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Committees and Private
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149 Stanley Avenue, Etobicoke, Ontario

November 25, 1980

Senate-Commons Committee
on the Constitution
P.O. Box 1044
South Block
Parliament Buildings
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A7

Co-chairmen: Senator Hayes
Mr. Serge Joyal

Dear Senator Hayes and Mr. Joyal:

The Board of Directors of Women's Habitat is very concerned that all Canadians have the opportunity to enjoy equal rights irrespective of sex.

Women's Habitat of Etobicoke is a charitable, non-profit emergency shelter for abused women with children. Daily, we house and assist women whose basic human rights have been violated. In our small, remedial way, we try to promote our clients' self-respect and re-evaluation of their situation. The hundreds of women we have housed, consistently confirm that women today are quick to recognize and reject attitudes and policies that place them in a different category than men.

Through wisdom and concrete effort, a government can provide legislative changes that enhance and promote truly civil laws which impart a healthy respect for oneself and others. Canadian men, women (and children) deserve to have, as an integral part of our Constitution, the formal legislative backing of the issues listed below:

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Women's Habitat strongly supports the statements and amendments proposed by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

The federal government's Charter of Rights is a critical document. Also critical, is the need for the law itself to treat men and women equally - not limited to the law's equal application to all individuals in a specific category.

Canadians deserve legislation that cannot be misinterpreted to provide differential treatment to men and women. A Charter of Rights can only be a misnomer if parts of it can be interpreted to deny equal rights to men and women, i.e. if it can be interpreted to deny Indian women equal rights to that of Indian men. We urge support of legislation and amendments that:

- 1.a) provides equality in the laws themselves (as well as the administration of the laws) to men and women;
- b) immediately grants 1.a) - a three year moratorium is unnecessary and insulting;
2. guarantees the appointment of a representative number of women to the Supreme Court of Canada and all other courts;
3. either deletes, or minimally, that specifies what rights cannot be abrogated in time of war or real or apprehended insurrection, i.e. the right to life, liberty and security; not to be subjected to cruel or unusual treatment or punishment; and the right to equality;
4. specifies women as a disadvantaged group requiring affirmative action; clearly articulated goals and objectives, and time frames to achieve equality;
5. prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex even if not all members of a sex are discriminated against.

We make the above recommendations for legislative change in good faith and in an effort to ensure a more just, humane and healthy environment for all Canadians.

We ask you to discuss our proposals with the Committee on the Constitution and to demonstrate strong support in this vital matter.

Sincerely,

Nancy Lawrie

(Mrs.) Nancy Lawrie, President,
Women's Habitat of Etobicoke

cc: Rt. Hon. Pierre Trudeau
Hon. Jean Chrétien