

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



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**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Women and Work Seminar for Chairpersons and
Members of Parliamentary Bodies Dealing with Gender
Equality and other Committees
Addressing Labour Issues**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**Geneva, Switzerland
December 6, 7 and 8, 2007**

Report

Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the Women and Work Seminar for Chairpersons and Members of Parliamentary Bodies Dealing with Gender Equality and other Committees Addressing Labour Issues

Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and International Labour Organization

1. Background

The “Women and Work” seminar for chairpersons and members of parliamentary bodies dealing with gender equality and other committees addressing labour issues was organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Prior to this seminar on “Women and Work”, a seminar on “The Role of parliamentary committees in mainstreaming gender and promoting the status of women” was held in 2006.

2. Theme and Agenda for the Women and Work Seminar

The “Women and Work” seminar took place on the 6, 7 and 8 December 2007 at the ILO Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. At the seminar, parliamentarians examined and discussed women’s participation in the labour market with a focus on improving women’s economic opportunities. They also addressed the issue of women’s discrimination and the challenges in combating old and new forms of discrimination. Parliamentarians were provided with an opportunity to exchange views and experiences with colleagues in other parliaments and to interact with experts and representatives of international organisations.

The Programme for the 2007 Women and Work encompassed the following topics:

- Keynote address: Women and work – key trends and challenges
- Changing patterns of work in a global context
- Old and new forms of discrimination at work
- Enhancing women’s economic opportunities or economic independence
 - women entrepreneurship
 - reconciling family and work
- Enhancing women’s security at work
 - access to social protection
 - reducing risks and vulnerabilities
- Strategies for the future and Lessons Learned

3. The Canadian Delegation

More than 100 members of national parliaments representing over 40 countries took part in the 2007 Women and Work seminar, including three parliamentarians from Canada:

- Ms. Yasmin Ratansi, M.P.
- Mr. Bruce Stanton, M.P.
- Ms. Nicole Demers, M.P.

In addition to the above-noted parliamentarians, the Honourable Sharon Carstairs, Senator, made a presentation at the seminar on the topic of 'Changing patterns of work in a global context.'

4. Welcome remarks

The Chair of the Meeting, Ms. Monica Xavier, M.P. from Uruguay and President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women MPs, welcomed the Parliamentarians to the Seminar.

Introductory statements were made by Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General, Inter-Parliamentary Union and Mr. Assane Diop, Executive Director, Social Protection, International Labour Organization. Mr. Johnsson discussed the role of the IPU in facilitating the work of Parliamentarians particularly with respect to addressing gender. Mr. Diop discussed the changing context of work for women and provided an overview of the ILO's decent work agenda.

5. Keynote address - Women and work – key trends and challenges

Ms. Nouzha Skalli, Minister of Social Development, Family and Solidarity (Morocco) gave a keynote address on developments that have been made in advancing women's equality in Morocco. She also discussed the barriers women face in achieving equality particularly in the area of political representation.

6. Changing patterns of work in a global context

During the morning and afternoon sessions, parliamentarians heard from several experts and representatives from international organisations on trends in women's and men's participation in the labour market and their implications for gender equality within the global context. They also heard from fellow parliamentarians who discussed changing patterns of work in their respective countries.

During the morning session, Dr. Stephanie Ware Barrientos, Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester, discussed the global dimension with a focus on the feminisation in the global economy and the state of global production networks. She addressed the challenges that women workers face and the importance of promoting women's rights in global production. Dr. Nedal Mohammed al Tenaiji, MP, Federal National Council (United Arab Emirates), provided an overview of initiatives and policies that are being undertaken in the United Arab Emirates.

A plenary debate ensued with questions posed by several participants, including members of the Canadian delegation. Ms. Ratansi asked two questions. The first question pertained to the role of civil society in ensuring that corporate conglomerates comply with good working standards. In response, Dr. Barrientos noted that globalisation has led to new opportunities for creating alliances at the local, national and international level. She also mentioned that because of civil society pressure, an Ethical Training Initiative Programme was created that assists business employees in implementing codes of practice that cover supply chain labour conditions.

