

# ***Building Our Union Through Diversity, Equality and Solidarity***

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The CAW has a long history of fighting for democracy within the union and fighting for social justice on a broader scale. Our union has been at the forefront in the fight for equality, not only because it is the right thing to do but also because it is essential to the basic struggle for human dignity and the very survival of the trade union movement.

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*"The involvement and activism of so many women in our union has made our union better and stronger. From our earliest years as a union, pioneering women have made their mark.....*

*The role of leadership in our union has been, not to oppose change, but to create space and support for change.....*

*Women make the union strong."*

Buzz Hargrove, CAW President

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Building the CAW for the future means organizing workers in many sectors, including retail, hospitality, health care, transportation, education, fisheries and mining along with our traditional base in the manufacturing sector. Women are predominant in many of these sectors. A key influence affecting women's decision to join the CAW is our longstanding and very public commitment to equality.

This document will build on our 1991 Affirmative Action Statement "*Solidarity in Diversity*" by ensuring that the CAW continues its leadership within the labour movement and the community. And that means continuing the struggle for progressive equality measures. These measures support programs and recommendations aimed at strengthening the union.

## ***Gender Equality in the CAW***

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Our success has been our commitment to ensuring that the union is inclusive for all workers to participate and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Our ability to build a strong, effective union has been premised on our commitment to democracy and equality.

Significant progress has been made in creating space within the union to ensure all groups are represented in the structures, education programs and activities of the union.

## ***Building On Our 1991 Affirmative Action Policy – 'Solidarity in Diversity'***

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Democracy and equality is the cornerstone of the CAW's Policy Statement on Affirmative Action - *Solidarity in Diversity* adopted at the 1991 Constitutional Convention. The policy recognized the changing face of our membership and the need for the union to reflect those changes if we were to continue to grow. The policy gave practical and concrete initiatives to act on the CAW's commitment to equality, thereby strengthening the union through solidarity.

Many positive actions came as a result of the 1991 Affirmative Action Policy including: the development and successful implementation of educational programs and initiatives specifically designed for women, workers of colour, and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-gendered (LGBT) members; mandatory seats for women and workers of colour on the National Executive Board (NEB), and an enhanced commitment to organizing women and workers of colour.

The 1991 policy called for the conscious integration of equity issues in the union's education programs, reference materials and activities. It also recommended the continuation of a number of positive measures that the CAW had already undertaken on gender equality issues.

The Women's Activist Program, developed shortly after the 1991 convention, is a glowing testament to the level of commitment the CAW has demonstrated in meeting its equity objectives. The Women's Activist Program has provided much-needed impetus for women to become active in the union. Indeed, most of the women in leadership positions in the union today were inspired by and found confidence through their participation in the Women's Activist Program to run for leadership in the first place. The program is effective in breaking down existing barriers that limit women's participation in the union and for developing women's leadership skills.

More than ten years have passed since we last reviewed our progress on gender equality. We believe that the 2003 Constitutional Convention represents an opportunity for our union to assess our growth and recommit to building on the success of our 1991 Affirmative Action Policy and to develop new initiatives that will allow us to build for the future.

As in 1991, our goal is not only to respond to the changes that we have seen in the union but also to position the union for the future so that we can attract and organize new members. Ultimately, our objective is to build on our progress so that we can enhance democracy and solidarity within the union thereby solidifying our reputation in the labour movement as being at the forefront of progressive change.

