



OFFICIAL STATEMENT OF VANCOUVER STATUS OF WOMEN TO COMMEMORATE THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

*"To be strong in the face of oppression is not the same as overcoming oppression.
Endurance is not to be confused with transformation." - bell hooks*

March 8th, 2011 marks the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. Across the globe, nearly 100 countries will be honouring mothers and grandmothers, aunts and sisters, wives, lovers and friends. In the city of Vancouver, there will be a parade. There will be dancing. And why not? Over the past century, Canadian women have acquired the right to vote, to be educated, to be paid for their work, to love who they want, to control (to a degree) their reproduction and protect their bodies. They have earned the right to live free of violence, the right to run for office, the right to pursue their happiness. There is a popular opinion that the feminist movement is no longer necessary. Our goals have been accomplished; men and women are "equal." In honour of 100 years of International Women's Day, Vancouver Status of Women asks:

How close are we really to achieving gender equality?

A recent report from the United Nations documents the "systemic erosion" of women's status in Canada - dropping in the gender gap index from 14th position in 2006 to 25th in 2009. In 2006, the Canadian government cut \$5 million from the budget of Status of Women Canada, closed twelve of their sixteen offices, and imposed a ban on federally funded advocacy work for women's equality. This same year saw the cancellation of Court Challenges Program, a legal service that previously led to such rulings as women's right to maternity benefits, the right of victims not to have their sexual history discussed in sexual assault cases, and the rejection of "implied consent" as a legal concept. The Canadian government recently cancelled the National Child Care Plan, despite its being named "the ramp to women's equality," by the Feminist Alliance for International Action. In 2008, our leaders attempted to take away women's right to appeal for pay equity to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, and in 2010, denied funding to Sisters in Spirit, the groundbreaking human rights organization that shed light on the appalling and systemic disappearance and murder of hundreds of indigenous women in Canada.

The situation across Canada is nowhere more apparent than in the province of British Columbia. In 2008, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UN CEDAW) recommended that Canada address violence and poverty for its most vulnerable members, including aboriginal women, women with disabilities, and single mothers. In 2010, the B.C. CEDAW Group reported that B.C. had failed to meet international women's rights standards, and has not addressed the UN's concerns. In fact, the situation has become more critical.

British Columbia has the lowest minimum wage, coupled with the highest cost of living in all the provinces, and a growing housing crisis which puts at-risk women in an even more vulnerable situation. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reports British Columbia as having the highest child poverty rate nationally, as well as the highest number of missing and murdered indigenous women. At this time in the city of Vancouver, 40% of single mothers and 73% of indigenous single mothers live below the poverty line. Meanwhile, the government of B.C. has been busy cutting 100% of the core funding to 37 provincial women's centres, as well as restricting legal aid for family law, the service most commonly accessed by women. While numerous women's centres and support programs - such as the Kelowna Women's Centre and My Sister's Closet - close due to funding losses, women continue to go missing from the Downtown Eastside, to earn 70% of what men earn for comparable work, to be under-represented in the government and media, and to be grossly over-represented as victims of violence and sexual assault.

Let us come together on Tuesday March 8th, and celebrate the great strides that women have made, and are making all over the world. But let us not forget - let us never forget - how far we still have to go. It is vital to continue working toward women's self-determination by supporting the efforts of equality-seeking organizations such as Vancouver Status of Women. It is time to refocus our attention on maintaining support, especially since our organization and others like it continue to experience a loss of operating funds. The cooperation and collaboration of B.C.'s women's organizations has never been more crucial than at this moment; we must stand together and have our voices heard. **No more cuts to social programs. No more stolen sisters. A living wage for mothers and their families. Equal rights for queer and trans women, and the two-spirited. Affordable housing and child care. Dignity. Safety. Community. Justice.**

And hope, in spite of everything. Always, and above all.

"Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."

-Arundhati Roy

