

Toronto Women's Call to Action

A group of diverse women met February 26, 2004 to end the growing invisibility of girls' and women's voices and issues from the political agenda in the City of Toronto. Women actively supported the election campaigns of current Council Members and the Mayor. We gave input to political platforms, did foot work, offered expert analysis and sound advice about the challenges facing Toronto women. This new Council owes women of Toronto accountability that our issues will remain priorities in the City.

Equity, Access and Human Rights in Toronto

In January 2001, community advisory committees and working groups, including the Status of Women Committee - composed of citizen and council members - were established to provide advice to City Council. The Mayor's Office reviewed this committee structure and established new Roundtable on Access, Equity and Human Rights. The Advisory Committee on the Status of Women is under review in the Mayor's office. We are concerned that women's voices, issues and visibility will fall through organizational gaps resulting from this restructuring process.

Goals

- Ensure political commitment to and action on gender equity.
- Remove barriers to women's active participation in all spheres of public life.
- Secure an equal share in all decision-making processes.
- Institutionalize inclusive, democratic and participatory processes.
- Support women across their diverse backgrounds to meet their rights and needs through systemic institutional change.
- Reverse cutbacks to services to women and initiate gender-responsive budgeting.

These transformative actions are needed for gender-sensitive, people-centred, socially, economically, environmentally sustainable cities.

Agenda for Action

We advocate anti-racist, anti-poverty, gender mainstreaming for Toronto. Gender mainstreaming is part of the *Beijing Platform for Action* to empower women and bring equality and equity to issues of decision-making, control over resources, budgets, benefits and rewards. This includes the perspective that gender intersects with race, ethnicity, class, ability, sexual and gender identity and Aboriginality and as such all policies need to reflect these social realities and identities. We want 50% representation of women on City Council and in senior management.

International and Local Context

Canada has signed the 1995 *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action*, and the United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) 1981. At the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban 2001, Canada ensured the integration of gender and race throughout the *Declaration and Program of Action*.

Cities that engage the diversity of their citizens in collaborative planning, budgeting and decision making also succeed in adapting to change and being innovative in this global era. Internationally, cities in numerous countries such as Brazil, Namibia, Peru, the Philippines and South African are working with local women's groups to gender mainstream local governments. As the country's largest city, Toronto should show leadership for women's equality and equity.

(Please send your comments to towomensmanifesto@yahoo.ca To join the listserve, write to torontowomen-subscribe@yahoogroups.com with the word 'subscribe' in the subject line. Include your name and affiliation if any.)