government had promised to begin funding. Even women are lucky enough to find a child care space, they cannot to purchase this care with \$1200 per year. In addition, federal government plans to subsidize the creation of spaces by businesses has not worked where it has been tried (eg. Ontario) and will not work for Canadians, or businesses, across the country.

Please rethink this plan.

The vast majority of Canadian women and men support a national child care strategy that is comprehensive, universally accessible and inclusive, affordable, high quality and non-profit. Canadian women waited a long time to see only the beginnings of a national child care strategy announced by the previous Liberal government. Please do not dismantle the progress made on behalf of Canada's children and families. For women who are trapped in dangerous relationships, a short-sighted plan like the one current being advanced gives no support to their children or their hopes to become free.

¹² Women and Housing in Canada: Barriers to Equality. Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation. (View at [CERA](#))

What the Government of Canada can do in the upcoming budget:

9. Honour the agreements made with provinces and territories to begin the development of early learning and child care services. Confirm that provinces and territories will receive multi-year funding of at least \$1.2 billion annually, specifically tied to building a high quality, accessible and inclusive, affordable, community-based child care system.
10. Create national standards that restrict funds transferred to the provinces to funding of non-profit child care services. Profit-making on the care of children who need safe places to be while their parents work is an inappropriate use of public funds.

Legal Aid

For women who are in abusive situations, use of criminal and civil legal systems by abusers is often a continuing opportunity to control and threaten women and their children. Women need stronger supports in these systems to ensure that these abusive partners don't prevail.

While governments often see the criminal legal system as the priority for responding to violence against women, the majority of women do not, in spite of all the public money that continues to flow into criminal justice system approaches. For those who do, however, or are forced into it because of increasing police charging of abused women, women need increased support from legal aid services.

More often it is the family and civil law systems that women must use, whether or not they are supportive or protective of women and children. It is here that increasing numbers of women across Canada go unrepresented to court against determined and well-represented abusers who use the public courts as their new weapon of choice.

According to Statistics Canada, spending on legal aid remained relatively static or fell in Canada between 1997 and 2000, while spending on courts and police have increased¹³. The number of applications approved for legal aid in Canada dropped every year between 2000 and 2004—applications approved in 2000 steadily declined in the following four years to an over 10% total decrease¹⁴. This is not a function of less need, but of severe cuts to legal aid, especially within civil law areas, and increasingly restrictive eligibility requirements by provinces for receiving legal aid in Canada.

We know that this deterioration of legal aid in Canada also stems from the decision in 1995 by the Liberal government of the day to abandon the Canada Assistance Plan and replace it with the Canada Health and Social Transfer, removing requirements for provincial use of federal transfer funds. Cuts to the federal transfers at the same time resulted in provinces making their own deep cuts in order to continue funding health and education, while cushioning the blow of federal cuts. Legal aid funding was only one of the social programs that were hit.

¹³ *Statistics Canada*. Justice Spending <http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/legal13.htm>

¹⁴ *Statistics Canada*. Selected legal aid statistics (Approved applications). <http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/legal18d.htm>

Equal access to and treatment under the law is a right in Canadian law, one that is not possible without legal aid for those who cannot afford the rising costs of seeking justice in any court. Women escaping violence need increased legal aid support for both criminal and civil legal systems, and especially for family and immigration law.

What the Government of Canada can do in the upcoming budget:

11. Increase legal aid funding transfers to provinces with specific direction to use these funds only to: a) increase legal aid supports for individuals within an equity framework, b) reverse restrictions on legal aid eligibility and c) increase matters for which legal aid is provided.

Aboriginal women's services and supports

In April 2004, the Native Women's Association of Canada participated in the Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable to contribute to discussions on the relationship between the Federal Government and Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal policy development in Canada. At that time, NWAC specifically asked for a number of initiatives and strategies to address issues for Aboriginal women in Canada.

One of the initiatives was dedicated to seeking funding support for work on the Sisters in Spirit Campaign to raise awareness and promote action on violence against Aboriginal women across the country. Aboriginal women are more likely than any other women in Canada to be murdered. According to NWAC in 2004, an estimated 500 Aboriginal women had been murdered or disappeared over 30 years, and we know that more have been killed or gone missing since then.

NWAC also called on the Government of Canada to make the abject poverty in Aboriginal communities a priority and to develop a strategy with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal women's representatives that would address what NWAC called "a significant contributor to the extremely high levels of violence and death faced by Aboriginal women".

