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NDP LAUNCHES WOMEN'S "EQUALITY CHALLENGE" PLAN

NDP issues challenge to political leaders of all parties to address women's issues

OTTAWA - The NDP issued an "equality challenge" to political leaders today in Ottawa. Recently, women have been losing ground in their fight for equality as the Harper Conservatives and Liberals in Ottawa have dramatically cut programs and moved backwards on women's issues.

"After decades of progress towards equality, ordinary women in Canada are now under attack economically, socially and politically," said Irene Mathysen, NDP critic for the status of women. "Many women in Canada are still not safe in their homes or on the streets. One in four women in Canada is the victim of sexual violence in her lifetime."

Mathysen also pointed out that in the workplace, women today only make 70% of men's salaries, and for university graduates, the situation is only getting worse, not better. Poverty affects almost half of single, widowed or divorced women over 65, and more than 40% of unattached women under 65.

"The World Economic Forum ranks Canada in 14th position, behind Sri Lanka, the Philippines and most European countries. And it will get worse if Stéphane Dion, Gilles Duceppe and Stephen Harper don't act on our challenge," said Mathysen. "Successive governments have stalled progress, and the outright opposition to women's equality from the Harper Conservatives is threatening to turn the clock back."

The NDP Caucus' action plan addresses six major areas of concern for Canadians women: fairness for women at work, better work-family balance, an end to the violence against women, making sure women's voices are heard, fairness for marginalized women and equality for women around the globe.

"This is a much-needed, very comprehensive action plan for equality in Canada," added NDP caucus chair Judy Wasylycia-Leis. "The NDP is showing leadership by fighting for Canadian women to ensure they are treated fairly. This plan offers effective guidelines and steps, which if followed, can stop the destructive backlash we've experienced on women's rights. We are working towards building a truly equal society."

The NDP's challenge is being launched coast-to-coast today with events in Halifax, Vancouver and Ottawa.

For more information, please contact:
Rupinder Kaur, media officer, 613-222-5048