



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

Distr.: General
10 February 2003

Original: English

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Twenty-eighth session

Summary record of the 604th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 23 January 2003, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Açar

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention *(continued)*

Fifth periodic report of Canada (continued)
(CEDAW/C/CAN/5 and Add.1; CEDAW/PSWG/CRP.1/Add.1; CEDAW/PSWG/2003/1/CRP.2/Add.3)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Canada took places at the Committee table.*

2. **The Chairperson** invited the delegation of Canada to continue answering questions raised at the morning meeting.

3. **Ms. Regehr** (Canada) said that recently the federal Government and other jurisdictions had been making efforts to develop frameworks for studying other factors than gender in assessing the situation of women, such as race, ethnic status, physical disability, sexual orientation, and family status. Canada was constantly improving and updating its databases and releasing new information. Censuses, which were conducted every five years, were the principal tool for the collection of data about women. An ethnic diversity survey was also under way; it would assess ethnic self-definition, family background, social networks, civil participation, social exclusion, areas of trust and belonging, and socio-economic activities. The results of that study would be released later in 2003, and should significantly improve understanding of Canada's diverse population.

4. In Canada, there were a wide range of analytical tools for assessing and studying the society. The figure of 63 per cent represented the after-tax income of all women in Canada, including paid and unpaid work, and regardless of whether or not they had earned any income during the period in question; those figures simply showed the income of women in comparison to that of men. There were also wage-ratio figures on a full year, full-time, or hourly basis. The hourly ratio, for example, showed that women earned 80 per cent of what men did on an hourly basis. The total earnings ratio included women working part-time, since that was a reality of many women's lives.

5. While women's income had been improving, the balance between paid and unpaid work had also been

improving. Women were doing more paid work, and less unpaid work; that was because men were assuming a larger share of household duties. The overall total workload was also declining. However, the work of taking care of children remained mostly women's responsibility, with important policy implications.

6. The poverty statistics generally cited in Canada were "low-income cut-offs", which showed relative disadvantage, in other words, the proportion of income required to satisfy basic life necessities. The Government was developing greater sophistication in understanding poverty, for example, it was measuring the factors of depth and duration. For many people, such as students, poverty was transitory; for others, such as lone-parent families, depth and duration represented a serious problem. All those findings had policy implications, and the analysis of that information was helping the Government of Canada to combat poverty.

7. The data had demonstrated that women were especially vulnerable as unpaid workers, and particularly in raising children. Moreover, for a family to survive, two incomes were now required; thus the close attention to single, unattached adults, regardless of age, and in particular to separated, divorced or widowed older women who had not earned income or developed pensions owing to child-rearing responsibilities. The issue of unpaid work was paramount. In maternity and parental benefits, Canada had tried to make it easier for fathers to take a larger share in child-rearing so that, over the course of a lifetime, women would not find themselves in the situation now affecting older women.

8. **Ms. Quinn** (Canada) said that the National Child Benefit was a major federal, provincial and territorial initiative which provided benefits to low-income families who were on social assistance or working. It affected over 80 per cent of all families with children in Canada. For a two-person family, the level of assistance had risen from 3,400 dollars in 1999 to 4,700 in 2003. Under that programme, the provinces could adjust the amounts of federal assistance and invest in complementary services for low-income families, such as the provision of transportation or prescription drugs. The federal Government had assumed that role with a view to providing a comprehensive approach. A report published in 2002 had shown that in 1999 the National Child Benefit had resulted in a 6.5 per cent decrease in the low-income

gap. Since the National Child Benefit had been increased and indexed for inflation, those results were expected to expand. They were being evaluated with respect to their impact on reducing poverty and improving labour force participation. The results were eagerly awaited.

9. The federal, provincial and territorial Ministers had signed the Early Childhood Development Agreement in 2000. The Agreement called for a 2.2 billion dollar allocation over the course of five years for early childhood development services. Reports would be issued on the impact of those services, and the results would be used in reviewing programmes. In response to the international interest in early childhood development, the federal Government and some of the provinces, in conjunction with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), would be conducting a thematic review of those programmes. It was felt that strong support services helped children to get a good start in life, and helped adults to participate in the labour force.