The time to act on these issues is now in this first budget of the Conservative Party of Canada. It is by this budget that we will know whether Canada will respond to Aboriginal women's concerns or continue Canada's internationally known scandalous record on Aboriginal issues.

What the Government of Canada can do in the upcoming budget:

12. Provide a \$5 million allocation to the Sisters in Spirit initiatives. The previous Liberal government provided \$5 million of a requested \$10 million to the Sisters in Spirit Campaign. In order to adequately fund this critical work, the upcoming federal budget should include the additional \$5 million not provided by the Liberals.
13. Designate significant additional funding for Aboriginal women's services, controlled by Aboriginal women, across the country and provide ongoing adequate core funding for the work of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women's advocacy groups, and that of women of non-status and urban Aboriginal communities.
14. Provide funds to support an Aboriginal anti-poverty strategy that provides for the inclusion and support of Aboriginal women's representatives, as outlined by NWAC

to the Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable of 2004¹⁵.

15. Provide resources in the upcoming budget to fund a national strategy for addressing racism in Canada which includes adherence to international agreements such as the UN *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* and the UN *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, which outline Canada's gaps in this area and provide direction for Canada on actions the Government of Canada must take.

Newcomer services and supports

Immigrant and refugee women in Canada experience many additional barriers to leaving an abusive situation: language barriers, unequal or no access to legal, social and health services, racism and discrimination, unfair immigration policies and a host of other challenges. They face these in addition to higher poverty rates (despite more qualifications) and less access to the little housing, education and employment opportunities that other abused women may find.

The isolation created by all of these barriers makes immigrant and refugee women and their children more at risk when they are in abusive situations. Women who are undocumented or were trafficked to Canada are also at greater risk of violence.

What the Government of Canada can do in the upcoming budget:

16. Include in the upcoming budget the first installment of the \$920 million over 5 years promised to Ontario for settlement and newcomer services in the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement of November 2005. Prior to the election, the Conservative Party said that it would honour this agreement. This commitment should begin with the first budget.
17. Stop the deportation of undocumented workers out of Canada. It is well-known that these workers provide critical economic value to business and to the country as a whole. As part of the economic strategy for Canada, if for no other reason, decisions to deport undocumented workers and non-status immigrants must be reversed and a strategy for regularization implemented, as outlined by the Ontario Association of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) in its April 4/06 letter to the Hon. Monte Solberg, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration¹⁶.

Non-governmental women's services and advocacy networks

Without strong, protected and publicly funded grassroots community-based women's services and advocacy groups controlled by women, we will all lose ground on both intervening and ending violence against women and their children.

Everyone agrees that the expertise of women's shelters, sexual assault centres, women's centres and women's provincial and national policy organizations is invaluable. We would

¹⁵ Speech by NWAC President Kukdoookaa Terri Brown to the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable, April 19, 2004.

¹⁶ Letter to Hon. Monte Solberg, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. April 4, 2006. Ontario Association of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI). <http://www.ocasi.org/index.php?qid=879>

like the government to recognize the efforts and sacrifices that these small services and even smaller advocacy and policy groups must make to continue their work.

If independent, community-based women's services and policy networks continue to be starved of financial support, efforts to address and ultimately to end all forms of violence and inequality against women will flounder. We want the enormous success of women's work on equality for women to continue and the Government of Canada has made commitments to help us do that.

Specifically, the government of Canada is a signatory to a number of agreements related to ensuring that all women in the country can be free of violence and inequality in all of its forms. Canada, however, has made only small progress on many of the agreements it has signed, while boasting to the international community that it has excelled in this area. One has only to look at the statistics and information in the recently released Statistics Canada report *Women in Canada: A gender based statistical report*¹⁷ to know that much more is needed.

With regard to the United Nations international agreements made by Canada, Stephen Harper personally signed a commitment during the recent election to "take **concrete** and **immediate** measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada"¹⁸ (bold type ours).

We would like to suggest some concrete and immediate measures for the upcoming budget.

