

Open letter to Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of International Development and La Francophonie urging increased and meaningful funding for women's organizations

November 17, 2016

The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, P.C.
Minister of International Development and La Francophonie

Dear Minister Bibeau,

We are writing to urge you make funding for women's organizations a significant and meaningful priority within Canada's international assistance envelope.

We applaud the Government of Canada's commitment to putting the rights of women and girls at the heart of Canadian development assistance. Gender inequality touches all of us. For too many women and girls around the globe, violence, discrimination and exclusion are daily realities. The impact is not only felt by individual women and girls, but also by whole societies that lag behind in development and are all too often mired in conflict.

The clear commitment of Prime Minister Trudeau and the Government of Canada to feminist principles offers a crucial opportunity to concretely address these challenges. We know that investments in gender equality and the rights of women and girls are catalytic investments. These investments support development, peace, and the achievement of more just societies.

Yet global progress has been too slow. Investments have lagged far behind commitments.

What is missing is direct and meaningful support to grassroots women's organizations. Led by women, these organizations are the motor of change that are best placed to identify and implement local, practical and effective solutions to the full range of development challenges. When they receive support for their own priorities, they build movements that accomplish great things and transform society. Women's organizations are currently addressing climate change, governance challenges, human rights abuses, peace & security, community health, economic inequality as well as responding to humanitarian disasters.

Women's organizations and movements not only provide critically important services to women, girls and their communities – they hold their governments accountable for their commitments to gender equality and effectively work to change harmful and discriminatory belief systems.

In recent years, we've seen increased attention given to women and girls in international development as part of the global Sustainable Development Goals agenda. Unfortunately, though, women's organizations have not benefitted, as they only receive a minimal percentage of aid going to civil society organizations. This dearth of funding to women's organizations puts at risk our chance of success with this ambitious agenda.

We must go beyond women and girls as beneficiaries of development initiatives to funding the organizations and movements that use the most innovative solutions to bring about lasting change.

We urge you and your Government to make women's rights organizations, including those at the grassroots, an ambitious funding priority. Canada is well positioned to be bold and lead on a new approach to women's empowerment by putting the power in the hands of the women themselves. A new, innovative funding mechanism that would ensure that Canadian resources

reach grassroots women's organizations would have a huge impact on advancing development where it is needed most, and contribute to greater global security.

This type of ambitious funding mechanism would respond to a recommendation in the recent report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (*An Opportunity for Global Leadership: Canada and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*), namely that the Government of Canada should provide development assistance on a multi-year basis and for core operations to civil society organizations – including at the grassroots level – that are working to implement the women, peace and security agenda in conflict-affected and fragile states.

There is an exciting opportunity for Canada to be a global leader. The moment is now.

Sincerely,

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights

Jonea Agwa

Aide internationale pour l'enfance

Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI)

Susan Bazilli, Director, International Women's Rights Project

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Rebecca Boyce

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Canadian Network of Women's Shelters and Transition Houses

CARE Canada

Centre d'étude et de coopération internationale (CECI)

Comité québécois femmes et développement

Crossroads International

Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie

Gender at Work

Greenpeace Canada

Susan Hartley, PhD

International Rescue Committee

Interpares

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

McLeod Group

Nobel Women's Initiative

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Betty Plewes

Althea-Maria Rivas, Assistant Professor, York University

Terre Sans Frontières

The MATCH International Women's Fund

Sarah Tuckey, PhD Candidate and Management Consultant

World University Service of Canada (WUSC)

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