**Canada’s engagement on advancing women’s representation and leadership**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the work of Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council and their efforts to advance gender equality and gender-balanced representation in support of the Secretary-General’s system-wide strategy on gender parity across the UN system, and recognizing the practices of Members to advance gender representation and gender-responsive institutions in their country.

Canada is a strong supporter of all efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and the work of the Council to take the measures needed to remove barriers for all women at all levels of human rights organs, treaty bodies and advisory committees.

Advancing gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls, and the fulfilment of their rights are key Canadian priorities, both at home and abroad. Canada prioritizes the full and equal participation of women and girls in all aspects of social, economic and political life.

The Government of Canada is working to increase the number of women in leadership and decision-making roles, including increasing women’s representation on corporate boards and in politics. Progress has also been made to improve work-life balance in the House of Commons, including scheduling votes after Question Period instead of in the evenings, legislation that enables the House of Commons and the Senate to provide maternity and parental leave for Parliamentarians, introducing a code of conduct on sexual harassment that includes an official complaint resolution process to prevent and deal with cases of sexual harassment. The Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) published a report in spring 2019 entitled, [*Elect Her: A roadmap for improving the representation of women in Canadian politics*](https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/FEWO/Reports/RP10366034/feworp14/feworp14-e.pdf)*.[[1]](#footnote-1)* This report offered recommendations to provide possible solutions to the barriers women face in electoral politics.

The Government of Canada supports projects and initiatives that strengthen the participation of women in politics, including:

* Support for Women's Empowerment: Over $13.9M in funding for 30 projects to promote and enhance women's participation in civic and political life by addressing barriers, as well as to strengthen the voices of Indigenous women in their communities.
* Funding to Advance Gender Equality: Over $18M in funding for 50 projects that engage some 150 women in leadership positions from across the country to advance gender equality locally and as part of a Pan-Canadian network.
* Equal Voice: $3.8M in funding was announced in October 2018 for a project to empower the next generation of women leaders, and increase women's participation in politics with a view to creating more gender-balanced governments.
* In May 2018, WAGE launched the Indigenous Women’s Circle (the Circle) in support of addressing systemic inequalities that disproportionately impact Indigenous women and girls, including in relation to leadership roles.
* Additional information on Canadian initiatives to increase women in leadership and decision-making roles can be found in [Canada’s Beijing+25 National Review](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/ENG_Beijing_25-Canada_National_Review_Report-FinalEng.pdf).[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Participation, Accountability and Gender-Responsive Institutions**

Women in Canada are consistently gaining ground in terms of elected representation at the federal level, to an all-time high of 29 per cent in the 43rd Parliament, an increase of 3% since the 2015 election. In 2015, the federal government appointed the first gender- balanced federal Cabinet. In 2019, the 43rd Canadian Parliament once again set a record number of women Members of Parliament from diverse backgrounds, with 98 women elected to the 338-member House of Commons of Canada. Canada is also approaching its first ever gender-balanced House of the Senate, currently represented by 48 women from a total of 98 sitting senators.

As of July 18, 2019, the Government has concluded over 1,280 appointments to administrative tribunals, agencies, boards, commissions, international organizations, and Crown corporations according to these standards. Of those appointees, over 53% identify as women. Progress has been slower in the private sector, where women account for 32% of senior management occupations in 2019.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Canadian Board Diversity Council’s 2018 Report Card indicates that women hold 24.5% of FP500 board seats, an increase from 2015 when women held approximately 20%.[[4]](#footnote-4)

***Governor in Council (GIC) Appointments***

The federal government is committed to open and transparent processes for selecting Governor in Council (GIC) appointees. This helps strengthen trust in Canada’s democracy and ensure the integrity of its public institutions. GIC appointments are those made by the Governor in Council - the Governor General acting on the advice of Cabinet. GICs range from heads of agencies and chief executive officers of Crown corporations to members of quasi-judicial tribunals. In February 2016, the Government of Canada established a new merit-based, open, and transparent approach to selecting candidates for some 4,000 GIC and Ministerial appointments on commissions, boards, Crown corporations, agencies, and tribunals across the country. The federal government’s efforts to increase the representation of women in positions of leadership in the public sector is important to advancing gender parity and social diversity in senior leadership roles.