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### ***Solidarity in Diversity***

*"Our union has a strong history for fighting for progressive social change.*

*To call each other sister and brother and truly mean it we must build solidarity through diversity".*

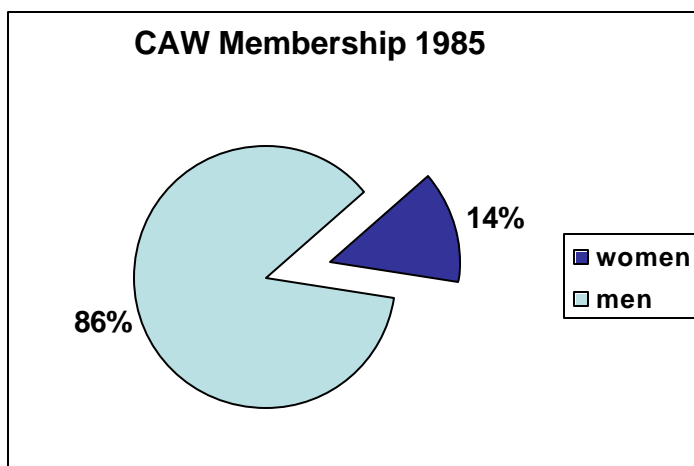
Robert White, CAW President, 1991

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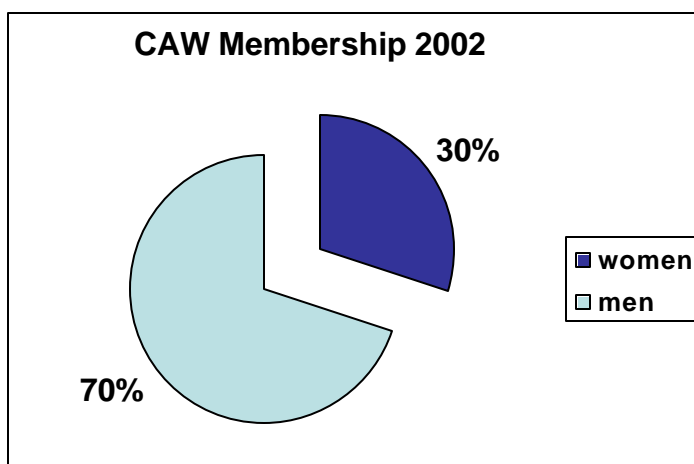
## Growing Numbers of Women in the CAW

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The number of women members in the union has grown remarkably since the formation of the CAW in 1985. Female membership in the union has in fact more than doubled since our founding convention. Today, women represent some thirty percent (30%) of the membership compared to only twenty (20%) in 1991 and fourteen percent (14%) in the 1980s. Female membership in the union will undoubtedly continue to grow as our union grows.



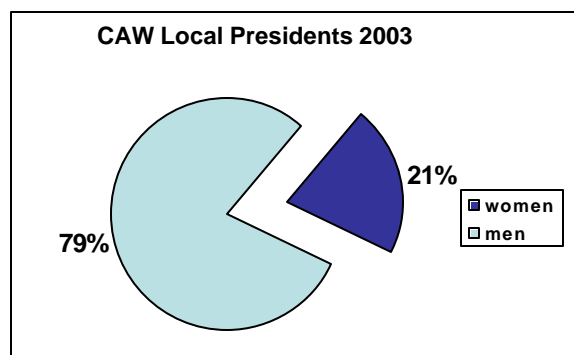
Newly organized units and recent mergers are bringing new groups of workers, including large numbers of women and workers of colour, into the CAW. In particular, a recent merger with the former Retail Wholesale Union (RW) brought about 23,000 new members into the ranks of the CAW, most of them are women working in predominately female-dominated sectors like retail and hospitality. In addition, some 18,000 predominately female health care workers have joined the union since our last constitutional convention, and women in many other sectors of the economy are attracted to the CAW.



While the rate of female membership in the union is increasing, women members continue to be under-represented in many decision-making bodies of the union. So while we have worked hard to make our union more accessible to women and to encourage women to become more active in the union, and while progress is evident on many fronts, there is clearly still more work to be done.

