Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA)
251 Bank Street, 2nd Floor
Ottawa, ON K1P 1X3

January 25, 2017

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Honourable Mélanie Joly
Minister of Canadian Heritage

The Honourable Maryam Monsef
Minister of the Status of Women

cc:
Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs
Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
Hon. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour
Hon. Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance
Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould, Minister of Justice, Attorney General of Canada
Hon. Jane Philpott, Minister of Health

House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Ministers Freeland, Joly, and Monsef,

We are writing to ask you to implement, fully and without delay, the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The recommendations were issued on November 18th after the Committee’s review of Canada’s compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) at its 65th session.

We cannot stress enough the importance of implementing these recommendations. Women’s equality in Canada has regressed over the last two decades. In 1995,
Canada held 1st place on the United Nations Gender Equality Index; Canada is now at 25th. Recently, the World Economic Forum ranked Canada 35th on gender equality out of 144 countries. We know that Canada can do better.

The Government raised the spirits of Canadian women by declaring itself feminist and embracing equality for women as a core value. This changed tone has also raised expectations. We now look to you to begin the hard and detailed work of improving Canada’s record and introducing concrete measures that will make equality for women a reality.

In addition to a changed attitude towards women’s equality, the Government declared that “Canada is back” and signaled that it will demonstrate a strong commitment to human rights both internationally and domestically. We are proud of Canada’s record of ratifying key UN human rights treaties, engaging with the UN human rights system during regular reviews of Canada’s compliance, endorsing some Optional Protocols that permit Canadians to have access to UN complaint procedures, and extending an open invitation to UN special rapporteurs and mandate holders to visit Canada.

However, Canada has a serious implementation gap. For years, Canada has ignored UN treaty body advice and recommendations, to the detriment of Canada’s most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents and to the detriment of Canadians as a whole. Canada has no mechanism for monitoring and facilitating implementation of treaty body recommendations, and for working with provinces and territories on implementation where co-ordination among all levels of government is critical. Because of this, treaty body recommendations tend to be ignored, rather than realized in a substantive way through government planning, policy, and programs.

Canada could take a huge step forward for women and for human rights by immediately beginning to plan for implementation of the CEDAW Committee’s most recent recommendations. As the attached summary of recommendations indicates, the CEDAW recommendations cover a wide range of issues crucial to women’s advancement: access to legal aid; the gender wage gap and pay equity; housing and poverty reduction; child care; political participation; violence; the socio-economic conditions of Indigenous women; the needs of women with disabilities; criminalization and imprisonment of women with mental health issues; access to abortion; trafficking and prostitution; harm reduction strategies; the extra-territorial conduct of Canadian mining companies; and much more.

The CEDAW Committee recommends two mechanisms for implementation of the *Convention* rights and treaty body recommendations:

- an effective mechanism for ensuring accountability and the transparent, coherent and consistent implementation of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* throughout all jurisdictions (at para 11); and
• a comprehensive national gender strategy, policy and action plan that addresses the structural factors causing persistent inequalities for women and girls, including those who are Indigenous, Afro-Canadian, racialized, disabled, immigrant, refugee and LGBTQ (at para 21).

Given the legal responsibility and leadership role of the Government of Canada, we ask that you establish an accountability mechanism* and, with the provinces and territories, develop a national gender equality plan so that Canada can move forward in a coordinated and strategic way to fully implement women’s human rights and advance women’s equality.

Coordinated, robust work to advance women’s equality is particularly timely and needed in light of Canada’s upcoming 150th anniversary, and in light of burgeoning attacks on women’s rights and dignity globally. Canada can be a leader once more and a model for the world if the Government of Canada, working with provincial and territorial governments, takes progressive, determined action to move women forward. We need action now that demonstrates Canada’s genuine commitment to fulfilling women’s human rights.

