

A Message From:
MARIA MINNA

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
BEACHES - EAST YORK



Minna Fighting for Women's Equality

The \$5 million (40%) cuts the Conservative government has made to the operating budget of Status of Women Canada directly impact its research capabilities which many groups depend on to fight for equality, violence against women and sexual exploitation, etc. The Women's Program which has funded women's groups has been fundamentally changed to reflect the right-wing ideological beliefs of the Conservatives.

The previous mandate of the program was to be the primary federal mechanism that promotes the *equality* of Women in Canada. Its mandate was to facilitate the full and active participation of women in the economic, social, *political* and *legal aspects* of society.

The Conservatives have shut down 12 of the 16 regional offices across the country and have also eliminated funding for groups working towards "*achieving social justice*". All organizations doing research and advocacy to advance women's equality will no longer be eligible for funding. These have all been eliminated from the funding criteria of the Women's Program that has been responsible for providing funding to such organizations as the Native Women's Association of Canada, the National Association of Women and the Law, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, the National Council on Women which has been in existence for over 114 years, and many other organization. One by one these organizations will close their doors because of the actions taken by this government. Slowly women will have less and less resources to advocate for equality or fight for their legal or political rights.



Meanwhile, the Harper government has allotted money for "**for profit**" organizations and "*spiritual organizations*". The international community is condemning the actions of the Harper government. We have become an international embarrassment when it comes to human rights for our aboriginal peoples and our women.

A coalition of six female Nobel Peace Laureates along with women's organizations in 18 countries have written letters to Prime Minister Stephen Harper expressing their concerns over his minority government's decision to undermine women's equality in Canada.

The Nobel Peace Laureates in a letter to Stephen Harper state: "**As international advocates for women's rights, we have relied on the Canadian government's leadership...It is the apparent roll-back of this leadership through recent decisions by your government that we find very disturbing.**"

Stephen Harper is going against his own signed election promise to "take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada."

In a Calgary Herald editorial on December 5, 2006, Adrienne Beattie compares the statements by Bev Oda, the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women to the advertising slogans used by Philip Morris cigarettes to sell Virginia Slims.

Beattie states: "At her first appearance before the Commons committee after being sworn in last February, Oda declared, "This government does fundamentally believe that women are equal." But her comments were like Philip Morris's sales pitch – they are slogans for throwing away federally supported programs for women...The problem is, inequality still exists and Status of Women Canada is vital to ensuring women's full participation in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of the country." She continues, "more women delegates were elected into the Afghanistan parliament than our own. Of the five major political parties in Canada, the Conservatives have the least number of women representatives."

This government claims to be transparent and accountable, however these cuts were made without any public consultation and were made in spite of recommendations to increase support for gender equality. As Beattie states: "Conservative ideology has trumped valuable social programs and public services that form the fabric of this country."

If this government is not stopped, we won't be able to recognize Canada. We will look more and more like the United States and less and less like the Canada that has been built up over decades.