## 2003 National Union Affirmative Action Survey Results

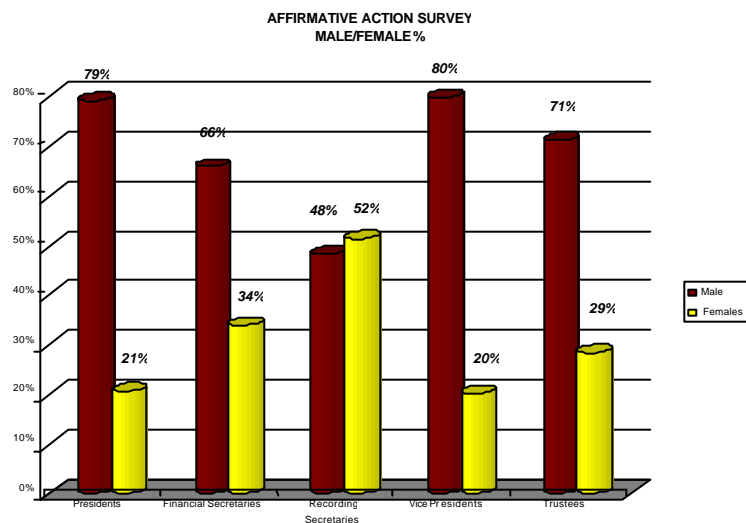
In 2003, the National Union initiated a survey to collect data on the demographic make-up of our local and workplace leadership. Surveys were distributed to all CAW Local Unions and staff representatives to obtain a snapshot of the proportion of women, men, workers of colour and LGBT members in executive local leadership positions and bargaining committees. This was the first time that our Union has undertaken collection of this type of data, and the process proved to be a difficult challenge. There was some difficulty analyzing the results, and some surveys were incomplete. Nonetheless, there was some good data collected pertaining to the locals that we can report.



Of the 150 locals that participated in the National Union's 2003 Affirmative Action Survey, 21% reported that the position of Local President is held by a woman. Similarly, only 20% of Local Vice-President positions are held by women.

Women are better represented in the positions of Recording Secretary, Trustee and Financial Secretary. The survey results show that women comprise 52% of Recording Secretaries, 29% of Trustee positions and 34% of Financial Secretary positions respectively.

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On the other hand, women are not as well represented in leadership positions at the workplace level. Information compiled from membership data indicates that only 15% of unit chairs are held by women.

The survey results combined with membership data point to the need for strengthening our initiatives for ensuring women are more equitably reflected in the structures and leadership of the union. Embracing diversity by making our structures more accessible and by encouraging women to run for leadership positions can only make the union stronger.

## ***Democracy: Our Union's Vision for the Future***

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Democracy and equality are integral to everything we do and stand for as a union. These are core values that not only define how we approach workplace issues, but also determine which issues are important to us. Everyday we struggle for democracy and equality for workers. Everyday we fight with the boss to ensure that all workers are treated with respect and dignity. In order to lend credibility to our beliefs and struggles, it is important that we strive to ensure that democracy and equality is reflected within our own structures.

One continuing challenge is to ensure that the union adapts to changes in the membership and meets the diverse needs and concerns of our members. All workers need to see themselves reflected in the leadership and activities of the union. All members need to know that if they become active in the union, that their rights and opinions will be treated with respect and dignity. And, finally, all members need to know that they can aspire to elected positions within the union. This is what gender equality is about and these goals define the core values of the union.

Union structures that include more diverse representation benefit enormously from additional skills, different abilities, access to new networks and communities, new ideas and different perspectives. Women workers can offer different perspectives on union issues based on their differing labour market and workplace experiences. Women have unique views to offer on the challenges we all confront, not just on "women's issues".

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*"Equality, democracy and solidarity are inseparable - erode one and the others become meaningless. The growing numbers of CAW women leaders strengthen our union today and extend a warm welcome to the countless women activists of tomorrow."*

Peggy Nash  
Assistant to the President, 2003

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Women's involvement in the union goes beyond the traditional 'women's issues'. Women have worked side by side our brothers in struggles to improve the daily lives of working people. We have struggled for important measures such as reduced work time, paid time off the job, improved wages, benefits and pensions and safer and healthier workplaces.

The promotion of gender equality within the union not only strengthens democracy but also provides common ground for the CAW to forge alliances with other progressive unions and community groups. Ensuring gender equality in the union is crucial for strengthening our fight-back against the conservative strategy to divide and conquer working people.

