

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Women ask Federal Leaders “Are you Up for Debate?”

Organizations across Canada ask federal party leaders to commit to a debate on women in the upcoming election

Ottawa, November 4, 2014. An alliance of 100 organizations from across the country has called for a federal election debate focused on women in 2015. Speaking at a morning press conference on Parliament Hill, YWCA Canada, the Native Women's Association of Canada and Oxfam Canada said women's rights must be an election issue, and called on all federal parties to make meaningful commitments to change women's lives for the better, in Canada and abroad.

“What works for women works for Canada,” said Paulette Senior, CEO of YWCA Canada. “The first and only federal leaders' debate on women took place thirty years ago. It's long past time for the second one. For many women Canada is a better country than in 1984, but we haven't achieved equality, and certainly not for all women.”

The press conference was organized by Up for Debate, a campaign to create a national conversation on gender equality in the lead up to the 2015 federal election. The campaign is led by an alliance of over 100 organizations -- women's groups in every region of the country, Aboriginal associations, community groups, international development organizations, faith-based groups and labour – representing over 3.5 million Canadians.

Up for Debate is calling on all party leaders to commit to participate in a nationally broadcast leaders' debate focused on policies and issues that impact women's lives once the election is called.

“Can we really say that the battle for women's rights had been won when over 1100 Aboriginal women and girls have been murdered in Canada since 1980, and each day more than 8,000 women and children seek protection from a shelter to escape violence and abuse?” asked Claudette Dumont-Smith, Executive Director of the Native Women's Association of Canada. “It's time for a national conversation about building a Canada that works for all women.”

The alliance notes that although today more women than ever before are graduating from university, entering new professions and running for public office, women still make up the majority of the poor, earn 20% less than their male peers for the same work, and do twice as much unpaid work at home.

The Alliance for Women's Rights is a network of over 100 women's organizations and allies from across Canada united in raising awareness about women's rights in the lead up to the next federal election.

Critical issues for women like childcare, pay equity and affordable housing have received scant attention in the 2011 leaders' debates. Yet in that election, over half a million more women than men turned out to vote.

"Canadian women are up for the debate about what this country should look like. We're asking the party leaders: are you?" said Paulette Senior.

Around the world, women continue to face economic exclusion and marginalization. Julie Delahanty, Executive Director of Oxfam Canada, explained that women's leadership is key to achieving a world free from injustice and poverty.

"Women and their organizations are a powerful force for change. And yet, women's organizations around the world do their courageous and tireless work on shoestring budgets", Delahanty said. She made the case for increased support for women's organizations, both in Canada and in developing countries, so that they can offer frontline services to women and address the root causes of discrimination and inequality.

In concluding the press conference, Up for Debate spokespeople reiterated their call for leaders to agree to a debate on women's issues once the election is called, and make meaningful commitments to ensure that women everywhere have equal rights, access to resources, and can live lives free from violence.

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Notes:

-For more information, media should contact:

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Short bios of three women leaders present at the press conference:

Paulette Senior

Paulette Senior is the CEO of YWCA Canada, the oldest and largest multi-service women's organization in the country. She took up her duties in January of 2006 and is recognized as one of the most respected and vocal women leaders in the country. She has captured significant attention as a leader and advocate for women and girls – resolute to build a safe and just society where women and girls are equal and free from violence, poverty, homelessness; equipped with critical supports to be leaders in their lives and communities. She has led, managed and operated shelters, employment programs and housing – helping women, children and youth in some of Toronto's most economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Claudette Dumont-Smith

Claudette Dumont-Smith has been the Executive Director of the Native Women's Association of Canada since 2010, and has been actively involved in the field of Aboriginal health since 1974. She is a registered nurse and has acted in various executive capacities with the Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada and worked as a consultant for various National Aboriginal Organizations as well as at the regional and local levels. Ms. Dumont-Smith has served as a member of the Aboriginal circle of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, a blue ribbon panel initiated by the Government of Canada in 1991, as Associate Commissioner for the National Aboriginal Child Care Commission of the Native Council of Canada, and as Commissioner for the Indian Residential School Commission for one year. Ms. Dumont-Smith is also an accomplished writer/researcher whose articles on a wide range of topics.

Julie Delahanty

Julie Delahanty, Executive Director of Oxfam Canada as of October 1st, 2014, is a leader on gender equality and human rights with more than 20 years of international development experience. Most recently, she was the Director of the Central America Program for Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, and has served as the Director of CIDA's Gender Equality and Child Protection Division. A published author, Julie has written extensively on issues of gender and employment, agricultural biodiversity, sexual and reproductive health and rights, garments and globalization.

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