

Speaking Notes

for

**the Honourable Helena Guergis, P.C., M.P.,
Minister of State (Status of Women)**

on the occasion of

**the 14th meeting of the
APEC Women Leaders Network**

“Women and Sustainable Development in APEC”

**Singapore
Tuesday, August 4, 2009**

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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to be here with you today in Singapore – a centre of global commerce and a perfect venue for this gathering. I am particularly honoured to be representing Canada at the 14th meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Women Leaders Network.

The overall theme for APEC: Singapore 2009 is ***Sustaining Growth, Connecting the Region***. This theme reflects the ongoing efforts by Asia-Pacific economies to promote trade and investment in the region, efforts that are all the more crucial given the current global economic crisis. The theme also reminds us that our efforts must be sustainable: we must ensure that any economic gains we make today will ensure the continued prosperity of future generations.

The theme for this 14th annual meeting of APEC Women Leaders is ***Women and Sustainable Growth in APEC***, which makes a straightforward link with the overall theme and reflects the critical roles that women and women leaders are playing in current economic recovery efforts. I emphasize the plural here – “roles” – because the engagement of women in the economies of their own country – is evident in virtually all sectors and all levels of democratic responsibility.

This gathering is timely given the challenges of the global economic climate and the need to ensure that all citizens, including women, are well placed to seize upon the opportunities this crisis may present. Allow me then to spend the next few minutes discussing our government's plan for women, specific measures we are currently implementing and our Economic Action Plan that is helping our country recover.

Canada's Economic Action Plan focuses on five key elements, totaling roughly \$40 billion in the next two years. In broad terms the five sets of initiatives are as follows:

1) Support for Workers and Taxpayers

We are helping workers and taxpayers to stimulate consumer spending by freezing employment insurance premiums and making personal income tax reductions permanent. And to ensure that all Canadians could immediately begin to benefit from lower payroll deductions, these tax measures came into effect in April 2009.

2) Support for the Housing Sector:

To support the housing sector, we are providing first time homebuyers with tax credits to assist with closing costs. Funds are being provided to provinces to assist with renovations to social housing, and we are providing Canadian homeowners with up to \$1300 in a home renovation tax credit. All indications show that Canadians are taking advantage of this tax credit and are embarking on home renovations in increasing numbers.

3) Infrastructure to Create Jobs:

Even before the current Economic Action plan, we had already invested significant dollars to the Building Canada fund and our stimulus plan continues with an additional \$4 billion for infrastructure projects. Currently over 80 percent of the stimulus funds have either been committed or implemented.

4) Support for Business and Communities:

Our action plan provides for specific tax measures for businesses, including special write-offs for long term investments in inventory like machinery, equipment, computer hardware and software. In addition, we have raised the threshold for the small business tax rate and eliminated federal capital gains taxes. Our government is also putting in place measures to help those industries and communities that are particularly hard hit - those that depend on forestry, automotive, agriculture and tourism for example.

5) Improved Access to Financing:

The unavailability of credit has been one of the most significant impacts of the crisis. That is why our Economic Action Plan contains a large number of measures to improve the availability of credit in the Canadian economy. We are injecting \$200 billion of credit into the system through the Business Development Bank, the Export Development Corporation and the Bank of Canada.

These initiatives are the right response for Canada's economy but more importantly, they are the appropriate action for Canadians - including women and their families. Furthermore these initiatives are building on the programs we are providing for women to advance their economic security and prosperity.

At the 13th annual WLN meeting of APEC held in Peru, ministers in attendance were asked to prepare an annual summary of what would transpire throughout the year and report back at this year's meeting. I am pleased now to share our own country's developments over this past year, specifically – the actions Canada has taken in assisting women-led enterprises with gaining global market access – and to highlight the work we are doing in educating women and girls in science and technology.

In March of this year I had the pleasure of announcing a partnership with WEConnect Canada, an organization that delivers leading international certification standard for women-owned businesses. We provided funding for their project *Opening Doors to Corporate Markets: An Education, Training, Coaching and Mentoring Program*. This project will focus on increasing economic opportunities for women-owned businesses by increasing market access in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and other countries that promote supplier diversity.

The Harper Government supports WEConnect because it increases women's access to markets. We also believe in the importance of women in non-traditional occupations. To encourage this, the Government of Canada partnered with the Canadian Advanced Technology Alliance, Women in Technology (CATA WIT) on their project *Supporting Women's Leadership in the Advanced Technology Sectors*. This project will encourage more women to consider the advanced technology field, and help those women already working in the field to improve the skills, knowledge and expertise they need for success.

These partnerships have been made possible because of the changes our Government made to the Women's program. We introduced two new funds: the Partnership Fund and the Community Fund. The Partnership Fund allows our government to leverage funds from partners – which can include other levels of government, the private sector as well as non-government organizations. The Community Fund is a grant fund that allows Status of Women Canada to provide much needed funding to grassroots organizations that provide direct services and support to women across Canada. In addition to the two projects I have just highlighted, our changes have led to direct benefits for 100,000 women and one million women indirectly.

These measures, the Economic Action Plan, as well as other government initiatives - are making a difference in the lives of Canadian women. Like their counterparts in the other APEC member states, Canadian women are contributing significantly to our economy, as well as to international markets and economies around the globe. In fact, Canadian women are among the world's most entrepreneurial. Since 1997, women in Canada have started SMEs at twice the rate of men. In 2004, 47 percent of all Canadian SMEs were owned either partially or wholly by women.

And these women-owned businesses are everywhere in Canada— in our biggest cities, in remote Northern and Aboriginal communities, in farming communities and in towns and villages throughout the country.

As rapid advances in technology eliminate some of the most formidable geographic barriers, Canadian women business owners are now beginning to form networks to discuss challenges and common experiences, to support each other and to share insights. And as their ranks grow, they are an increasingly potent global economic force.

As Canada's first Minister of State dedicated solely to the Status of Women, I have travelled throughout our country and met with Canadian girls and women. We have discussed the issues and challenges they face as individuals, as members of their communities and as responsible citizens during this crucial period.

My findings are helping to inform the Government of Canada's development of an Action Plan for Women, which comprises three pillars: Improving women's economic security and prosperity; encouraging women and girls in leadership and decision-making roles; and, ending violence against women and girls.

The three pillars of the Action Plan – inter-dependent and equally important – also support our goal of equality for women. We will have reached our goal when all three pillars are firmly grounded in the Canadian way of life.

Our Government will continue to work to create the conditions for success for Canadian women. We know that when women prosper, families, communities, and indeed our nations prosper. All of you here today are clear examples of the crucial role women play in creating prosperity around the globe. Our Government will continue to be an active participant in APEC and to support the work of the APEC Women Leaders Network, which so positively contribute to the full participation of women in society. It is our firm belief that when women have the opportunity to participate fully in society, our communities are made stronger and we *all* benefit.

Thank you