## ***Building the Union through New Organizing***

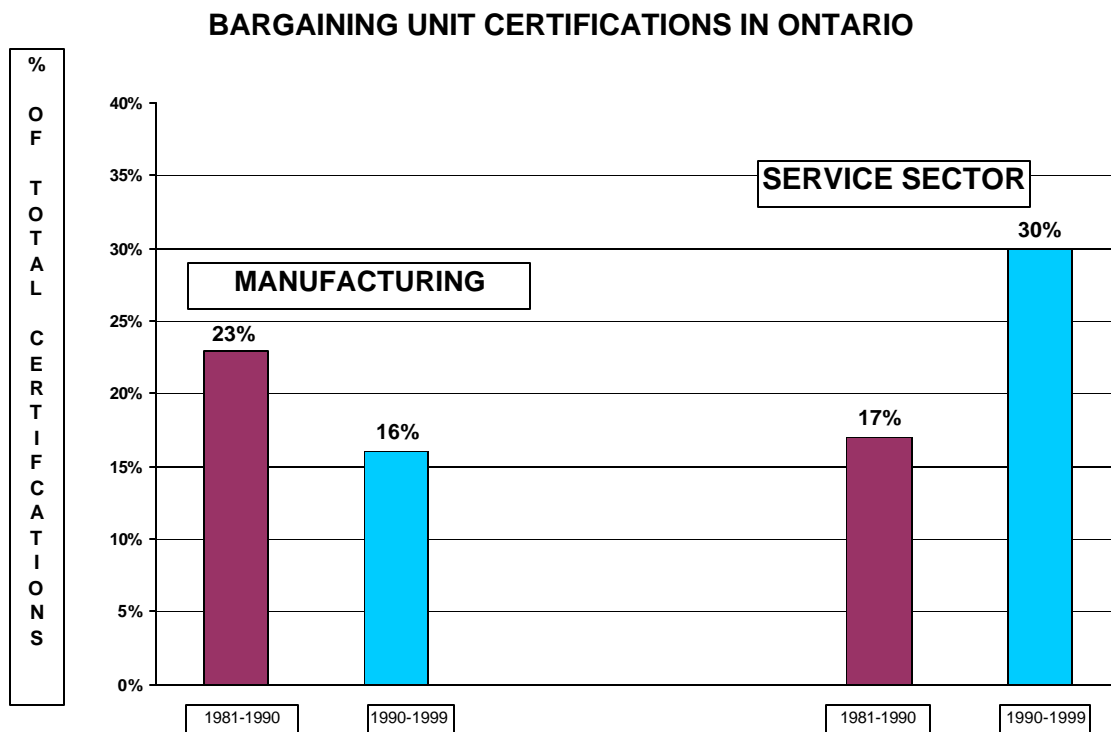
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Organizing new members is crucial to building the union. In order to appeal to new members, it is important that workers feel that the union is representative of them. Our commitment to ensuring gender equality is fundamental to our future ability to organize new workers.

The private service sector represents one of the fastest growing, unorganized sectors of the economy. This sector is largely female-dominated, characterized by minimum wage jobs, insecure working hours and no benefits. There is no doubt that workers in this sector could benefit enormously from unionization.

With the growth of the service sector, unions are increasingly shifting their organizing priorities from the manufacturing sector to the service sector. This shift is reflected in the growing number of certification applications covering service sector workplaces.

In Ontario, for example, the number of applications covering service sector workplaces grew dramatically from 17% of total applications for the period between 1981-1990 to 30% of total applications for the period of 1990-1999. This growth was accompanied by a clear decline in organizing effort in the manufacturing sector. For example, between the period 1981-1990, some 23% of all applications that were filed in the province of Ontario covered the manufacturing sector compared to only 16% for the period between 1990-1999.