What the Government of Canada can do in the upcoming budget:

18. For the first and all following budgets of the Government of Canada, make gender equity based analysis mandatory within all budget planning and implementation, as recommended by the current *Canadian Federal Plan for Gender Equality* and the UN international agreement under CEDAW, the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*.
19. Provide a minimum of \$100 million dollars to support community-based women's shelters, sexual assault centres and women's centres across Canada to support work to both intervene and to end violence against all women, whether in the home, community or workplace.
20. Through increased funding to the Status of Women Canada, provide increased funding on a core funding basis to women's equity-seeking organizations across Canada working on systemic, political and legislative issues.

Conclusion

The pre-budget consultation requests that we suggest areas for cuts in spending to cover any requests for additional funding. We would suggest that it is the responsibility of the Government of Canada to honour its *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, including the

¹⁷ Women In Canada: A Gender Based Statistical Report. Statistics Canada. March 2006. Catalog No. 89-503-XIE.

¹⁸ Letter to the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action. January 18, 2006. http://www.fafia-afai.org/images/Conservative_response_Jan182006.pdf

rights contained in Sections 7 and 15, and to honour its international agreements with active government resource support. We know that this government can provide the necessary funds if violence against women is a priority for action. It is a question of values.

In the spirit of the government's invitation to provide input, however, we would respectfully make these contributions to the budgeting decision dilemma facing the Government of Canada:

- Abandon plans for tax cuts until the needs of all vulnerable Canadians for food, shelter, basic needs, equity of result for all Canadians seeking equality and freedom from violence in all its forms has occurred.
- Reduce spending on military conflict operations, such as those in the Middle East.
- Use the surplus that has accumulated under previous government management.

We are pleased to provide this submission to the Government of Canada pre-budget process and urge you to implement the recommendations made here in the upcoming budget year. In your budgetary decisions, consider the needs of the most vulnerable women and children you have pledged to represent. Please make the difference we know you can make this year.

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eileen Morrow", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Eileen Morrow, Coordinator
Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH)

April 19, 2006

Summary of OAITH Recommendations to the Government of Canada

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4. Raise minimum wage to \$10 per hour, indexed to cost of living.
5. Expand eligibility for Employment Insurance for unemployed workers.
6. Move aggressively to advance pay and employment equity within all employment sectors.
7. Step up any current efforts to build affordable housing.
8. Make a commitment in the upcoming budget to dedicate 1% of this budget and each future budget to building housing for low-income families until all Canadians have safe, affordable housing.
9. Honour the agreements made with provinces and territories to begin the development of early learning and child care services. Confirm that provinces and territories will receive multi-year funding of at least \$1.2 billion annually, specifically tied to building a high quality, accessible and inclusive, affordable, community-based child care system.
10. Create national standards that restrict funds transferred to the provinces to funding of non-profit child care services. Profit-making on the care of children who need safe places to be while their parents work is an inappropriate use of public funds.
11. Increase legal aid funding transfers to provinces with specific direction to use these funds only to: a) increase legal aid supports for individuals within an equity framework, b) reverse restrictions on legal aid eligibility and c) increase matters for which legal aid is provided.
12. Provide a \$5 million allocation to the Sisters in Spirit initiatives. The previous Liberal government provided \$5 million of a requested \$10 million to the Sisters in Spirit Campaign. In order to adequately fund this critical work, the upcoming federal budget should include the additional \$5 million not provided by the Liberals.
13. Designate significant additional funding for Aboriginal women's services, controlled by Aboriginal women, across the country and provide ongoing adequate core funding for the work of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women's advocacy groups, and that of women of non-status and urban Aboriginal communities.
14. Provide funds to support an Aboriginal anti-poverty strategy that provides for the inclusion and support of Aboriginal women's representatives, as outlined by NWAC to the Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable of 2004.

15. Provide resources in the upcoming budget to fund a national strategy for addressing racism in Canada which includes adherence to international agreements such as the UN *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* and the UN *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, which outline Canada's gaps in this area and provide direction for Canada on actions the Government of Canada must take.
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18. For the first and all following budgets of the Government of Canada, make gender equity based analysis mandatory within all budget planning and implementation, as recommended by the current *Canadian Federal Plan for Gender Equality* and the UN international agreement under CEDAW, the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*.
19. Provide a minimum of \$100 million dollars to support community-based women's shelters, sexual assault centres and women's centres across Canada to support work to both intervene and to end violence against all women, whether in the home, community or workplace.
20. Through increased funding to the Status of Women Canada, provide increased funding on a core funding basis to women's equity-seeking organizations across Canada working on systemic, political and legislative issues.