***Public Life and Decision-Making***

*Legislative Support*

The Government of Canada is committed to increasing the representation of women in positions of leadership in the public and private sector. In May 2018, it made amendments to the *Canada Business Corporations Act* (CBCA), [[5]](#footnote-5) requiring federally- incorporated, publicly traded corporations to disclose information relating to diversity to their shareholders. The prescribed corporations will soon be required to include in their disclosures information regarding the representation of women, Indigenous people, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities on their boards of directors and senior management teams, as well as their policies for promoting diversity. If no such policies exist, the corporations must explain why this is the case. These amendments aim to advance gender equality and diversity in Canada’s boardrooms.

*Federal Investments*

In October 2018, the Government of Canada announced funding for Equal Voice, a national organization dedicated to increasing the number of elected women to all orders of government. Funding supports their 36-month project *Daughters of the Vote*, which aims to empower the next generation of women leaders, and increase women's participation in politics with a view to creating more gender-balanced governments.

The federal government has also provided funding to the *Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)* for a project to develop a national strategy to address barriers that impede women’s active political participation and to help attain greater gender parity on municipal councils across the country.[[6]](#footnote-6)

*Increasing Indigenous Representation*

The federal government created the Indigenous Women's Circle to offer guidance and expertise, and inform its work in addressing the systemic inequalities experienced by Indigenous women, including in relation to leadership roles. The Indigenous Women’s Circle provides an opportunity for the federal government to consult with leaders in Indigenous communities on the challenges they face and their priorities for the Government of Canada related to advancing gender equality. It also provides an opportunity to learn from successful Indigenous-led activities. Members of the Circle come from a broad range of sectors and include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth and Elders, with representation coming from all parts of the country.

*Improving the Judicial Appointments Process*

The federal government is also committed to increasing gender equality and the representation of women and underrepresented groups in the judicial system. Changes to the superior courts judicial appointments process aim to increase the openness, transparency, accountability, and diversity of Canada’s judiciary. The bench is strengthened by different perspectives and experiences, which enhance the quality and impartiality of decision-making. A judiciary that reflects the diversity of Canadian society also helps to reinforce public confidence in the justice system. Between October 2016 and October 2019, the Government appointed almost 250 new judges to superior courts across Canada. Of these, 54 percent are women, 8 are Indigenous, 20 are members of visible minority communities, 10 self-identified as LGBTQ2, and 3 self-identified as persons with disabilities. During that same period, the Government appointed or elevated an additional 58 judges to superior courts, 55% of whom were women. Statistics and demographic information on judicial applicants and appointees are published by the Office of the Commissioner for Federal Judicial Affairs. [[7]](#footnote-7)

*Court Challenges Program*

In 2017, the federal government reinstated and modernized the popular Court Challenges Program to improve access to justice and hold it to account for respecting constitutional and quasi-constitutional rights. [[8]](#footnote-8) Historically, the Program has been instrumental in supporting precedent-setting cases that clarify and assert women’s constitutional equality right. The modernized Program provides funding to individuals and organizations who require financial support to bring cases of national significance related to constitutional and quasi-constitutional human rights and official language rights before the courts.[[9]](#footnote-9) It is administered by an independent third-party institution (the University of Ottawa), with funding decisions made by independent Expert panels.

*Modernizing Federal Labour Standards*

The Government of Canada passed significant changes to the federal labour standards set out in Part III of the *Canada Labour Code* in 2017 and 2018.[[10]](#footnote-10) Under the new code, employees in the federally regulated private sector have the right to request flexible work arrangements, such as flexible start and finish times and the ability to work from home. The changes also grant access to a new five-day personal leave, of which three days are paid, which employees can take for family responsibilities, personal illness, injury or emergencies, or to attend their citizenship ceremony. These measures will especially benefit female employees who traditionally bear a disproportionate share of caregiving responsibilities, compared to men.

