



YWCA
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A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN

UN POINT TOURNANT
POUR LES FEMMES

MEDIA RELEASE

To recognize International Women's Day, YWCA Canada urges the federal government to look at figures that really matter to women, EI

Toronto, March 7 - Immediate changes are needed to make EI into a system that works when women lose employment, says YWCA Canada, the country's oldest and largest multi-service organization for women and girls. This year, International Women's Day falls in an economic storm that is tossing Canadians out of work in the tens of thousands, threatening livelihoods, families, businesses and communities. Many of those struggling hardest are women, 70% of whom pay into Employment Insurance and are not eligible to collect when they lose their jobs.

"Much ink is spilled over women's figures, and some should get more press than they do," says YWCA Canada CEO Paulette Senior. "Women account for 70% of part-time employees and two-thirds of Canadians working for minimum wage. Yet report after report confirms that women are unable to access a system they pay into every day, leaving them struggling in poverty."

Though Canada has the highest levels of working mothers in its history, 36% of mother-led families still have incomes below the poverty line and 43% of children living in a low-income family live with a single mother. Women of colour, Aboriginal women and women with disabilities are even more at risk.

"Pundits have suddenly been seized with the notion that with job losses concentrated in male-dominated sectors and women are becoming the majority of the workforce. There is talk about a new lipstick economy - as if this increase is a new phenomenon," laughs Senior. "It's not. Women's participation in the labour force has climbed steadily over the last thirty years. In fact, International Women's Day itself is rooted in women's cheap labour, sparked by a fire in Manhattan's garment district almost 100 years ago."

On March 25, 1911, a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, where many young, immigrant Jewish and Italian women worked in sweatshop conditions were often locked in before closing. Girls as young as fifteen were trapped and shocked New Yorkers watched them jump from ninth floor windows to avoid burning alive. Out of a workforce of 500, 146 died in the fire. Frances Perkins, the first woman appointed to a federal cabinet, witnessed the fire and dedicated her career to advocacy for workers, becoming Secretary of Labor in 1932.

"Canadian women could use a Frances Perkins now, advocating on their behalf in the current recession," says Senior. "Transparency in EI policy is a no-brainer. Women need access to the EI

funds that have been amassed through deductions from their pay cheques. It's a question of fundamental justice. Women should get what they have paid for."

As the nation lost 129,000 jobs in January, reported EI claims climbed. In December, the number of men receiving benefits jumped over 21% from a year earlier; for women it increased only 8.6%.

"For nearly a century, women have been singing about bread and roses. This year it is all about putting bread on the table," notes Senior. "Employment Insurance is the national equivalent of a rainy day fund, and this year, on International Women's Day, a hard rain is falling. Women need access now."

For more information, please visit www.ywccanada.ca .

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For further information on YWCA Canada and its Member Associations, or to set up an interview with Paulette Senior, CEO of YWCA Canada, contact Laura Tilley, Communications & Marketing Coordinator at 416.962-8881 x 233.

About YWCA Canada:

YWCA Canada is the country's oldest largest women's multi-service organization. With 33 Member Associations operating in more than 400 districts and communities across the country, our Turning Point Programs for Women™ - which address personal safety, economic security and well-being - reach out to 1 million women and girls in nine provinces and one territory. YWCA is the largest national provider of shelter to women, serving 25,000 women, children and teen girls including 6,000 fleeing domestic violence each year. We are the largest provider of literacy, life skills, employment and counselling programs in the country, and the second largest provider of childcare services. YWCA Canada is a member association of the World YWCA which unites 25 million women and girls worldwide and spans 125 countries. For more information about YWCA Canada and our Member Associations, visit www.ywccanada.ca.