The CEDAW Committee has provided detailed and concrete recommendations, which can be incorporated into a national gender equality plan. To begin the identification of priority areas for investigation and strategic work, we ask you to meet with a delegation of representatives of the signers of this letter no later than March 3, 2017, to plan first steps.

We look forward to your response and to working with you on a new plan for women’s equality in Canada and for the realization of women’s human rights.

Sincerely,

Angela Cameron, Chair, Steering Committee, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action
Email: A.Cameron@uottawa.ca

Shelagh Day, C.M., Chair, Human Rights Committee, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action
Email: Shelagh.Day@gmail.com
Telephone: 604-872-0750

* An oversight mechanism for implementation of treaty body recommendations has been called for by other United Nations Committees, including the Human Rights Committee, and consistently by Canadian NGOs (see Empty Words and Double Standards: Canada’s Failure to Respect and Uphold International Human Rights - Joint Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council in relation to the May 2013 Universal Periodic Review of Canada, October 2012, available online: <http://socialrightscura.ca/documents/international/UPR%202013%20NGO%20Coalition%20submission.pdf>).
Supported and endorsed by:

Organizations:

Aboriginal Legal Services
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Alberta Network of Immigrant Women
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Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic
BC CEDAW Group
BC Society of Transition Houses
Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty in Canada
Canada Without Poverty
Canadian Association of University Teachers / Association canadienne pour les professeures et professeurs d’université (CAUT-ACPPU)
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Canadian Federation of Nurses’ Unions / La Fédération canadienne des syndicats d’infirmières et infirmiers (CFNU)
Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)
Canadian Federation of University Women, Ottawa Chapter
Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA)
Canadian Labour Congress Women’s Committee
Canadian Network of Shelters and Transition Houses
Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW)
Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women – Nova Scotia
Canadian Union of Public Employees/ Syndicat canadien de la function publique (CUPE-SCFP)
Canadian Women’s Foundation/Foundation canadienne des femmes
Central Nova Women’s Resource Centre
Centre d’Aide et de Lutte Contre les Aggressions à Caractère Sexuel d’Ottawa (CALACS, Francophone d’Ottawa)
Chair in Indigenous Governance
Design for a New Tomorrow
DisAbled Women’s Network Canada (DAWN)
Family Services Toronto
Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ)
First Call – BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
Harmony House Women’s Shelter
Human Rights Watch
Ingamo Homes
International Women’s Rights Project (IWRP)
Interval House of Ottawa/ Maison Interval d’Ottawa
Interpares
Justice For Girls
Kirsten French Child Centre for Advocacy
MATCH International Women’s Fund
Mission Services of Hamilton
National Association of Women and the Law/Association nationale Femmes et Droit (NAWL)
Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC)
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour
Northumberland Domestic Abuse Monitoring Committee
Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH)
Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW)
Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC)
Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA)
Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL)
Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre (ORCC)
Ottawa Victim Services
Oxfam Canada
Oxfam Québec
Plan Canada International
The Poverty and Human Rights Centre
Public Service Alliance of Canada / Alliance de la Fonction public du Canada (PSAC-AFAC)
Rainy River District Women’s Shelter of Hope
Regroupement québécois des CALACS
Sexual Health Centre Saskatoon
Single Mothers’ Alliance BC
Temiskaming Native Women’s Support Group
Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS)
Toronto Women’s City Alliance (TWCA)
Tri-County Women’s Centre
Vancouver Rape Relief
Vancouver Women’s Health Collective (VWHC)
Voices-Voix Coalition
West Coast Domestic Workers’ Association
West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund (West Coast LEAF)
Women Against Violence Against Women Rape Crisis Centre (WAVAW)
Women’s Community House / Sexual Assault Centre London
Women’s Habitat of Etobicoke
Women’s Human Rights Institute
Women’s Initiatives for Safer Environments (WISE)
Women’s Inter-Church Council of Canada (WICC)
Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)
Women’s Place of South Niagara
Women Transforming Cities (WTC)
Yellowknife Women’s Society
Yukon Federation of Labour
Yukon Status of Women Council
Yukon Women’s Transition Home Society
YWCA Canada
YWCA Halifax
YWCA Niagara Region