Through these amendments, federally regulated employers will be required to give employees predictable scheduling; eliminate the minimum length of service requirements for a number of protections and benefits, including maternity and parental leave; expand sick leave to include medical appointments; provide unpaid nursing breaks for employees who nurse or express breast milk; and eliminate unpaid internships in federally regulated sectors, where they are not part of a formal educational program. Once the necessary regulations have been drafted and outreach to the relevant employers and employees has been completed, these changes are expected to become law in 2019, once the necessary regulations have been drafted and outreach to the relevant employers and employees has been completed.

These amendments also include: extending the maximum length of parental leave to 63 weeks; creating a new leave of 17 weeks for a family member to care for a critically ill adult; requiring employers to provide employees with 96 hours advance notice of their work schedules; providing leave for Traditional Aboriginal Practices for up to five days with three days paid; giving employees the right to request overtime as time off, and to divide, interrupt, and postpone vacation leave; and repealing the requirement to establish a Commission of Inquiry before making or amending regulations relating to certain hours of work provisions. Taken together, these important amendments to federal labour standards support caregivers and promote a positive work-life balance.

*G7 Gender Equality Declaration*

With respect to technology-related violence against women in positions of political power, Canada signed the G7 Gender Equality Declaration in Paris on May 10, 2019. In it, the Ministers for Gender Equality of the G7 committed to increasing attention to address sexual and gender-based violence, abuse and harassment in digital contexts. Among other things, the Declaration encourages partnerships between social media platforms and specialized civil society organizations to collaborate on solutions. While the Government does not currently have in place specific campaigns or programs to address the media treatment of women in politics, a number of initiatives exist to help prevent and address technology-facilitated GBV. For instance, in February 2019, Women and Gender Equality Canada and the Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence partnered with the Public Policy Forum, Telus, Equal Voice and Informed Opinions to hold a roundtable on “Finding Solutions to Cyber Harassment Aimed at Women in Political Life.” The event brought together current and former politicians, and Canadian and international experts representing law enforcement, academia, government and civil society to discuss solutions to this issue. A report with recommendations called Online Culture Shift was released in August 2019.

*Conclusion*

As part of Canada’s commitment to gender equality, Canadian women continue to gain ground in terms of representation at the highest levels of economic and political life. Canada believes that advancing women's leadership and political participation helps transform attitudes toward women in society and in the home, and their presence in politics and government also leads to better decision making. Having women and girls as full participants in public life, in the business world and in government leads to better decision making that improves the quality of life for all citizens. While some good practices have emerged, Canada recognizes that more work needs to be done to advance gender-parity oriented policies and programs that contributes to the advancement of women in all social, political and economic life, and this report outlines some best practices that may merit further consideration.

1. House of Commons. 2019. Elect Her: A roadmap for improving the representation of women in Canadian politics. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/FEWO/Reports/RP10366034/feworp14/feworp14-e.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Women and Gender Equality Canada. 2019. *Beijing+25 Canadian National Review*. Online: <https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/ENG_Beijing_25-Canada_National_Review_Report-FinalEng.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Statistics Canada. 2019. Annual labour force characteristics by occupation: Table 14-10-0335-01. Online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410033501> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Canada Board Diversity Council. 2018. *Annual Report Card: Advancing Diverse Leadership on Canada’s Corporate boards*. Online: <http://phasenyne.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ARC-Annual-Report-Card-2018.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See: <http://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-25/royal-assent> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See: <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/new-federal-investment-will-help-more-women-run-for-elected-office-699689221.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See: <http://www.fja.gc.ca/appointments-nominations/StatisticsCandidate-StatistiquesCandidat-eng.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See: <https://pcjccp.ca/>; <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/court-challenges-program.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See: <https://pcjccp.ca/>; <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/court-challenges-program.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2018/10/backgrounder-modernizing-labour-standards.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)