

September 3, 2016

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

As the Executive Director of Canada Without Poverty (CWP), I was pleased to see your comments in a recent letter to the [ONE Campaign](#) noting that you “wholeheartedly agree: Poverty is Sexist.”

At Canada Without Poverty, we are excited that your administration is putting feminist issues at the forefront of public discourse, particularly as it relates to social policy issues. Your comments come at a particularly timely moment as Canada will undergo its review under the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) this October. It is indeed a time to highlight the struggles of low-income women across the country.

With the promised Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy on the horizon as well, we are hopeful that Canada will renew our role as a feminist world leader by addressing systemic discrimination and inequality experienced by women not only globally, but also on home soil.

The reality is that poverty is sexist here in Canada too.

Each year, CWP tracks anti-poverty work and policies across the country in our [Poverty Progress Profiles](#) and we have noticed some astounding statistics. A woman’s experience of poverty in Canada is unique: lone-parent mothers enter shelters [at twice the rate of two-parent families](#), and it is estimated that [four out of five women in prison](#) are there for poverty-related crimes. Social assistance rates across the country are so woefully inadequate for single-parent families that only in Newfoundland and Labrador can these families receive assistance, which brings them above the poverty line. All other social assistance rates for lone-parent mothers ensure a life of poverty.

The Canadian Women’s Foundation has also pointed to [these sobering statistics](#):

- More than 1.5 million women in Canada are living on a low income.
- 37% of First Nations women (living off reserve), 23% of Métis and Inuit women (measured in the provinces), 21% of single mothers, 33% of women with disabilities, and 20% of immigrant women live in poverty.
- Compared to other developed countries, Canada’s poverty rate is higher than most, ranking 23rd out of 34 OECD countries.

Your letter aptly stated, “Nowhere on earth do women have as many opportunities as men. Nowhere”. We completely agree.

That's why policy in Canada must address barriers for women from marginalized communities, those who face disparities in employment as well as dismal childcare options, embarrassingly inadequate social assistance rates, the significant wage gap, and high rates of food insecurity for families. Without tackling the systemic causes of inequality and ensuring women's that human rights are fulfilled, poverty will remain sexist.

Prime Minister Trudeau, I would like to reiterate: your support for women in poverty globally is encouraging. Here at CWP we hope you will bring this verve to poverty policy in Canada to ensure women can be "treated equally everywhere."

We would be happy to assist in any way possible, and look forward to hearing your plans for action in this regard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leilani Farha". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Leilani Farha
Executive Director