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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Canadian Federation of University Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

The focus of this statement is "consequences of failing to ensure access to justice for all women and girls," inspired in part by Sustainable Development Goal 16, which aims to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." It is submitted by the Canadian Federation of University Women, a self-funded national organization of over 6,800 women in 90 Clubs located across Canada. Since its founding in 1919, members have worked to achieve educational and economic equality, as well as social justice, through continuous learning and empowerment within a secure and peaceful environment.

Throughout our organization's 106-year history, we have witnessed the value of equitable access to justice for everyone and the resultant problems from injustices. As explained in The United Nations and the Rule of Law, the rule of law is a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards.

Justice is an ideal of accountability and fairness in the protection and vindication of rights and the prevention and punishment of wrongs. Accordingly, equitable access to justice is essential for equality, yet discriminatory laws, systemic inequities, and structural barriers

continue to deny women and girls equal access. For example, the 2018 Women, Business and the Law Database records 10 actions that women cannot legally perform in the same way as men and the number of applicable economies/countries: apply for a passport (37), choose where to live (31), be head of household (31), get a job without permission (18), travel outside the home (18), apply for a national identity card (11), travel outside the country (6), register a business (4), open a bank account (3), sign a contract (1) (World Bank Group, 2018, Table 1.2).

The 2019 World Justice Project captured the everyday legal problems of women in 45 countries and the limited use of legal recourse to resolve these issues. Consumer and housing issues were among the most common problems women experienced. This includes problems related to poor or incomplete professional services, difficulties obtaining a refund for faulty or damaged goods, disruptions in the supply of utilities, disagreements with landlords, tenants, or neighbours, and becoming homeless. According to the project authors, data related to domestic violence categorized as family problems was difficult to collect and likely underreported in the data set.

Legal injustice is often compounded by the intersection of economic inequality and poverty. 92 countries do not guarantee equal pay for equal work, with women, globally earning just 77 cents of each dollar a man earns (United Nations, n.d.). According to UN Women (2025) there is an earnings gap of on average between 26 and 60% for women who experience intimate partner violence. There is also a pension gap that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2023) reports is persistent and large, citing

average pension levels for women in countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development being 24% below those of men. In addition, most people worldwide above retirement age without any regular pension are women, at nearly 65% (United Nations, n.d.). If, as estimated, closing the gender economic gap could raise global gross domestic product (GDP) by over 20%, there is not only a human rights benefit but also an economic one. At the September 2025 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Equal Pay Day Event, it was noted that the pay gap has a long-term impact on the quality of women's lives, as well as their risk of exposure to poverty and social exclusion.

Women are not homogeneous in the impacts of pay inequality, intersecting identities create unique conditions that impact each woman differently. Differences in access to justice are also affected by intersectionality. Each nation has a responsibility to look within its borders to identify barriers that prevent its citizens from having equal access to justice. Accordingly, as an organization located in Canada, we will demonstrate that access to justice in Canada can be unequal for different population groups, and highlight the value of collecting and analyzing disaggregated data. Finally we illustrate an example of an initiative that can serve as a best practice for other countries to employ.

The triple disadvantage of class, race and gender is well documented. In 2022, Canadian-born women earned 9.2% less than their male counterparts, and Indigenous women earned 20.1% less than Canadian born men (Drolet & Mardare Amini, 2023). According to Justice Canada (2024) Indigenous people are continuously overrepresented in Canada's criminal justice system both as victims and those accused of crime. Although we will be examining the statistics on justice and indigenous women in Canada it is important to

acknowledge the context of Indigenous peoples' histories and experiences with systemic discrimination and socioeconomic marginalization (Justice Canada, 2024). This systemic discrimination has resulted in overrepresentation in correctional institutions, under-protection by law enforcement, and contributes to a lack of culturally appropriate legal support, and geographic isolation.

It is essential to examine disaggregated statistics, as it is in the specificities of the data that we can identify who is most vulnerable to inequality and adverse outcomes under existing structures. In 2022, 56% of Indigenous women have experienced physical assault, while 46% have experienced sexual assault. In comparison, about a third of non-Indigenous women have experienced physical assault (34%) or sexual assault (33%) in their lifetime (Heidinger, 2022). Indigenous women are also nearly three times more likely to experience intimate partner violence compared to non-Indigenous women (Heidinger, 2022). While Indigenous women account for about 5% of all women in Canada, they make up about 26% of all women killed by an intimate partner in 2022 (Government of Canada, 2024). Indigenous women face unique barriers to reporting violence or seeking help afterward, including a lack of access to culturally appropriate resources, inaccessibility of support services, a general distrust of law enforcement and a perceived lack of confidentiality in the justice system (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). When justice systems fail to respond adequately to violence, trust in institutions is eroded, and barriers to reporting crimes increase.

Justice Canada (2024) reports that Indigenous adults and youth, in particular women, are overrepresented in provincial and territorial correctional services while Indigenous adults,

particularly women are overrepresented in federal correctional services. This overrepresentation negatively impacts Indigenous peoples, cultures, and communities and has a high economic cost (Justice Canada, 2025). The Office of the Correctional Investigator's 50th Annual Report (2023) notes that overrepresentation has been characterized as a crisis and is one of Canada's most urgent human rights challenges. Justice Canada (2024) also reports that in addition to being overrepresented, Indigenous federal offenders face harsher in-custody experiences and face disproportionate adverse outcomes from parole hearings.

The magnitude of this issue requires a solution that can appropriately address it. In March 2025, the Government of Canada released the Indigenous Justice Strategy which was developed in consultation and cooperation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis, including Modern Treaty and Self-Government partners, and provincial and territorial governments. It was also guided by feedback from Indigenous women, youth, Elders, persons with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQI+ persons (Justice Canada, 2025). Notably, the Indigenous Justice Strategy is based in holistic, trauma-informed understandings of justice, and guided by Indigenous ways of knowing on justice and healing, aiming to introduce progressive and transformative changes to the justice system (Justice Canada, 2025). It commits the Canadian government to work in partnership with the very people who, despite Canada's commitments to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, remain affected by inequitable access to justice within Canada.

Recommendations

1. We call on member states to prioritize the collection of disaggregated statistics relating to women and girls and their relationship to legal systems.
2. Call on the United Nations to explore the development of a dedicated mechanism or body for Indigenous women, led by Indigenous women within the United Nations System.
3. Call on member states to use Canada's Indigenous Justice Strategy as an example of how to meaningfully address barriers to ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls. In particular, by using the strategy's priority actions of collaborative relationship and accountability, long-term and predictable funding, and justice and wellness.

Endorsed by:

Graduate Women International (GWI)

International Alliance of Women

Women Graduates-USA