The second question that Ms. Ratansi asked related to the United Arab Emirates' policies towards foreign workers and their protection from harmful working conditions. In response, Dr. al Teaniji stated that the U.A.E. is committed to international labour standards and to the commitments made under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

During the afternoon session, participants heard from Mr. Jon Messenger, Senior Research Officer, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, ILO. Mr. Messenger discussed the changes occurring in the global workforce particularly with women increasingly becoming part of the paid workforce. He also elaborated on several trends such as the increase in income inequality despite the decrease in the gender wage gap and the longer work week that workers experience worldwide. Mr. Messenger recommended that policies that improve women's working conditions should be considered in an integrated manner that takes into account women's family responsibilities. After Mr. Messenger's presentation, the Honourable Sharon Carstairs, Senator, discussed the status of women in Canada by reflecting on her own experience.

A plenary debate ensued with questions posed by several participants including the Canadian delegation. Mr. Stanton asked Mr. Messenger to elaborate on how countries were addressing women's unpaid work. In response, Mr. Messenger pointed to the ILO Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175). The Convention discusses improving the working conditions of part-time workers since women work part-time in order to fulfill their family responsibilities. He also noted that Netherlands has laws in place that facilitate the movement from part-time to full-time employment. He cited Sweden's parental leave program that is dedicated to fathers as an example of ensuring parental duties are shared by both parents.

7. Old and new forms of discrimination at work

At the last session of the day, parliamentarians heard from two experts on the topic of old and new discrimination at work affecting women. Ms. Manuela Tomei, Chief, Conditions of Work and Employment Branch, ILO, and Ms. Mary Cornish, Chair of Ontario's Equal Pay Coalition presented on the persistence of long-recognized forms of discrimination against women and the emergence of new and multiple forms in today's global economy. They also addressed the challenges in combating these forms of discrimination. A plenary debate ensued with questions posed by several participants including the Canadian delegation. Ms. Nicole Demers asked the presenters to discuss how access to the judicial system can be facilitated for people who suffer from discrimination. Ms. Cornish responded by explaining that facilitating the access to the justice system has to occur at many levels. She noted that there exists a lack of

knowledge of the current laws that protect against discriminatory practices and that there is a need to sensitize and inform the population about these laws.

8. Enhancing women's economic opportunities or economic independence

On the second day of the seminar two panels presented on the theme of women's economic opportunities.

Panel 1: Women entrepreneurship

Panel 2: Reconciling family and work

Panel 1: Women entrepreneurship

The panelists made presentations on supporting women entrepreneurship and women's economic autonomy. Ms. Jyoti Tuladhar, Senior Gender Specialist, Bureau for Gender Equality, ILO, discussed the ILO's program known as Women Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality (WEDGE). She referred to three paradigms when considering women's development: neo-liberal market paradigm, feminist empowerment paradigm and interventionist poverty alleviation paradigm. Ms. Tuladhar described the constraints that women entrepreneurs face at three levels – that of the informal and formal micro-enterprise sectors and that of the small enterprise sector. She discussed policies that need to be in place in order to address these constraints particularly those that related to women's inequalities and barriers. Dr. Fauzia Al Saleh, Member of the Shura Council, Bahrain, provided an overview of developments in Bahrain. Ms. Jalia Bintu Abwoili Lukumu, Member of Parliament, Chairperson of the Committee on Equal Opportunities, Uganda, shared with parliamentarians the developments taking place in Uganda.

After the presentations, a plenary debate ensued and participants asked several questions. Ms. Ratansi asked a question related to providing economic security for women given the tendencies to relax labour laws and to move towards a neoliberal market economy. In response, Ms. Tuladhar pointed out that the ILO believes in socially equitable growth. At the same time, the ILO is struggling to find a balance between economic efficiency on the one hand and socially equitable growth on the other.

Panel 2: Reconciling family and work

The presenters, Ms. Naomi Cassirer, Senior Technical Officer, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, ILO, Ms. Marieke Koning, Equality Officer, Equality Department, International Trade Union Confederation and Raquel Gonzalez, Assistant Director, Geneva Office, International Trade Union Confederation, and Mr. Carlos Recondo, Member of the Chamber of Deputies (Chile), discussed the growing work-family tensions stemming from the intensification of labour, demographic changes and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The panelists provided the participants with concrete examples of how these tensions are being addressed. A plenary debate ensued with questions posed by several participants.

9. Enhancing women's security at work

Two panels presented on enhancing women's security at work during the afternoon session.

