April 3, 2014

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., MP

Prime Minister of Canada

80 Wellington Street

Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

We, the undersigned organizations, welcome the Government of Canada’s participation in the 58th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which took place in New York, March 10 – 21st 2014 under the theme ‘addressing challenges and achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).’ We take this opportunity to recognize positive contributions made by governments, including Canada, during CSW58, and highlight ways in which the Government of Canada can work to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment through the implementation of its outcomes.

Given the theme of CSW58, governments acknowledged that the MDGs furthest from being achieved are those focused on women and girls—particularly on achieving gender equality and improving maternal health. With the MDGs set to expire in 2015, the Commission's outcome document will help shape priorities for the next global development framework.

The CSW58 outcome calls for prioritization of gender equality and the human rights of women to achieve sustainable development and a stand-alone goal on gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda. This recognizes that sustainable and meaningful development must address the root causes of gender inequality, which deny women and girls education, the right to make decisions about their bodies and childbearing, to decent employment—and equal pay for work of equal value — and to live free of violence.

The outcome reaffirms the Cairo Programme of Action as well as the Beijing Platform of Action (PfA), which called for investments in quality comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care including emergency contraception, information and education, safe abortion, and prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections and HIV. It also called on governments to address the discriminatory social norms and practices that foster gender inequality, including early and forced marriage and other forms of violence against women and girls, and to strengthen accountability mechanisms for women’s human rights.

Developed countries are also urged in the outcome document to maximize and prioritize investments in gender equality, the empowerment of women and the realization of women’s and girls’ human rights through Official Development Assistance.

In implementing outcomes from the CSW, we call on the Government of Canada to:

1. Take a leadership stance on, and encourage other states to **support a** **stand-alone goal on gender equality**, **and the integration of gender equality into targets and indicators** **of all new goals,** especially those related to education, health, economic justice, and the environment, of the new development framework.
2. **Take into account the views of women’s, youth and other relevant civil society organizations in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda**, including participating in the upcoming 47th session of the Commission on Population and Development with the full and effective participation of Canadian civil society organizations, including through holding consultations, and the inclusion of women’s and sexual and reproductive rights advocates on the Canadian delegation.
3. **Meaningfully engage in the review of the 20 year anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and PfA** by:
   1. Meaningfully engaging indigenous women, youth, women human rights defenders, and other civil society organizations in the review process, specifically through their inclusion on the Canadian delegation for the full 59th session of the CSW in 2015, and establishing a civil society advisory committee for the duration of the review process,
   2. Undertaking a comprehensive national review of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and PfA, and
   3. Participating in the regional Beijing Declaration and PfA review meeting.

The health, well-being and empowerment of women and girls in Canada, and around the world, rely on the Government of Canada to be a leader on gender equality. As a leader, the **Government** **of Canada** **must respect, protect and fulfil the full range of human rights of women and girls, at home and abroad, recognize the essential role of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in sustainable development and national prosperity, and as important in and of themselves, and make these a priority for government investment.**

Sincerely,

The undersigned organizations & women’s human rights defenders:

1. Action Canada for Population and Development
2. Amnesty International Canada (English)
3. Amnistie Internationale Canada (Francophone)
4. Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI)
5. Canadian Council for International Co-Operation
6. Canadian Federation for Sexual Health
7. Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions
8. Canadian Federation of University Women
9. Canadians for Choice
10. Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network / Réseau juridique canadien VIH/sida
11. Canadian Labour Congress
12. Canadian Teachers’ Federation
13. CECI – Centre d’étude et de coopération internationale / Centre for International Studies and Cooperation
14. Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women
15. Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW-ICREF)
16. FAFIA – Feminist Alliance for International Action
17. Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)
18. Grandmothers Advocacy Network (GRAN)
19. Inter Pares
20. Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD)/Coalition interagence sida et développement (CISD)
21. Institute for International Women's Rights - Manitoba
22. Institute for International Women's Rights at the University of Winnipeg Global College
23. Laurentian University Staff Union (LUSU)
24. L’Oeuvre Léger
25. MATCH International Women’s Fund
26. McLeod Group
27. National Council of Women of Canada
28. Oxfam Canada
29. St. John's Status of Women Council, St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador
30. Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)
31. Yukon Status of Women Council
32. YWCA Canada

CC Christian Paradis, PC, MP

Minister of International Development

CC Kellie Leitch, PC, MP

Minister of Status of Women

CC Niki Ashton, NPD, MP

NDP Status of Women Critic

CC Hélène Laverdière, NPD, MP

NDP International Development Critic

CC Kirsty Duncan, Liberal, MP

Liberal International Development and Status of Women Critic