THRONESPEECH 2020
THE ONLY WAY FORWARD IS WITH A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

Summary

FAFIA welcomes the central commitment in the Throne Speech to address the multiple ways the social and health crisis of COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted women in Canada, especially Indigenous women, racialized women, Black women, newcomer women, 2SLGBTQ women, and women living with disabilities. The Government’s acknowledgment that the way out of the COVID-19 crisis requires a feminist and intersectional approach is an important step towards the future. A feminist recovery is not just an issue for women, but is vital to Canada’s recovery as a whole.

For far too long economic and social structures in Canada have failed to promote and realize women’s equality. Though women have seen progress in their civil and political rights to vote, stand for public office, control property and to be equal before the law in marriage and family life, they have not seen similar gains in their economic and social rights to an adequate standard of living, and to just and favourable conditions of work. Women’s social and economic inequality has been heightened and exposed through the pandemic. We agree that Canada cannot permit the hard fought social and political gains that women have made—in the labour force and beyond—to be rolled back. FAFIA supports key commitments in the Throne Speech, like the creation of a task force to guide the creation of the National Action Plan on Women and the Economy, a national childcare strategy, and the urgent development and implementation of a National Action Plan to respond to the National Inquiry on MMWIG. Now is the time for action, these commitments must move forward tangibly, and the next step is the federal budget.
We welcome the explicit recognition of the need for a feminist intersectional approach to the economic recovery process and the efforts to build a task force with diverse representation. Women’s inclusion is critical to a just and feminist COVID recovery for all of Canada, but it is not an end in itself. Economic recovery is undoubtedly a significant aspect of this process, but solely relying on it will not lead to meaningful change.

Context

Many of the foundations that were laid out in the Speech provide a clear path for a just recovery, but they require a firm human rights framework to ensure the advancement of the rights of women in Canada. The impact of COVID-19 on women - especially Indigenous women, racialized women, Black women, newcomer women, 2SLGBTQ women, and women living with disabilities - has been devastating and unique - laying bare pre-existing inequalities requiring some systemic and structural changes. For Canada to fully recover, and “build back better”, it’s response to COVID-19 must be rooted in women’s human rights. This response needs to ensure that all women - especially Indigenous and racialized women, and women with disabilities - in Canada are finally able to fully enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights.

Recommendations

- We welcome the explicit recognition of the need for a feminist intersectional approach to the economic recovery process and the efforts to build a task force with diverse representation. Women’s inclusion is critical to a just and feminist COVID recovery for all of Canada, but it is not an end in itself. Economic recovery is undoubtedly a significant aspect of this process, but solely relying on it will not lead to meaningful change.

  For this task force to be effective it must:

  - Be directly linked to decision-making bodies either directly reporting to the Prime Minister’s Office or the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board Secretariat;
  - Engage with the implementation of social and economic rights of women;
  - Be transparent in the selection of participants, as well in its procedures, and engagement processes;
  - Involve regular participation of the multi-sector groups working to protect the women’s rights;
  - Engage with organisations that represent the diverse voices from across the country including grassroots organisations, Indigenous women, racialized women, Black women, Newcomer women, 2SLGBTQ women, and women living with disabilities.

- The speech focuses on job creation, but any reform to ease the economic insecurity that women experience must employ a comprehensive analysis using an equality framework. This is essential because women who work in female dominated industries are often undervalued and under-compensated. Women in Canada do not have strong legal guarantees of pay equity that is proactive, effectively enforced, and covers both the public and private sectors in all jurisdictions. Canada has not yet taken women’s wage gap seriously or viewed it as a human rights issue compelling attention by all governments.

  Protective and equality-ensuring measures must be in place to ensure that good quality jobs are created for women in all sectors, including in the care-giving sector where women predominate. Governments have permitted the market to override legal and moral commitments to equality for women, thereby putting all of us in danger. COVID-19 has highlighted long existing exploitation of women, particularly immigrant, racialized women who are underpaid, under protected, and at high risk. There are no adequate measures in place to protect and provide equality for women in “women’s jobs”, including those in the health sector and in the retail sector. This is the time to provide an adequate standard of living for women, free from income insecurity.

#FEMINISTTHRONESPEECH
There is a significant lack of disaggregated data to provide a comprehensive picture of women and employment, these statistics have been chosen to highlight the disparities that exist.


YWCA Canada and the Institute for Gender and the Economy, A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada: Making the Economy Work for Everyone, online: <https://www.feministrecovery.ca>.

Kathrine Scott, “Tracking women’s economic recovery”, Behind the Numbers, online: <https://behindthenumbers.ca/2020/07/22/tracking-womens-economic-recovery/>.

WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT

- 90% of paid long-term care home staff are women;
- 56% of women are employed in the Canadian retail and service sectors;
- 42% of personal support workers are racialized.
- Immigrant women represented 37.4% employment losses by mid-June.

FAFIA celebrates the commitment to a national affordable, accessible, inclusive and high-quality childcare system, a long-term demand of the feminist movement in Canada. Childcare is a delayed recommendation lasting 50 years, having been recommended by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970. This again needs to be implemented in collaboration with the advocates and organizations who have been leading this fight.

The Government must accelerate the development and implementation of a National Action Plan that responds to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The Government needs to expeditiously implement Bill S3 by ensuring that all First Nations women and their descendants who are now entitled to status under the Indian Act, and its benefits, can actually be registered. To do this, Indian Act registration must be declared an essential service. FAFIA echoes the calls from Indigenous women's organizations, including the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA), that this work, and all work impacting Indigenous women's lives, must include Indigenous women and Indigenous women's organizations at the decision-making tables.

FAFIA appreciates the dedicated funding towards housing and the commitment to implement the National Housing strategy – the right to adequate housing is an explicit international human right of every Canadian and must be reflected in Government action. However, implementation strategies also need to include collaboration with experts in women's housing and homelessness, and data collection that reflects the unique circumstances and needs of women. Any commitment to end chronic homelessness requires a commitment to take into account the hidden homelessness that women experience. Experts who have highlighted the long-term impact of the financialization of housing must be brought in to examine the impact of the market economy on low income women. Finally, applying a human rights framework to the implementation of housing programs provides a more comprehensive approach that is aimed at achieving substantive equality for women and built around affordability and adequacy, including the realities of women living in remote and Northern communities.

#FEMINISTTHRONESPEECH
• The commitment to reform Employment Insurance (EI) is welcome and long overdue. The existing eligibility criteria disqualify many workers who pay into the system from collecting benefits, and the exclusions fall especially heavily on women. Women’s human rights advocates must be full participants in the reform process to ensure that systemic discrimination against women is eliminated and EI is returned to its role of supporting all unemployed workers.

• The Government’s acknowledgement of systemic racism in Canada in the speech was long awaited. The speech recommended police training and reform signalling a limited approach when a much more radical overhaul of policing and the criminal justice system are needed given systemic and deep-rooted racism. There must be a commitment to work with the voices from the community who have lived experience in addition to expertise on ways to combat racism. A radical overhaul of policing and the criminal justice system in Canada is also needed to address systemic sexism, overt police brutality and abuse of women, and failures to protect and provide justice to women who are victims of male violence.

#FEMINISTTHRONESPEECH