10. In its effort to assist vulnerable groups, the Government was working with partners, caregivers and providers, and providing assistance for children and families. Such groups were not, however, mutually exclusive: an individual could be aboriginal, disabled and an older person. In that connection, the Government had made significant progress in reducing poverty among older persons. It was aware, for instance, that women who had not worked outside the home did not have access to contributory plans. It was attempting to resolve that problem through guaranteed income, old-age supplements and the services it provided. Complementary initiatives included the childcare expense deduction and the parental and maternity benefits extension.

11. Both the federal Government and the provinces were involved in providing services to disabled persons. A report had been issued on the employment assistance programme for disabled persons, which described the progress to date in that area.

12. **Ms. Ginnish** (Canada) said that the Aboriginal peoples of Canada were Inuit, Indian and Metis. The Indian groups had two sub-divisions, those who met the legal definition of Indian under the Indian Act, and non-status Indians, or the descendants of such persons. The Inuit people, who came mostly from the northern regions of Canada, were self-identified, and associated

with an attachment to a particular community. Metis people were of mixed aboriginal and non-aboriginal descent: that was primarily also a self-identification. Although there were few Metis communities, large numbers of Metis lived in urban areas. Census and Statistics Canada collected data on all those groups, and the definition they used depended on the purpose for which the data was collected.

13. The proposed First Nations Governance Act had been launched in April 2001 after an extensive consultation process, including community meetings and information sessions in communities, small cities, and large urban areas. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development had established a joint advisory committee made up of Government and First Nation representatives, which had provided input in the drafting of the legislation. Over 10,000 people had expressed their views, approximately 50 per cent of them women. Women had raised such specific concerns as greater participation in First Nation affairs, access to redress mechanisms, greater transparency in governance, and greater accountability at the community level. Their principal concern was that the Canadian Human Rights Act should apply to decisions made at the community level. The legislation had been drafted to address governance issues; it had been introduced in Parliament and was currently being studied by the House Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development would appear before the Advisory Committee during January 2003, and public hearings would subsequently be held across the country. At that time, First Nations women would have the opportunity to make their views known, and the legislation could be altered accordingly.

14. A decision had been made at the outset not to address the issue of matrimonial real property in the First Nations Governance Act because the Indian Act contained a large number of sections relating to the management of land, and there did not seem to be a sufficiently broad consensus to justify the revision of its provisions. The First Nations Land Management Act, however, provided some relief for First Nations women concerned about matrimonial real property issues. Unfortunately, that legislation was optional, and only 14 nations currently operated under its provisions. The Act called for First Nations to develop matrimonial property regimes, so that in case of a

marital breakdown, there was a community process for determining the division of the property. The Minister was supportive of the First Nations Land Management Act, and intended to introduce it into 30 more First Nations in the next few years.

15. As a result of the First Nations Governance Act, Canada would be amending the Canadian Human Rights Act so as to provide women with another avenue for making their views and concerns known with respect to decisions affecting them.

16. Finally, she recalled that the 1985 amendments to the Indian Act had removed a number of discriminatory provisions. Although they had not eliminated all aspects of sexual discrimination, they had provided some control over reserve life, in particular the determination of band membership. The question had been asked why the Indian Act could not simply be amended in order to allow women to pass their Indian status to the next generation the same as men could. The federal Government worked to the extent possible in partnership with First Nations in the development of policies, plans and legislation, and a sufficiently broad consensus had yet not been reached to warrant amending the laws. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development recognized the importance of the issue for women, and the need to meet that challenge.

17. **Ms. Harder** (Canada) said that the Live-in Caregiver Programme operated under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act was designed to meet the labour market's need for such caregivers. Without that Programme, there would be no opportunity for women to come to Canada and, after fulfilling their contract, apply first for landed status and then for Canadian citizenship. It was the only programme for temporary foreign workers that permitted them to apply for landed status once in Canada. In response to expressions of concern, the Programme had recently been modified to require a specific, detailed contract between the employer and the caregiver and to increase flexibility regarding interruptions in the caregiver's employment. Both employers and caregivers received information on their rights and responsibilities under the Programme.

18. The Safe Third Country Agreement would not enter into force until late spring 2003. It would allow Canada to return to the United States of America refugees who could have applied for asylum in the latter as their first country of arrival and was a step

towards shared responsibility in considering applications for asylum status. More men than women would be affected since the Agreement applied only to refugees who entered through land border points whereas most women applicants entered at inland points or airports. No refugee would be left without the opportunity to apply for asylum. Her Government was aware that gender-based asylum claims were handled differently in the United States and Canada; for that reason, a one-year review of the Agreement would include mechanisms for determining whether it had a different impact on men than on women.

