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STATEMENT BY

THE DELEGATION OF CANADA

TO

**THE 50TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

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DÉCLARATION DE

LA DÉLÉGATION CANADIENNE

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**LA 50^E SESSION DE LA COMMISSION DES NATIONS UNIES
SUR LA CONDITION DE LA FEMME**

NEW YORK, LE 1 MARS 2006

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates

I am pleased to address the Commission this year as it takes forward the experience of the Beijing +10 review and appraisal in 2005 and embarks on a course for the next few years. Canada, as a member of the last Bureau, extends its congratulations to the new Bureau and I assure you of my delegation's support.

We have reviewed with interest the reports provided by the Secretary General on the matters before us. While they are sobering in terms of the need for improvement that exists, we are encouraged by the many examples of initiatives undertaken by Member States and by many parts of the UN system. In the report on gender mainstreaming at the national level, in particular, we note examples of leadership by many different countries in many areas that can be a source of both practical help and inspiration.

Canada is pleased to note the issue of accountability that runs through many of the Secretary-General's reports, and the importance of having statistics, indicators and other sources of information, including the voices of women themselves, upon which to base sound policy and implementation decisions. We also note with interest, *The World's Women 2005* publication highlighting the need for statistics and indicators to support gender analysis, policy making and good governance. Next week, the 2005 edition of *Women in Canada: a gender-based statistical report* will be launched. This wide-ranging compendium of statistics on women and men has historically been a best-selling and much-used publication.

Since Beijing +10, Canada's national women's machinery has conducted regional, national and on-line consultations focused on accountability issues, including gender equality indicators, an area of particular interest for us. The consultation results also supported placing priority on reducing poverty among women and improving the situation of Aboriginal women. They urged in all matters to respect diversity and recognize the barriers that many women face because of factors such as lone-parenthood, racism, sexual orientation and violence against women. In a similar vein, Canada's international development agency has produced an assessment framework that focuses on gender equality results in order to ensure that its practice lives up to its policies. And the health ministry is developing specific indicators that are sensitive to both gender and diversity to better monitor women's health status and outcomes. We hope to gain from sharing ideas and experience with other Member States and non-governmental organizations at this 50th session and will look forward to pursuing this discussion in the years to come.

I now would like to turn to this year's major thematic discussions. First, concerning the theme of the **participation of women in development**, my delegation commends the Secretary General's report for drawing the connections among health, education and work and between those issues and women's overall social and economic situation throughout their lives. Within Canada, we have found employment equity legislation and other positive action measures to be important tools in ensuring that women, as well as visible minorities, Aboriginal people and persons with disabilities, are able to access a wide range of educational and employment opportunities. Student grants and loans, maternity and parental benefits and access to public health services are also among the programs that enable women to fulfill their aspirations and benefit

from the varied paid and unpaid contributions they make to Canada's social and economic development.

Internationally, Canada is a strong supporter of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We view the third goal, which seeks to "promote gender equality and empower women", both as a goal in and of itself and as fundamental to achieving all of the MDGs. Through our international development agency (CIDA), Canada seeks to achieve results for gender equality in three broad areas: women as decision-makers; the human rights of women and girls; and women's access to and control over resources and benefits of development.

Attention to diversity among women and girls is also important to our international cooperation endeavours. This includes addressing the situations of women and girls in emergencies, armed conflict and post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction, not only with regard to the great challenges they face but also with regard to their significant contributions in negotiating peace and rebuilding their communities and countries.

Concerning the theme of **participation in decision-making processes**, Canada takes an inclusive and comprehensive approach, recognizing that there are many factors that influence decision-making, especially in the realm of public policy, and there are many forms of leadership. Women leaders at national level often get their start in NGOs or run for local office as stepping stones to the national political arena. Or they may have an impact on public policy debates and decisions by holding influential positions in civil society, unions, corporations or the media.