Individuals:
Susan Boyd, Professor Emerita, Allard Hall Law School, University of British Columbia
Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director, DisAbled Women’s Network of Canada
Angela Cameron, Shirley Greenberg Professor of Women in the Legal Profession, Faculty of Law, Common Law Section, University of Ottawa
Barbara Cameron, Professor of Political Science, York University
Suzie Dunn
Martha Jackman, Professor of Law, Faculty of Law, Common Law Section, University of Ottawa
Elizabeth Johannson
Anne Levesque
Sandra Lockhart
Sharon McIvor
Jackie Neapole
Jennifer Nedelsky, Professor of Law and Political Science, University of Toronto
Diana Majury, Professor, Criminology, Carleton University
Pamela Palmater, Chair in Indigenous Governance, Ryerson University
Denise Réaume, Professor of Law, University of Toronto
Martha Shaffer, Professor of Law, University of Toronto
Bre Woligroski
Lara Koerner Yeo
Margot Young, Professor of Law, Allard Hall Law School, University of British Columbia
Diane Harris, Executive Director, Ingamo Homes
Francine Descarries, Professeure, Département de Sociologie, Université du Québec à Montréal
Yolande Cohen, Université du Québec à Montréal
Peter Crosby
Patrick Crosby
Jennifer Koshan, Professor of Law, University of Calgary
Nicole Beatty, CFRE, Northumberland Domestic Abuse Monitoring Committee
Vrinda Narain, Associate Professor and Associate Dean, Faculty of Law, McGill University
Mary Jane Mossman
Doreen Nicoll
Isabel Grant, Professor, Co-Director Centre for Feminist Legal Studies, University of British Columbia
Kathleen Lahey, Professor and Queen’s National Scholar, Faculty of Law, Queen’s University
Dr. Lorna A. Turnbull, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Manitoba
Rachel Chagnon, Directrice de l’Institut de recherches et d’études féministes, Professeure, Département des sciences juridiques, Université du Québec à Montréal
Penelope Simons, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, Common Law Section, University of Ottawa
Melissa Heimed, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services
Sandy Toth, Executive Director, A New Design for Tomorrow
Ruthann Brown, Executive Director, Women's Place of South Niagara
Janet Handy, Executive Director, Kristen French Child Advocacy Centre
Barbara Byers, C.M., Secretary-Treasurer, Canadian Labour Congress
Marie Clarke Walker, Executive Vice President, Canadian Labour Congress
Donald Lafleur, Executive Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress
Prof. Jennie Abell, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa
Mary Eberts
Ann Hawkins, President, Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association
Kate Wiggins
Jane McGregor
Shelley Yeo
Johanne Saint-Charles, Faculté de communication, Centre de recherche interdisciplinaire sur le bien-être, la santé, la société et l’environnement, Université du Québec à Montréal
Gil McGowan, President, Alberta Federation of Labour
Siobhán Vipond, Secretary Treasurer, Alberta Federation of Labour
Nicole Vézina
Chris Buckley, President, Ontario Federation of Labour
Patty Coats, Secretary-Treasurer, Ontario Federation of Labour
Ahmad Gaied, Executive Vice President, Ontario Federation of Labour
Jillian Schwandt, Executive Director, Sexual Health Centre Saskatoon
Angelo Soares, Professor of Organizational Behaviour, IREF, Université du Québec à Montréal
Dr. Monia Mazigh, writer and human rights advocate
Julia Sánchez, President-CEO Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC)
Ann Batisse, Executive Director Temiskaming Native Women’s Association
Barbara McInerney, Executive Director of Yukon Women’s Transition Home Society
Jeanne Sarson, MEd, BScN, RN
Linda MacDonald, MEd, BN, RN, Persons Against Non-State Torture (NST)