The service sector accounts for about seventy four percent (74%) of all jobs in Canada, representing an enormous yet largely untapped organizing potential for unions. Building the union for the future will likely mean organizing the service sector and its

predominately female workforce. About eighty-seven percent (87%) of jobs held by women are in the service sector.

Our success in organizing service sector workers largely depends on the extent to which we can appeal to women workers. To better attract new female members, we need to reinforce that gender equality is an integral part of our policies and structures. In order to present the union as an attractive option to women workers, the union must be seen as being more attentive to the distinct concerns of working women.

Our organizing efforts will be even more successful if we can better appeal directly to the workers we are trying to organize. Our chances of success improve if we can demonstrate to new members that the union is truly representative. Our odds of winning are also improved if the workers we are trying to organize can relate personally to their first union contact, which is typically the organizer.

In short, building the union means embracing diversity. Gender equality is consistent with our goal of building the union. It involves appealing to new members by guaranteeing that all members can fully participate in the activities of the union and by ensuring sufficient representation of women and workers of colour in the union's leadership structures, decision-making bodies, delegations and committees.

## ***How are we doing?***

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We can be proud of our record on gender and equity issues. The CAW has always been at the forefront of the labour movement in ensuring that our programs, policies and bargaining demands include a gender and equity component. Our actions demonstrate our commitment to gender equality. They include:

- Amended in 1962 Article 44 of the Constitution to require the establishment of local union women's committees.
- Held our first Women's Conference for the UAW Canadian Region in 1964.
- Created the Canadian Women's Department in 1970.
- Appointed the first women to Canadian UAW Staff - Edith Johnson, Local 27 and Lorna Moses, Local 1839.
- Established in 1982 the CAW Council Women's Committee.
- Negotiated the inclusion of a child care fund in a collective agreement in 1983, and we were the first Canadian union to negotiate an employer-funded child care centre in 1984.
- Established in 1988 the Roxie Baker Child Care Centre at the CAW Family Education Centre.
- Adopted at the 1988 Constitutional Convention a ground-breaking anti-harassment policy that dealt with co-worker harassment.
- Passed a strong resolution at our 1991 Constitutional Convention on violence against women and affirmative action, guaranteeing a minimum of two seats on our National Executive Board (NEB) for women and one seat for a worker of colour.

- Developed a Women’s Activist Program in 1992.
- Won the right to refuse work in the event of harassment in 1993 Big Three negotiations.
- Bargained equity representatives and women advocates in 1993.
- Negotiated same-sex benefits including pension benefits for workers at Nortel.
- Adopted a comprehensive policy paper on gay, lesbian and bi-sexual rights at our 1997 Constitutional Convention.
- Won childcare subsidy and tuition refund in 1999 Big Three negotiations, and in 2002 made significant improvements to these benefits.
- Developed in 2003 two new women’s educational programs, the Women’s Activist Program and the Women’s Leadership Program.

Indeed, our record on gender and family issues is impressive. We can easily fall back on this record to demonstrate our commitment to gender equality within the union. However, in order to remain at the forefront of progressive change and to maintain our strong reputation as the union that fights for the rights of all workers, we need to continuously monitor our progress and adapt to changes in our membership and society as a whole.

## ***Goals for the Future***

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To remain as the vanguard of progressive change, we must continue to build on the progress we have made on equity issues. Ensuring that our structures and policies are more reflective of our membership will help build the union by encouraging activism and new ideas as well as by assisting our efforts to organize new members. Gender equality is crucial for strengthening democracy within the union and for our ability to forge alliances with other progressive unions and community groups.

We can build our union with a stronger democracy by continuing to reflect the changing needs and composition of our membership and by enhancing the representative nature of our internal structures and policies. We can strengthen our organizing capacity by targeting growing sectors of the economy such as the service and health sectors where there is a predominately female workforce. This is how we can build the union.

