



National Committee for UN Women Canada/ Comité National de l'ON Femmes
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Keynote address by : Almas Jiwani, President of National Committee of UN Women Canada
Winnipeg Chapter Launch celebrations – Glolal College, Winnipeg
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Honorable Judges, Distinguished Colleagues, and friends of National Committee for UN Women Canada. Chers Excellences, honorables invités, chers parrains d'ONU Femme et alliés.

Thank you all for joining us this evening in célébration of the launch of National Committee for UN Women in Canada. Je vous souhaite la bienvenue à cette soirée de lancement de l'ONU femmes au Canada et je vous remercie de votre présence.

My profuse thanks to our host and my friend, Marilou McPhedran. Thank you for hosting our historic launch of the Winnipeg Chapter of the National Committee for UN Women Canada. I would also like to thank Muriel Smith for her continuous guidance and mentoring us all as we move forward with the new entity. Thank you all

C'est un plaisir immense de partager cette soirée avec vous et de vous annoncer que l'établissement de l'ONU femmes est maintenant achevé.

It is a joy and honor for me to announce the official launch of the National Committee for UN Women Canada in Winnipeg.

Your presence here means a lot to me personally and to my colleagues here in Winnipeg and . Today we are engaging in historic celebrations to launch a strong voice for women in Canada and to see further progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Canada is longstanding UN partner – whether it is the Government, our National Committee, private sector companies or women's organizations with whom, UN Women have worked closely for many years. The Government of Canada has shown great leadership in supporting the work to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

It has demonstrated strong political and financial commitment to the issue and to UN Women through its active engagement in the process of creating the new entity and now through an eight-fold increase in its core contribution to UN Women this year.

This launch event is indeed timely. I am delighted to inform you that on 11 March the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon announced the appointment of Mr. John Hendra of Canada as Assistant Secretary-General for Policy and Programme at UN Women. Mr. Hendra will also serve as one of the two Deputies to the UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet. We hope that this will further strengthen our partnership with Canada.

After years of hard work, there is new, powerful global “voice,” at the UN and across Canada that will lead worldwide efforts to turn our hopes and dreams of a better world into a reality. We, the national committee for UN Women and our Winnipeg chapter are poised and ready to begin its work as a global champion for women and girls.

Nous sommes prêtes à démarrer nos activités en tant que promoteur mondial pour l'aide au progrès et à l'épanouissement des femmes et des filles.

Gender equality is not only highly important for UN Women, but it is significant for Canadians and all societies across the world. In our society today, women make up almost half the population and yet they represent the largest demographic whose potential is untapped. Under Secretary General, and UN Women Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet has also acknowledged that “women’s strength, women’s industry, women’s wisdom are humankind’s greatest untapped resource.

In recent years, the notion of gender equality and women’s empowerment has become inextricably tied and has gained immense momentum in the realm of international development. So let me start my address by raising the question that what does this phrase “Gender Equality” mean? « qu’est-ce que l’égalité des sexes? Is this phenomenon some sort of invention by intellectuals, political leaders and staff at the United Nations in recent years? No! Then you might wonder, that, what does “gender equality” stand for?

Gender equality is our pluralistic fundamental right (as women) to be at the same par as men and to participate in all and every walks of progressive existence as women. It is a state of society, when men and women are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence;

Our progress for gender equality is a thousand years old journey that women are attempting to acquire. It is an issue that has been pursued life-long by Emily Murphy of the Famous Five, Lydia Taft and Lady Madikizela Mandela (wife of Nelson Mandela) and also leaders such as The Aga Khan. It is also an issue near and dear to my heart as a international humanitarian.

L'égalité des sexes n'est pas seulement un aspect primordial pour ONU Femmes, mais elle est également déterminante pour les Canadiens et les autres sociétés dans le monde entier.

Gender equality is important because parity of the sexes in the work force results in profits and progress for countries.

The World Economic Forum (WEF), which tracks performance on gender equality measures in 134 countries, reports a clear correlation between progress in gender and GDP per capita. In addition, a recent study found that Fortune 500 companies with the highest number of women on their boards were 53-percent more profitable, than those with the fewest women board member.

Gender Equality is important on most country's agenda, yet, we have socially constructed roles, for men and women, that often thwart, the potential of girls and women, which results in discrimination

UN Women is currently working in 101 countries though its 15 sub-regional programme offices, 65 country programme offices, and project presence in 21 other countries. In addition to UN Women's role of mobilizing, coordinating and leveraging the efforts of others, UN Women will focus on five areas:

- 1) Expanding women's voice, leadership and participation;
- 2) Ending violence against women and girls — which of course is fundamental to women's empowerment — political, economic, social and personal;
- 3) Strengthening women's full participation in conflict resolution and peace processes;
- 4) Enhancing women's economic empowerment; and
- 5) Ensuring gender priorities are reflected in national plans and budgets, including capacity to support CEDAW reporting.

In 2010, we launched the Women's Empowerment Principles that were developed with the UN Global Compact as a tool for an effective and results-based partnership with the business community. To date, more than 180 companies from around the world have signed on to the Principles, and the number continues to grow.

Implementing the Principles, can make a measurable and real difference, in the lives of women and men:

In Canada, the Canadian National Committee for the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, raises UN Women's profile and promotes its work in Canada; raises funds for UN Women projects worldwide; creates awareness within the Canadian government for increased funding for UN Women projects and encourages non-governmental organizations to promote and support UN Women.

The issue of gender inequality is not an issue confined to any one group of countries or societies. It is a universal issue.

Est-ce que les femmes sont capables de transformer ce monde en un lieu plus positif pour nous tous? Oui! Cependant, pour ce faire, il faut qu'on leur donne des opportunités et il faut qu'on les inclue dans la prise des décisions.

We must convince all political actors — including ministers of finance and trade as well as health and education — that we are not only talking about rights, we are talking about social vitality, political stability, and economic growth

We are determined, that UN Women will, offer a new dynamic to the global dialogue on gender equality and bring new energy drawing on multiple talents, and bringing together men and women from different countries and communities in a shared endeavour.

The National Committee for UN Women – Canada and our Winnipeg chapter will ensure, that we model a world at home in Canada and internationally, where young girls are no longer taken out of school; where women's employment opportunities are not limited due to discrimination; where women do not starve because they only eat one meal a day; and where the threat of gender based violence is no longer a daily reality and women are safe at home in the street at school and at work. The neglect of women's human rights is a moral and ethical dilemma facing society.

Through these efforts, the Canadian National Committee also hopes to open more regional chapters and increase memberships.

As the president of National Committee for UN Women Canada, I assure you, our entire national team including our Winnipeg Chapter and affiliates in other cities will refuse to stand by and watch these gross abuses of human injustices occur.

Let us mark the beginning of this new era of gender equality with a sustainable, active and profound movement, to ensure that gender equality is a realized goal. Let us mobilize, our resources to alleviate poverty, discrimination, violence and the abuse of women's rights.

Let us all work together, to create a just society for present and future generations, where men and women are equal beneficiaries of humanitarian development.

I fully believe that the National Committee for UN Women in Canada will revitalize the global dialogue on gender equality, bring new energy and draw on multiple talents, and bring together men and women from countries around the world for this endeavor to make gender equality and the empowerment of women a "lived reality" at home and abroad.

So let us stand together as stimulus for change in Canada and Winnipeg. Let us take affirmative action to end gender injustices. Let us all work together to make gender equality and positive change for rights of women across the world and at home more than mantra!