19. The new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act was the result of extensive negotiation over a six- or seven-year period. Its criteria had been considered as part of an extensive gender-based analysis process and had been adapted to allow for anticipated differences in the impact on women of certain factors such as the greater likelihood of interruptions in their employment and the need to provide coverage for health workers and paraprofessionals. Issues which would require monitoring over time had been identified; the Act was the only federal legislative instrument which included a requirement that its impact must be monitored from a gender perspective.

20. In 2000, the Immigration and Refugee Board had completed consideration of 28,917 applications for asylum, including 138 filed on grounds of gender-based persecution. Of the latter group, 95 had been successful, 35 unsuccessful, two abandoned and six withdrawn. Between 2000 and 2002, about 150 applications had been filed on grounds of gender-based persecution; 90 per cent of those applicants had been women. Canada was proud of its guidelines on gender-based persecution and was working with other interested countries at conferences, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

21. Most immigrant women entered Canada as the spouses or dependants of male immigrants. Recently-immigrated married women tended to remain unemployed owing to their childcare responsibilities. However, women accounted for about 25 per cent of successful applicants for immigration in the skilled worker category; those women tended to equal and even surpass the earnings of Canadian women within the five years following arrival in the country. The 2001 census data would provide more accurate

information on immigrants' economic situation over time.

22. **Mr. Hatt** (Canada) said that many of the programmes and policies mentioned in the section of the report devoted to British Columbia were not yet or only recently operational. The current provincial Government had been in office for only 18 months and had required all its ministries to submit outcome reports; additional information would be provided in the next periodic report to the Committee.

23. He observed that British Columbia had registered a deficit for three of the past four years. That situation was not conducive to the protection of human rights in the long term; the new Government had had to take difficult decisions and to prioritize key areas, such as the advancement of women, gender equality, health care and safety; combating poverty and discrimination; and delivering childcare to between 45,000 and 70,000 children. The Ministry of Women's Equality had not been eliminated; it had been amalgamated with the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services. A new gender analysis guide would be released in 2003.

24. Despite high hopes, human rights policies based on the Bill Black report had failed owing to excessive costs, backlogs and delays; the current Government would soon enact new legislation, consistent with the Paris Principles, which would change not the protection offered, but the enforcement measures provided.

25. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** said that it was still unclear whether the federal Government was committed to ensuring that social issues were covered by the Canadian Human Rights Act and to reconsidering the issue of transferring federal funds to the provincial Governments.

26. Federal childcare benefits had increased but federal funding for provincial programmes had diminished; she wondered whether the overall childcare benefit had actually increased.

27. The number of self-employed women had increased; she asked whether those women's earnings were sufficient to entitle them to social security benefits once they became too old to work. Furthermore, the report stated that the Canadian Human Rights Commission had audited only half of all employers under the new Employment Equity Act; it

was not clear whether the failure to audit all employers was a consequence of reluctance on the latter's part or of budget constraints.

28. Lastly, while she applauded the Government of Quebec for its efforts to improve the provision of childcare, it appeared that there were places for only 18 per cent of eligible children.

29. **Ms. Popescu** asked what the specific goals of the Federal Plan for Gender Equality were as they related to women's active participation in public life and in all levels of the decision-making process. It would also be useful to have a more detailed explanation of the measures taken by political parties, including campaign funds earmarked for women and mechanisms designed to achieve greater gender parity. In its responses to the list of issues (CEDAW/PSWG/2003/I/CRP.2/Add.3), the Government had stated that obstacles to women's participation in politics included the nomination process, unequal access to financial backing and childcare expenses and responsibilities; however, it made no mention of other obstacles, such as traditional gender stereotypes and minority or aboriginal status. The delegation offer some clarification.

30. She noted with appreciation the increase in the number of women members of the House of Commons and the Senate as the outcome of the 2000 federal elections. Unfortunately, however, the report provided gender-disaggregated election statistics for only three provinces: British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. She would welcome such information for the smaller provinces as well. The delegation should also provide details on efforts to encourage aboriginal participation in community governance through amendments to the Indian Act and the Agenda for Gender Equality as well as on the current number of women occupants of high-level posts in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Lastly, she noted that the Government had failed to reply to questions 16 and 17 on the List of Issues (CEDAW/PSWG/2003/I/CRP.1/Add.1).