## ***Recommendations***

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The following recommendations comprise our gender equality goals:



## Information

- Data to be collected through the 'State of the Union' on gender representation
- The Women's Department to produce an annual report to the joint CAW/TCA Council or Convention on the status of women in the union. This report will also measure progress in each of the following recommendations:

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### Education

- Continue to implement the proposals from the 1991 Affirmative Action policy
- Improve representation of women, with special outreach to women of colour, in all education and training courses such as PEL and Family Education.

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### Staffing

- Continue efforts to have staff in all areas reflect the make-up of the membership by increasing the number of women, particularly women of colour
- Ensure that at least one woman staff representative in major area offices will be responsible for advancing women's participation in the union as part of her regular assignment.
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### Local Union

- Work to ensure that local union executives, boards and committees reflect the composition of the membership
- Continue the offer made in 1991 that Locals can apply to the NEB to add additional places to their Local Executive Board to achieve better representation
- Locals to encourage women to run as CAW/Quebec Council and convention delegates to reflect the membership of the Local.
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### Bargaining Agenda

- Continue to negotiate the following provisions in all CAW collective agreements:
  - Harassment policy, procedure and training
  - Language on violence against women
  - Women's advocates
  - Employment equity; pay equity
  - Gender neutral language
  - Child care and elder care
  - Emergency leave

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### Organizing

- Continue to target women's workplaces such as the private service sector in organizing drives.
- Train more CAW women organizers to increase their role in organizing new workplaces.
- Ensure that 'on-the-ground' organizers reflect the make-up of the workplace they are trying to organize.
- Create a new organizing brochure aimed specifically at women.

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### National Union

- Continue the goal of having the CAW Council Executive, the Quebec Council Executive and the National Executive Board reflect the proportion of women members in the union.

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### Bargaining Committees

- The CAW will launch a National Initiative, working with Locals and CAW women, to increase the representation of women at the bargaining table
- Women's Department to develop a collective bargaining training course designed specifically for women
- Work to ensure units with 30% or more women have at least one woman on the bargaining committee
- Newly organized units with 30% women should have at least one woman on the bargaining committee.

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### Council Committees

- Work to ensure Council Committees include women Council delegates
- Work to ensure the proportion of women on each committee reflect the percentage of women in the union
- Local officers, council delegates and committee members are encouraged to submit the names of women delegates to the President of CAW/Quebec Council for consideration.

## **Conclusion**

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These recommendations are vital to building the union. To position our union for the future, we must continue to build on our progress. To sustain our momentum, we are committed to building on the progressive policies of the 1991 Affirmative Action Policy and to implementing the new exciting initiatives that are presented in this document.

We look forward to implementing the recommendations aimed at organizing more women workers through the development of specially-designed brochures and the specific targeting of women's workplaces for unionization.

The recommendation to ensure better representation of women on bargaining committees will help strengthen our bargaining agenda, solidify our union's reputation on equity issues, and ultimately improve the lives of all working people. Also, the recommendations affirm our commitment to ensuring that the composition of CAW staff, the National Executive Board (NEB), Quebec Council, CAW Council Executive and Council Committees reflect the proportion of women members in the union.

These recommendations serve as an appeal to locals to continue to ensure that women are represented on their executive boards and local committees. Many locals have already implemented the recommendations from the 1991 policy to add two affirmative action spots, one for a woman and one for a worker of colour, to their executive board.

The recommendation to improve representation of women, with special outreach to women of colour, in all education and training courses is vital to building leadership that is more reflective of the membership and society as a whole. This initiative will inspire women's increased involvement in the union and help develop future women leaders. Special outreach initiatives will ensure that women of colour are better reflected in the union's activities and decision-making bodies.

Finally, the recommendation to continuously gather information on women in the union and to provide annual reports on their status will better enable us to monitor our progress on gender and equity issues. This will better ensure that the CAW is meeting the needs of its membership while at the same time adapting to changes in the union and broader society so that we can continue our leadership role in the labour movement.

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**Our message for the future is bold and clear: CAW leaders share both the vision of a more inclusive union and the courage to make it happen. Our decisions today will open doors for women in a very practical way, and re-energize the CAW of tomorrow.**

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