Panel 3: Access to social protection

Panel 4: Reducing risks and vulnerabilities

Panel 3: Access to social protection

The members of the panel, Ms Shahra Razavi, Research Co-ordinator, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, (UNRISD), Mrs Desirée Pethrus Engström, Member of the Labour Committee, Parliament of Sweden, Ms Sylvia Beales, Policy Manager, Helpage International, Ms Renana Jhabwala, President of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) discussed strategies and experiences aimed at increasing women's access to social protection, including maternity protection and health care. It will also address the implications of ageing for women.

A plenary debate ensued with questions posed by several participants including the Canadian delegation. Mr. Stanton asked Mrs Engström to comment on the phenomenon whereby Danish workers are opting to work in countries that have lower income tax rates despite the comprehensive social and work-life balance supports that are available to them. Mrs Engström discussed the current policies that are in place and the demographic challenges facing Sweden. She agreed that Sweden has one of the highest tax rates. At the same time, she pointed out that Sweden is implementing new incentives for workers by taxing them less.

Panel 4: Reducing risks and vulnerabilities

The panelists, Ms. Pramila Patten, Member of the UN CEDAW Committee, Ms. Eve Bazaiba Masudi, Senator, President of the Socio-Cultural Committee (Democratic Republic of the Congo), and Ms. Cristina Semidei, Parliamentary Gender Expert (Paraguay) discussed mechanisms to address discrimination, exploitation, abuse and violence at work. A plenary debate ensued with questions posed by several participants.

10. Lessons Learned and Strategies for the future

The final day of the seminar focused on discussing the lessons learned, identifying priorities for the parliamentary committees and mechanisms to support progress, and developing future strategies.

The panelists, Baronness Uddin, Member of the House of Lords (United Kingdom) and Ms. Yasmin Ratansi, Member of the House of Commons, Chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (Canada) discussed developments in the areas of women and work, women's political participation, and, more generally, the status of women in their respective countries and the lessons they have drawn from the seminar presentations and discussions.

During the final session, parliamentarians provided concluding remarks and recommendations for future strategies. The Canadian delegation's remarks encompassed support for women's full political, economic and societal participation and the need for facilitating this participation. The delegation recommended that a

legislative database be established. This database would provide a centralized information source for innovative legislative practices. In addition, the Canadian delegation recommended the formation of an on-line forum to facilitate continued discussions on the topics addressed during the seminar.

Appendix 1

Concluding observations by the Rapporteur, Ms. Desirée Pethrus Engström, Member of the Labour Committee, Parliament of Sweden

We have come together these past two and a half days to discuss and exchange experiences on women and work. Our objective has been to identify key priority areas for action and parliamentary initiatives and strategies to achieve equality between men and women on the labour market.

We would like to recall that gender equality is at the core of development and a condition for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Empowering women on the labour market is therefore instrumental.

Our discussions began by taking stock of recent trends related to women and work. The past two decades have seen a massive influx of women in the labour force, although there are significant variations from one region to another. Despite important progress in women's education and access to decision-making positions, their status on the labour market is not commensurate with their educational achievements and work experience.

Women continue to face numerous challenges in accessing the labour market. More often than not they obtain jobs that are of a lesser quality than men's, they are discriminated against in the workplace, they experience poor working conditions and job insecurity, and they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The difficult environment in which they work often results in less security in their post-professional life.

There is no single solution to address these challenges and reach the objective of equality at work. Rather, there are a variety of approaches, reflecting the diversity of situations and country experiences. The following is by no means an exhaustive summary of the range of experiences and detailed practices that were examined during the conference. Rather, it aims to highlight the main strategies and elements that can contribute to achieving progress.

First, we need to build a **gender-sensitive environment**. We cannot hope to address challenges related to women and work without taking into account the wider situation and the need to secure respect for women's fundamental rights in general. Women's economic empowerment cannot be achieved without tackling gender inequality.

Such an environment also needs **gender-sensitive actors**. Women should be present in all bodies, including governments, parliaments, trade unions and enterprises, not only in high numbers, but also in key decision-making positions. In this regard, IPU is called on to pursue its work in favour of a stronger participation of women in parliament.

Second, to secure and promote equality for women in the workplace, we must begin with a strong and effective **legal framework**. Developing gender-sensitive legislation is the basic foundation for which we - as parliamentarians - have responsibility. National legislation must meet the international standards and benchmarks to which our

countries are committed. It must also address national realities and serve the interests of all of our constituents, including rural women and marginalized women.