31. **Mr. Flinterman** urged the delegation to reply to question 16 on the List of Issues; the Committee had received reports that aboriginal women were not given financial and other support designed to achieve gender equality in local government and other areas of communal life.

32. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** noted that although Canada's political parties were headed by men, the

Government had conferred on them the responsibility for increasing women's participation in public life; it would be interesting to know whether any parties were headed by women. Furthermore, while Canadian senators were appointed by the Governor-General, who was a representative of Queen Elizabeth II, only 29.8 per cent of Senate seats were held by women. She wondered why the Governor-General did not immediately appoint a sufficient number of qualified women to achieve gender parity in that body. The Government should also ensure that the system of advancement within the judiciary allowed women to achieve parity or a majority on the Supreme Court, which was also an appointed body.

33. Canada was a rich country and a member of the Group of Seven and had carried out a successful structural adjustment programme; she requested gender-disaggregated statistics on the distribution of the nation's wealth and economic power.

34. It was not clear whether aboriginal and First Nation women could vote in all Canadian elections and be elected to the House of Commons or appointed to the Senate or whether, as she believed, their lives were lived in the streets and jails, only to be cut short at an early age.

35. **Ms. Gaspard** stressed the importance of attributing disparities in the impact on women to socially produced rather than genetic differences between the sexes. She wondered whether the nation's elected bodies discussed women's issues, whether the Government planned to take temporary special measures to promote their advancement and whether efforts to increase the number of women in diplomatic posts had been successful. The next periodic report should include statistics on all Canadian territories and provinces. Lastly, she regretted that the Government had not replied to question 17 on the List of Issues.

36. **Ms. Khan** observed that a job pattern in which over 40 per cent of women worked in non-standard, generally part-time and precarious jobs, made it hard to guarantee women's economic rights. Those women would not be covered, for instance, by the federal contract programme under the Employment Equity Act, which applied only to employers with over 100 employees. It was not clear whether they would be covered by the new Employment Insurance system applicable to jobs lost temporarily (fifth report, para. 289). She wondered whether the different

provinces had different employment requirements and benefits, and whether there was any protection for agricultural workers, workers in the informal sector, domestic help and the like. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal was to be congratulated for recognizing discrimination against women in its rulings (addendum to fifth report, para. 73). She would like to know what recommendations had been made by the Task Force established in 2001 to review federal pay equity legislation (addendum, para. 74), and whether those recommendations would apply to the provinces as well. She hoped the Tribunal had suggested ways of standardizing non-standard jobs in order to cover women in those occupations.

37. **Ms. Tavares da Silva** observed that the decision to transfer to the provincial governments undifferentiated block grants in support of health, education and social programmes (fifth report, para. 343), leaving the use of the funds at the discretion of the provinces, together with the reduction in the amount of funds transferred, created a critical situation for women. She asked whether any thought was being given to reimposing national standards on the provincial governments.

38. **Ms. Patten** said that she too would like to know what national standards the Government was imposing on the provincial governments, given its acknowledgement that the 1996 restructuring of social programmes had had a disproportionately harmful impact on women. She was also very concerned about the Federal/provincial agreements allowing the provinces to claw back funds from the National Child Benefit intended for the most needy families and to apply them to income assistance. She wondered if any assessment had been made of that policy's impact on women.

39. **Ms. Gnacadja** asked whether the nationally applicable Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms could be invoked in a provincial court when a provincial human rights law offered less protection and, if so, she would appreciate information on specific cases. It would also be interesting to know how provincial courts had handled conflicts between Federal and provincial human rights legislation and if the adoption of a provincial law violating equal rights was punishable, and by whom.

40. The federal Government itself was not living up to the national equal rights standards in respect of the

matrimonial real property rights of First Nations women. It had exclusive jurisdiction over Aboriginal affairs, but there was no mention in the Indian Act of those rights. Aboriginal women thus suffered triple discrimination: at the hands of the federal Government, under the Indian Act, and under the grossly discriminatory practices in their own Aboriginal communities. It was unclear whether the recent First Nations Land Management Act constituted an amendment of the Indian Act. The optional nature of its provisions would surely reduce its effectiveness.

