

10 YEARS OF FEDERAL BUDGETS:

DOUBLE WHAMMY FOR WOMEN

OTTAWA - February 3, 2005 - Federal fiscal choices have done little to improve most women's economic security over the last 10 years, says the first ever analysis of federal budgets on Canadian women.

The ground-breaking report, released today in Ottawa by the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), tracks a decade of federal budgets. Written by award-winning economist Armine Yalnizyan, it measures the federal government's performance against the explicit commitments it made to gender equality in Beijing in 1995. It shows that massive spending cuts unduly hurt women in the deficit era and women's interests have been largely ignored since Ottawa began posting surpluses.

"On the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, we found that the promises didn't match up with the federal government's fiscal choices," Yalnizyan said.

"Since 1998 Canada has posted annual surpluses, but the federal government has been more interested in tax cuts and debt reduction than in reinvesting in social supports that help women," added Yalnizyan.

By comparing federal budget promises with federal public accounts, Yalnizyan was able to trace where the money was cut during the nation's deficit era, and where it was spent during the surplus era. The results make it clear that promises made to women were not kept.

* Cuts and changes made to vital programs - such as Employment Insurance, the Child Tax Benefit, housing, and the Canada Health and Social Transfer - during the deficit era were never fully reversed during surplus years;

* Almost \$12 billion a year was cut from these social supports between 1994 and 1997;

* Once the federal government began registering surpluses in 1998, it allocated \$152 billion to tax cuts and \$42 billion to new program spending on initiatives such as defence and innovation, while programs that benefit women lost out;

* Only a fraction of new spending went to affordable housing or quality child care - programs that make a central difference in women's lives.

"What we found is that women bore the brunt of the federal government's deep fiscal cuts," said FAFIA spokesperson Lise Martin.

The report shows that since the deficit was eliminated way ahead of schedule, and since the surpluses have been much larger than projected, the depth of the cuts made between 1995 and 1998 may not have been necessary and many women may have suffered needlessly.

"Even now, social programs that directly benefit women remain low on the government's list of fiscal priorities. Whether times are bad, or times are good, women are made to wait," emphasized Lise Martin.

"A commitment to equality means a commitment to allocating resources to the programs that make a difference," said Shelagh Day of FAFIA. "After 10 years of waiting for progress, it's time for the Government of Canada to stop ignoring women. Women have a claim to make on this surplus."

For more information:

Nancy Peckford: (613) 232-9505, x222 or (613) 292-7941 (cell)

Lise Martin: (613) 563-0681

Shelagh Day: (604) 872-0750

An executive summary and the full report are available at:
<http://www.fafia-afai.org> <<http://www.fafia-afai.org>> in both official languages.

FAFIA is an alliance of more than 50 Canadian women and human rights organizations, including the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres, la Fédération des femmes du Québec, the Yukon Status of Women Council, the Disabled Women's Network, the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women, the Congress of Black Women of Canada, the Native Women's Association of Canada, the National Association of Women and the Law, and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.