Developing adequate and gender-responsive legislation requires reliable, comprehensive, sex-disaggregated **data**. We need to build our national statistical capacities. We call on international organizations such as the ILO and the IPU to provide us with comparative research that can inform our legislative work. The creation of a database of legislation on women and work, and of best practices, in particular with regard to implementation measures, is recommended. The provision of information on general legal frameworks required would also be welcome.

Third, while legislation is necessary, it is not sufficient, as there is often a gap between de jure and de facto equality, i.e. there is a gap between legislation and its effective **implementation**. Responsibility for bridging this gap lies also with parliamentarians, as we can oversee the implementation of policies and programmes to ensure that they meet the standards and goals we have set. We must ask the difficult questions and hold governments to account. Budgets need to match the priorities set in legislation and national policies.

We must also make sure that we raise issues relating to gender equality in public debates and help forge national consensus on these issues. In addition, we must ensure that legislation is easily accessible and well understood by the people, including through sensitization and educational campaigns, translation into local languages and public debates.

Fourth, in the context of globalization, **international actors** can strongly influence countries' development agendas, without necessarily being subject to national scrutiny or having national interests as their first priority. In order to lessen possible negative effects and advance equality, we must aim for globalization processes that are inclusive and consultative. It is important to maintain open channels of communication and forge **alliances** between the various stakeholders, from the local to the international levels. This must also mean that we have to increase our own involvement in, and oversight of, the multilateral system in order to encourage better performance and accountability of international organizations.

Fifth, as parliamentarians, we must ensure that our countries are State parties to **international treaties** and texts related to gender equality and work: for instance, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; ILO Conventions on Maternity Protection (No.183), Equal Remuneration for Men and Women (No. 100), Discrimination (No.111); Workers with Family Responsibilities (No.156), and Social Security (Minimum Standards - No.102. With regard to the social partners (trade unions and employers), which are key partners in achieving progress for women in the workplace, ILO Conventions 87 and 98 are also worth mentioning. For those of our countries that are parties to these international treaties, we have an obligation as parliamentarians to monitor effective implementation at the national level, oversee government action in this field, raise awareness and sensitize citizens to their rights. We must also regularly review the validity of reservations certain parties may have made to some treaties and aim for their gradual removal.

Sixth, facilitating women's access to work begins with providing them with **education**, not only to lift them out of poverty, but also to ensure their economic empowerment and security. Education alone, however, is not sufficient to avoid employment discrimination against women. The example of declining average earnings in professions that have become "feminized" in recent years suggest that other policy measures are needed to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunities at work for both men and women.

An increasing number of women are now in the paid workforce across the world; however women still perform the vast majority of *unpaid* economic and care work. Giving visibility to **unpaid work** is therefore a priority. There is a need for recognition of women's continuing heavy burden of unpaid work in the light of their increasing participation in the paid labour force. We need to consider what the best policies are to enable women to participate in the paid workforce; we also need to develop mechanisms to include unpaid care work in the formal accounts of national economic activity.

Seventh, access to paid work for women is closely linked to the **challenge of reconciling family and work**. We must explore incentives to enable a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities between the State and families and between men and women, including paternity and parental leave entitlements, childcare arrangements, maternity protection, and investments in infrastructure and services. Implementing such policies may require sensitization and educational initiatives aimed at changing mentalities.

As parliamentarians, we also have a special responsibility to pay particular attention to our work space and its functioning, with a view to ensuring that it facilitates women's participation. Our parliaments need to be gender-sensitive and offer facilities and some flexibility to allow women MPs and women members of the secretariat to reconcile family and work obligations. The provision of certain facilities such as crèches or the limitation of late/night meetings are some initiatives that could be considered.

Reviewing working time policies is an additional need. The emergence of **new forms of employment** contracts characterized by flexibility (part-time, temporary work, self-employment) has the potential to increase female labour force participation. However, in view of the poor quality of many of these jobs, it remains important to provide terms of employment that are equivalent to those of full-time workers, particularly regarding wages, social security coverage and pensions. In addition, very long working hours also restrict time available to dedicate to family life, and efforts are necessary to reduce excessive working hours and overtime for all workers.