41. **Ms. Morvai** asked whether, in general, the laws governing Aboriginal peoples were exempt from constitutional scrutiny and whether the Government assumed its full international and national obligations to ensure the rights of Aboriginal women. At the very least the Government should ensure that Aboriginal women were represented politically. The issue was a delicate one, for on the one hand the Government wanted to protect the minority rights of the Aboriginal communities, but at the same time women would not be sufficiently represented if the matter was left to their own communities. She asked how many Aboriginal women's non-governmental organizations had been involved in the nationwide consultations prior to the introduction of the draft First Nations Governance Act.

42. It was unclear if the legal aid provisions in civil cases (fifth report, para. 381) applied also to criminal cases, and whether low income was an eligibility criterion.

43. She would appreciate updated information on the pioneering work Canada had done in invoking the Convention in its courts. There had to be a continuing emphasis on teaching the judiciary to use the Convention as a source of law and interpretation.

44. **Ms. Shin** said that she was troubled by the seemingly non-inclusive term "visible minority" used throughout the report.

45. **Ms. Manalo** asked whether a gender impact analysis had been done of British Columbia's recent amendment of its Employment Standards Act removing protections for the most vulnerable workers, including migrant workers and women; and what legal protections generally were in place to prevent their exploitation.

46. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** asked whether the Government was considering compensating its

Aboriginal peoples for the historical wrongs they had suffered.

47. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** asked whether any gender impact analysis had been done of the changes in the Employment Insurance Act. The statistics given (responses to the list of issues, pp. 32-33) seemed to show that the effect had been to reduce the access of women to unemployment benefits. Also, she would like to know the real percentage of fathers taking parental leave. In the next report, Canada should provide a nationwide picture of the pay equity legislation and its implementation in the public and private sector, and should specify what jobs for women were covered.

48. **Ms. Ievers** (Canada) said that there were no plans to change the conditions for the fiscal arrangements between the federal Government and provincial governments, but new programmes might be created — for children or housing, for example.

49. Canada's new transfer arrangements for health and social assistance ensured that the provinces and territories received minimum basic social requirements and that no minimum residency requirements would apply. The Government had been obliged to set conditions that were less accommodating than previously, but the delegation would convey the Committee's concern about those conditions to the Government.

50. Commenting on self-employed women, she said she welcomed the fact that more women than men were currently becoming entrepreneurs and in the process acting as an engine for job creation. In 1996, one third of small- or medium-sized businesses were owned or operated by women. It was true, however, that many of the new jobs created were in the non-standard areas where neither men nor women received benefits. Once the Government identified those employed in that fast-growing new sector of the labour market and gathered data on whether their jobs were permanent or mobile, it would be better able to decide how to address the question of access to benefits.

51. While the Government agreed that the participation of women in political life was a desirable goal, it was not in the Canadian political culture to use coercive measures or apply quotas. Almost 30 per cent of the Senate, an appointed body, were women, including at least one Aboriginal woman, and the past decade had seen an appreciable rise in their numbers. Three of the nine Supreme Court justices, including the

Chief Justice, were women. The Governor-General of Canada was an immigrant woman, and one of the political parties was headed by a woman.

52. **Ms. Holt** (Canada), referring to the representation of women in foreign affairs, said that 23 women headed 18 per cent of Canada's missions abroad and held 20 per cent of the senior management positions. A number of new employment qualifications favourable to women had resulted in equal gender representation in the intake of new foreign service officers, which would eventually have an impact on the percentage of women in senior positions.

53. **Ms. Quinn** (Canada) said that there was currently only a 10 per cent gap between the childcare needs and the spaces available, not counting further investments that had been made and that could still be made under the system in place between the federal Government and the provinces.

54. With regard to the claw-back to the National Child Benefit, she pointed out that parents who received welfare benefits generally lost child-related benefits when they moved to work, often earning as little as half of their previous benefits. Until the federal child benefit matched the provincial child benefit, the claw-back would continue. At the same time, however, earnings had generally increased for low-income workers.

55. More information would be provided subsequently on non-standard work. In connection with the impact of recent developments in Employment Insurance, she noted that the Department of Human Resources Development had active networks of individuals trained in gender analysis, who promoted the Department's gender policy in all policy areas and analysed its impact.

56. The number of men who had applied for parental leave had increased in 2001 by more than 80 per cent over the previous year, to almost 22,000.

