

**Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences**

Ref.: AL CAN 4/2025  
(Please use this reference in your reply)

14 April 2025

Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 50/7.

In this connection, I would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information I have received concerning **the recent decision by the Government of Canada to eliminate the position of Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth in the 30<sup>th</sup> Canadian Ministry (Cabinet)**. This measure is deeply troubling and may constitute a significant step backward for the rights of women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada.

According to the information received:

On 14 March 2025, the Government of Canada announced a restructured cabinet that no longer includes a dedicated minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) portfolio. This change appears to consolidate responsibilities related to women and gender equality into broader ministerial portfolios, allegedly in response to economic pressures. While fiscal constraints are acknowledged, the removal of this dedicated role has been widely criticized by civil society, women's rights organizations, and policy experts, who emphasize that gender equality cannot be achieved without sustained political leadership, resources, and institutional accountability.

The elimination of the ministerial position for WAGE in the Cabinet undermines decades of progress in addressing systemic discrimination and gender-based violence in Canada, particularly affecting women and girls who experience heightened rates of discrimination and violence based on intersecting grounds, including indigenous women and girls and those with disabilities.

Without prejudging the accuracy of the information received, I express my deep concern toward the abolishment of the ministerial position for WAGE, which contradicts Canada's commitments under its Feminist International Assistance Policy, the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, and the spirit of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This decision also appears to be inconsistent with the recent and welcome signature by the Government of Canada of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, known as the Belém do Pará Convention. In signing the Convention, Canada has signalled its support for strengthening the Inter-American human rights framework and ongoing regional efforts to eliminate gender-based violence against women and girls. To fulfil increased responsibilities under international and regional human rights

instruments, however, Canada must bolster—not reduce—its dedicated focus on gender equality. I wish to underline that the complete abolishment of a ministerial position of this nature has rarely been evidenced in other jurisdictions and sets a negative precedent.

To conclude, I strongly recommend that the current and future Governments of Canada maintain a dedicated federal department focused on gender equality and women headed by a Minister; strengthen its mandate on gender equality in its own right; and provide it with sufficient financial, technical, and human resources.

Should Canada maintain the abolition of the ministerial position for WAGE, it would be important to take into account the negative consequences that may result and identify how the consequences on the rights of women and girls will be mitigated. Furthermore, it would be important to reflect on whether placing the responsibilities for women’s affairs and gender equality within the Ministry of Canadian Culture and Identity, Parks Canada, and the Quebec Lieutenant would be appropriate.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is my responsibility, under the mandate provided to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to my attention, I would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the elimination of the position of Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth.
2. Please provide the rationale for eliminating the ministerial position for WAGE and whether consultations, if any, were held with affected groups, including women’s organizations, victims of discrimination and gender-based violence, and other relevant civil society organizations.
3. Please explain what institutional mechanisms are being put in place to ensure that gender equality remains a priority across all government policies and programmes.
4. Please provide how your Excellency’s Government will ensure dedicated funding, policy oversight, and accountability mechanisms for advancing gender equality, addressing gender-based violence, and supporting youth engagement.
5. Please provide information on your Excellency’s Government’s plans for ratifying the Belém do Pará Convention.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency’s Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, I urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to prevent any weakening of institutional capacity to address gender-based discrimination and violence, and to ensure that the gains made in gender equality are preserved and advanced.

I may publicly express my concerns in the near future as, in my view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. I also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that I have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Reem Alsalem

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

## Annex

### Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, I would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the international norms and standards applicable to the present case. I would like to first remind you of the legal obligations of States under international human rights law to respect, protect and fulfil women's rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights to non-discrimination and equality set out in articles 3 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by Canada on 19 May 1976 and article 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ratified by Canada on 19 May 1976 and article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by Canada on 13 December 1991.

I would also like to recall that article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Canada on 10 December 1981, affirms that States Parties have a fundamental obligation to pursue, without delay and by all appropriate means, a policy aimed at eliminating discrimination against women, including gender-based violence (CEDAW/C/GC/35, para. 21). Article 5 of CEDAW further requires States Parties to "take all appropriate measures: (a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women." Furthermore, in resolution 41/6, the Human Rights Council urged States to remove barriers, whether political, legal, practical, structural, cultural, economic, institutional or resulting from the misuse of religion, that prevent the full, equal, effective and meaningful participation of women and girls in all fields.

In its general recommendation no. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women updating general recommendation no. 19 (1992) on violence against women, the CEDAW Committee underscored the need for States parties "to adopt legislation prohibiting all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, harmonizing national law with the Convention," as well as to "to adopt and adequately provide budgetary resources for diverse institutional measures, in coordination with the relevant State branches [including] the design of focused public policies, the development and implementation of monitoring mechanisms," in accordance to articles 2 and 5 of the Convention ([CEDAW/C/GC/35](#), paras. 26(a) and (b)). The CEDAW Committee further urged States parties to "eliminate the institutional practices and individual conduct and behavior of public officials that constitute gender-based violence against women, or tolerate such violence" and stressed that "appropriate measures to modify or eradicate customs and practices that constitute discrimination against women, including those that justify or promote gender-based violence against women, must also be taken at the executive level" ([CEDAW/C/GC/35](#), para. 26(b)).

With regard to coordinating and monitoring and data on gender-based violence against women, the CEDAW Committee recommended States parties to "set up a mechanism or body, or mandate an existing mechanism or body, to regularly coordinate, monitor and assess the national, regional and local implementation and effectiveness of [data collection measures and to] allocate appropriate human and

financial resources at the national, regional and local levels to effectively implement laws and policies for the prevention of all forms of gender-based violence against women, provision of protection and support to victims/survivors, investigation of cases, prosecution of perpetrators and provision of reparations to victims/survivors, including support to women’s organizations” ([CEDAW/C/GC/35](#), para. 34).

In the most recent concluding observations on Canada adopted by the CEDAW Committee on 30 October 2024, the Committee expressed concern over persistent systemic discrimination against women and girls and recommended the Government take urgent action to eliminate inequalities; achieve women’s equal representation in decision-making positions; intensify efforts to combat gender-based violence; improve access to justice; and expand socio-economic support to address the feminization of poverty ([CEDAW/C/CAN/CO/10](#)). These measures, the Committee stressed, should pay special attention to the intersectional barriers faced by marginalized groups, including indigenous women, women belonging to religious minorities, women of African descent, women with disabilities, amongst others.

I also wish to refer your Excellency’s Government to the Political Declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women adopted at the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2020, in which Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the pledge to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly by “strengthening the effectiveness and accountability of institutions at all levels to promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” and “matching commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls with adequate financing through the mobilization of financial resources from all sources” ([E/CN.6/2020/10](#), paras. 12(c) and (e)).

Finally, I would like to recall the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on State responsibility for eliminating violence against women, which takes note of the States’ accountability towards social structural deficiencies and systemic challenges, such as ongoing gender discrimination ([A/HRC/23/49](#)). States need to take a life cycle approach in attending to the complex interplay of multitudinous barriers that contribute to violence against women and girls, as well as act with due diligence in recognition of its systemic-level responsibility to address the root causes and consequences of violence against women and girls.