



## GENDER EQUALITY & THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

In 1970, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) inquired into and reported upon steps that might be taken to ensure women had opportunities equal to men in all aspects of Canadian society. This blueprint for government action—and feminist activism—was the first success of the second wave of Canadian feminism and a watershed in Canadian history. The year 2020 is the fiftieth anniversary of the RCSW. It is now both timely and necessary to renew Canada's commitment to the status of women for generations yet to come.

### What was done?

#### The RCSW:

- **Aimed to enable women to realize their full potential** through rights outlined in the United Nations' human rights framework and Canada's rights commitments in international agreements.
- **Collected information about the conditions of women's lives**, including those that increased risk of poverty and insecurity.
- **Engaged the public using new channels of communication** (radio hotline, brochures in libraries and supermarkets, televised public hearings, informal focus groups, and workshops).
- **Set a direction for gender equality.**
- **Amplified women's voices** as individuals and as members of organizations, professional associations, and unions.
- **Made 167 recommendations**, identifying possible ways to implement some of them.
- **Worked with a small budget and short timeline that limited research into how many issues affected women's quality of life**, including access to birth control, citizenship, economic status, education, family life, immigration, law, poverty, public participation, taxation, and work. (Accounts of discrimination, harassment, and violence were set aside as "personal stories" outside of their mandate.)

### Why does women's status, equality, and gender justice matter?

Although most RCSW recommendations were implemented in full or in part—and there have been improvements in the conditions of some women's lives over the last fifty years—inequalities remain. Amongst other issues, insufficient care and attention has been paid to the dreams of and opportunities available to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women. Women in general remain underrepresented in political arenas, on public and corporate boards, in job sectors including arts and culture, innovation, science and technology, and in universities and national honours. Promoting gender parity (equal numbers of men and women) among political candidates and representatives is one step towards equality. However, further work is needed to include visible minority and Indigenous women in public offices and publicly-funded agencies.

Some key RCSW recommendations were never implemented, including Recommendation 137 for a national child care program. The lack of a national care program—which today would include paid and unpaid care work, care of adults and seniors, respite care, flexible care, and child care—affects women's access to education, work, and resulting benefits like economic security and improved health outcomes. Paid care work, often done by racialized women, and unpaid care work would benefit from policies informed by the extensive analysis performed by feminist scholars since the 1970s.

Canada has endorsed rights that enable women's equality and gender justice but has not fully supported these rights through policies and programs. An affordable housing program and equal pay policies would support economic security for



# Policy4Women

Public space, public engagement

all but have not been achieved. Campaigns such as [#IBelieveYou](#), [#MeToo](#), [#moiaussi](#), and [le Comité des 12 jours d'action](#) educate the public about the need to end sexual harassment and violence against women, as human security is necessary in a truly free and democratic society. However, public institutions have much more to do in terms of cultural change, law enforcement, and support for survivors of violence. Issues such as citizenship status, access to entitlement programs, guaranteed annual income, and implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also invite conversations

about new or underdeveloped gender equality rights.

**A new round of inquiry and legislative change is now crucial.** Intersectional gender-based analysis that considers how social factors such as ability, age, gender, gender expression, race, and sexual orientation impact access to rights and opportunities will be necessary to understand the root causes of gender injustice. For example, experience has shown that when women who commit crimes due to poverty (especially racialized women) are provided access to social programs it empowers and helps them maintain dignity and avoids need for imprisonment.

## Gender justice policy debates MUST consider:

- Gender equality in all arenas.
- Who is primarily served by the policy (all women or specific populations)?
- Which social factors are most relevant?
- Assumptions about gender justice, why it is needed, and how it contributes to a sustainable future.

## What can governments do?

### Who is responsible?

Municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal governments are responsible for gender equality in all government activities, including ensuring everyone has access to health and care programs, economic security, employment, pay equity, and safety.

The federal government is also responsible for laws and programming designed around gender justice for First Nations, immigrants, military families, and refugees. It funds public services, models behaviour (such as in negotiations with its own employees), makes laws and regulations, and coordinates gender justice initiatives with other levels of government.

### What can be done?

**A Gender Equality Plan should be produced by the federal government by 2020**, as called for by the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. An intentionally

feminist approach to action in areas such as climate change, elections, foreign policy, and free trade would enable Canada to meet commitments to gender-based analysis under our international agreements.

Gender equality measures will create a more level playing field and contribute to establishing good relationships among all people in Canada. This approach would also advance a core principle in Canada's Treaties with First Nations: that good relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, Canadian governments, and our environment are necessary to achieving good lives for ourselves, our families, and future generations.

## A Canadian Gender Justice Agenda would:

- contribute to a Gender Equality Plan by 2020;
- build capacity for a free and democratic society characterized by inclusion, justice, and fairness in all our interactions; and,
- actualize gender justice by 2070.

Bird, Florence. (1974). *Anne Francis: An Autobiography*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co.  
 Black, Naomi. (1993). The Canadian Women's Movement: The Second Wave. In *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, (2nd ed). Eds. Lorraine Code, Sandra Burt & Lindsay Dorney. 155-177. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.  
 Elliot, Trisha. (2017). Interview with Kim Pate. In *The United Church Observer*, Sep 2017. Retrieved from [www.ucobserver.org/interviews/2017/09/interview\\_kim\\_pate/](http://www.ucobserver.org/interviews/2017/09/interview_kim_pate/)

Royal Commission on the Status of Women. (1970). *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer.  
 Timpson, Annis May. (2001). *Driven Apart: Women's Employment Equality and Child Care in Canadian Public Policy*. Vancouver: UBC Press.  
 Vickers, J., Rankin, P. & Appelle, C. (1995). *Politics As If Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.