



Deafening silence on women's issues: Leaders seem oblivious to 52% of the Population

Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS)

Ottawa, 16 June 2004 - Anxiety mounts among voters concerned about women's equality following the federal leaders' debates on Monday and Tuesday. Women denounce the party leaders for neither mentioning, much less committing to address, the pressing areas of concern promoted by women in this election.

"The leaders seem to be disconnected from the social issues and concerns that real people are worried about in Canada," says Dr. Ailsa Watkinson, President of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS). "Aside from passing reference to women's right to choice on abortion and a brief exchange on child care, many issues critical to women were ignored."

"The debates were a missed opportunity for parties to actually address what they plan to do for women and children. Specifically, how they will address inadequate welfare and other social, health and educational services, without which we will see ever increasing poverty, homelessness and the amplified relegation of our most vulnerable to subsistence living, the streets, jail or death," continued Kim Pate of CAEFS. "Despite many concrete recommendations to governments and parties for proactive steps to achieve women's equality, there seems to be little interest in meeting the needs of women and children. It is disrespectful and dishonours all of us."

Leaders were so busy attacking each other, women's groups wonder if leaders' debates offer voters any meaningful discussion of policy issues. "The massive levels of marginalization of the most vulnerable have mushroomed in recent decades. It is not too late to correct past mistakes and alleviate inequality for the betterment of all Canadians. Women are looking for genuine leadership, but that seems to be the biggest deficit in Canada these days if the debates are anything to go by," concluded Pate.

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For more information, contact **Kim Pate** at kpate@web.ca , 613-238-2422