57. **Ms. Gingras** (Canada) said that the participation of women in politics was a topical issue in the Government, in the political parties and in women's groups. There had been a more than 50 per cent increase in the number of women deputies since 1995, but the general numbers had remained relatively stagnant. In order to remedy the situation, the Government had established a parliamentary commission to suggest ways of improving the electoral

system in order to attract excluded groups, and another parliamentary commission to consider reform of democratic institutions, including ways of increasing the representation of women. There was an equal number of men and women on both of those commissions. The next report would present their conclusions.

58. **Ms. Eid** (Canada) said that the inclusion of "social condition" in the Canadian Human Rights Act was currently under consideration, and that the Committee would be informed when a political decision had settled the issue.

59. She noted that the Employment Equity Act applied to employers regulated under the federal Government, a category comprising nearly 500 major employers and covering approximately two million employees. Coverage was currently limited to larger employers owing to the onerous reporting obligations imposed under the Act. She also noted that employers representing approximately 85 per cent of the workforce were currently under audit.

60. With regard to pay equity, she noted that the current situation in Canada was complex, and agreed on the need for a complete description of the federal/provincial/territorial pay-equity framework in the next report. Provisions requiring pay equity existed in all jurisdictions, but there was some variation between "equal pay for work of equal value" and "equal pay for similar work" in the standards underlying those provisions. The Task Force had completed its public consultations and research on a comparative review of the concept of equal pay for work of equal value as implemented in all jurisdictions as well as in other countries, but its final report and recommendations on improving the legislative framework were not expected before March 2003.

61. She noted that women's enrolments in law schools across Canada had recently equalled and in some cases surpassed those of men, and those advances were expected to continue.

62. She said that while the Employment Equity Act did not apply to enterprises comprising less than 100 employees, those in non-standard employment were nevertheless protected by anti-discriminatory human-rights legislation at both the federal and provincial levels. With regard to the relationship between human-rights legislation and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, she noted that women facing

discrimination by Government employers could bring complaints to a Human Rights Commission or institute legal action under the Charter, although most individuals chose to resort to the Commission because it was simpler and less costly than launching a major court action. However, the Supreme Court of Canada had interpreted equality under the Charter and under human-rights legislation in similar ways; both instruments provided protections against direct and adverse-effect discrimination, and both could deal with systemic discrimination as well as affirmative-action programmes.

63. On the other hand, not all financially needy persons accused of a crime received legal aid. Canada followed the international and Constitutionally accepted standard stipulating that the State must pay for legal counsel where the interests of justice so required. Moreover, citations of the Convention in court cases and especially in Human Rights Tribunal jurisprudence were increasing in frequency, a trend that was expected to continue.

64. Finally, she noted that the term “visible minority” had been coined in the 1980s during the research that eventually resulted in the Employment Equity Act. At that time, it was determined that there existed a particular group of individuals facing discrimination in the workplace on the basis of visible racial characteristics, while ethnic minorities without such visibly distinguishable characteristics appeared to be less likely to face such discrimination. The term was solely used in the context of employment equity and in the interest of advancing minority representation in the workforce, and not in the general context of the Charter or human-rights legislation.

65. **Ms. McPhee** (Canada) said that a long-standing programme at Canadian Heritage provided funding to aboriginal women’s organizations. Furthermore, under Gathering Strength — Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan, the Aboriginal Women’s Programme received funding specifically to strengthen the capacity of aboriginal groups at the community level and ensure their full and equitable participation in aboriginal self-government initiatives. The Government had also developed a proposed work plan to structure guidelines on engaging aboriginal women in the negotiation process; the drafting of the guidelines would be based on advice and recommendations of aboriginal women.

66. She also noted that the proposed gender-parity plebiscite for Nunavut had been put forward as part of the work of the Nunavut Implementation Commission and had been paid for by the Government of Canada; no formal evaluation of the proposal had been carried out. Part of the reason that the proposal had not passed could be the enormous amount of work involved in the creation of an entirely new territory and the consequent limitations on resources and competition among priorities.

67. **Ms. Ievers** (Canada) said that the importance of aboriginal issues to Canadian society and the commitment of the federal Government to correct discrimination against the aboriginal population were demonstrated by the numerous measures being undertaken by the Government. The current Government was committed to, inter alia, assisting poor lone-parent families and low-income families with severely disabled children, increasing the national child benefit, improving early-learning opportunities and childcare, and reducing the gap in opportunities between aboriginal and non-aboriginal children. The Government’s tangible commitment to the advancement of women and improvement of their condition in Canadian society was also demonstrated by the allocation of 20 million Canadian dollars to the programme to achieve gender equality.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.