Eighth, for women to set up their own business and become **entrepreneurs**, several challenges must be overcome. Constraints include lack of access to credit, finance and markets; lack of access to relevant education and training; gender-blind/gender-insensitive macro-economic policies; excessive administrative procedures; lack of cultural acceptance and recognition of women as entrepreneurs and social restrictions posing problems in reconciling public and private life.

To facilitate and promote women **entrepreneurship** we need to implement targeted measures. These can include affirmative action, programmes to ensure that women

and men have equal access to resources, support and opportunities to run businesses, micro-credit facilities, and training programmes, including in ICT. It is also important to promote an entrepreneurial culture that motivates and engenders the community. For this, there needs to be an enabling legislative framework, with the possibility of tax rebates for female-led enterprises, integration of non-discriminatory clauses in all enterprise-related laws, and monitoring mechanisms.

Ninth, access to **social protection** remains a challenge. While a variety of models exist, it is important to bear in mind gender biases and gender-differentiated impacts on men and women. Social security systems based on employment entitlements and contributions, for instance, can disadvantage women who may have spent considerable proportions of their adult working years performing essentially reproductive and societal tasks without remuneration, or in part-time work. Systems requiring fees and charges at public health facilities can lead to exclusion of the poorest. Particular attention needs to be paid to the ageing population and to the informal sector, which are both most likely not to benefit from adequate social protection policies.

Tenth, the CEDAW Convention is an effective instrument to combat discrimination against women in the workplace. It provides the framework for parliamentary action to identify and regularly review discrimination in existing legislation, policies and practices, and in the work culture. The reporting mechanism to the United Nations CEDAW Committee provides opportunities for regular stock-taking: parliaments should be strongly involved in this process, in particular in the follow-up of the Committee's recommendations. Tackling discrimination requires as a priority reviewing laws with a view to removing discriminatory provisions. We wish to stress in particular the need to abolish legislation that limits or denies legal status to women.

Combating discrimination also requires building a culture of equality and tolerance, sensitization and raising awareness. Education is fundamental, and should start in the home. School curricula should also be reviewed to include education on human rights and gender equality.

Eleventh, protection of women in the workplace is another cause for concern, especially with regard to sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation. Measures and legislation must be taken to criminalize such behaviours. Efforts also need to be inclusive and cover all areas of work. Particular attention was paid to discrimination against women in the police, the military and in jails. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was invited to address this particular issue and produce a report on the subject.

Twelfth, progress will only result from the combined efforts of all stakeholders aimed at achieving equality. Political commitment, strong and sound regulatory frameworks, targeted public policies, partnerships, including with trade unions and employers, and sensitization campaigns are all important ingredients for success.

To ensure follow-up of the conference and its results, we need to take action when we get back home. We need to disseminate the results of the meeting in parliament and bring them to the attention of specialized committees. We must also make use of all possible opportunities (including celebration of international, regional and national days

for women) to draw attention to some of the issues discussed, raise awareness and trigger discussions and initiatives.

Networking among participants is also important in order to continue to support one another, share experiences, follow trends and highlight progress. Networking with other partners concerned with gender issues is also key. This can be done through electronic fora such as iKNOWpolitics (www.iKNOWpolitics.org), set up by IDEA, IPU, NDI, UNDP and UNIFEM.

Dissemination of the results of the meeting should also be ensured by the IPU and the ILO. The IPU is requested to circulate the results of the conference to all parliaments and present them at its next Assembly, to be held in Cape Town, South Africa (April 2007). A report on the conference, including presentations and highlights of the debates, should also be produced. The IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians is asked to discuss follow-up of the conference and ways of monitoring initiatives taken and progress made.

Furthermore, we request that a conference of parliamentary bodies dealing with gender equality be organized next year. We would like to suggest that a session on follow-up of our conference on *Women and Work* be included in the programme.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Q.C., Senator
President, Canadian Group IPU

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	Women and Work Seminar for Chairpersons and Members of Parliamentary Bodies Dealing with Gender Equality and other Committees Addressing Labour Issues
DESTINATION	Geneva, Switzerland
DATES	December 6 - 8, 2007
DELEGATION	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Ms. Yasmin Ratansi Mr. Bruce Stanton Ms. Nicole Demers
STAFF	Ms. Clara Morgan, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	\$15,774.82
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 2,895.59
HOSPITALITY	
PER DIEMS	\$ 3,388.36
OFFICIAL GIFTS	
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 38.09
TOTAL	\$22,096.86