Regardless of how many women are in positions of power, however, or whether it is men or women making decisions, data, research and gender analysis must inform the process. In addition, all governments must find ways to support and enable women themselves to influence the decisions that will affect their lives and the lives of their families. Canada has made particular efforts to ensure that Aboriginal women have a place at the table – in their own communities and nationally. An example is the First Ministers' Meeting with Aboriginal leaders held in the fall of 2005, which included the Native Women's Association of Canada. Although important steps such as this have been taken, however, much more needs to be done to promote Aboriginal women's rights, a struggle that is supported by non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal women's organizations alike.

Canada is rich with examples of women's leadership and mobilization. Several leaders of non-governmental organizations are here at this Commission, along with several young women who I am certain will be future leaders in this country. Yet Canada continues to face challenges, including in making progress towards greater gender balance among elected representatives.

I would like to highlight a recent event called *The Women, Constitutions and Democratic Renewal conference*. It celebrated an historic moment when on Valentine's Day, February 14th, 1981, thirteen hundred women gathered to ensure that the new Canadian constitution protected women's equality rights in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The 25th anniversary conference held this year brought together Parliamentarians across party lines, female and male, current and retired, including former Ministers and activist leaders from the struggle 25 years ago and the current

Minister for Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, the Honourable Beverley Oda. It included new generations of young women, as well as academics and the media, which ensured it was broadcast across the country. It also featured the inspiration of women from South Africa, Rwanda and Afghanistan, who have had their own historic struggles and successes. This year also marks 25 years since Canada ratified CEDAW. Both the Charter and CEDAW have proved their worth as lasting institutional mechanisms for gender equality and they continue to grow in importance in addressing persistent and new equality challenges.

Madame Chair,

Canada's remaining comments will be addressed to the **Programme of Work and Methods of Work** of the CSW and while last, it is certainly not least in importance for us. In fact, we view this as one of the most significant matters before the Commission. Member States have acknowledged, and progress to date confirms, that we have had considerable success in understanding problems and agreeing on objectives and commitments. We remain very much challenged, however, in achieving the lasting gender equality results we are aiming for, especially for those women who face the greatest barriers to equality.

I would like to recall the CANZ statement delivered last year at the resumed session of the Commission where we stressed that it was time to take a new approach. Canada remains convinced that *negotiated texts will always have their place but the Commission's greatest value is in facilitating rich dialogue to enable Member States to benefit from a wide range of expertise and experience in the increasingly complex field of gender equality.*

Since 1947, the Commission has been a catalyst in bringing about world-wide changes that were not even imagined in those early years. It has periodically altered its work in significant ways to be stronger, more relevant and adaptable. The increased use of interactive panels and expert group meetings since Beijing is a good example.

The Commission has also recently focused not just on what needs to be done but on how to do it. And this is our challenge for the future – we have set good standards, we are building knowledge. We must determine how, at this juncture, we can best utilize the CSW to foster implementation and the achievement of results, especially where they have been elusive. One pragmatic way is to learn from experience – and in Canada's view, it is incumbent on all of us gathered here for this 50th session to devote more time and seek more creative ways to enable the Commission to achieve this.

The Canadian delegation does not travel as far as others to come to New York. But Europe, Africa and Asia are far from us and the opportunities for Canadians working on gender equality to engage with their counterparts in those regions are few and far between. *The real value of this Commission is that it provides a truly unique forum – that exists nowhere else - for substantive exchange among capital-based experts.* We should bear this in mind in our review of working methods and deliberately seek to make such opportunities happen as a matter of regular practice at the CSW. We must endeavour to ensure that the unique forum the CSW offers serves that goal and provides an effective, annual cross-roads for discussion, learning and decision.

The full and effective implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* remains our goal.

We thank the Bureau for its proposals in this regard, especially the additional time devoted to substantive panels. We also particularly support the proposals assess how the methods are working and to undertake periodic reviews of the implementation of agreed conclusions. But there may also be more that we can do. Canada looks forward to sharing ideas and collaborating with other interested delegations to ensure the Commission meets the needs of Member States and fulfils, as effectively and powerfully as possible, its central purpose of advancing gender equality and improving the lives of women world-wide.

Thank you, Madame Chair.