

# **Immigration Ottawa Initiative Community and Protective Services Committee April 5, 2007**

## **Deputation presented by:**

City for All Women Initiative (CAWI)

Initiative: une ville pour toutes les femmes (IVTF)

Nubia Cermeno and Cecile Mbaya

Good morning members of the committee.

My name is Nubia Cermeño I am with the Latin American Women's Organization and the Steering Committee of the City for All Women Initiative. I am joined today by Cecile Mbaya, coordinator of Karibu Canada. We speak today in representation of women and organizations who are part of the network of the City for All Women Initiative. You will see some of us here wearing our peach scarves.

In June 2005, the Health and Social Services Committee renewed the partnership of the City for All Women Initiative and directed the Community and Protective Services Department to work with CAWI so as to ensure that the goal of integrating gender equality into city practices was realized. Since that time, CAWI has coordinated city staff and community in the development and pilot of the Gender Equality Guide, for using a Gender Equality Lens in developing programs. This Guide is currently under review for implementation city-wide.

We are here today to shed some light on the importance this report has for immigrant women and the barriers that must be overcome if the City of Ottawa is to make a real difference in the lives of immigrant families in our communities. In the months leading up to the Municipal Election, employment and training was one of the key issues that women in our network identified as an issue to raise with the candidates.

You may have heard some of us asking candidates to develop a collaborative approach between the City and women's organizations so as to help remove barriers that keep immigrant women from obtaining employment and training.

We strongly support this proposal. It is only by working in partnership with the community that such ambitious aims can be achieved.

We know the impact that the inability to find jobs has had on our families and communities. For many, it has meant that our hard earned skills and education are unutilized, which in turn has contributed to poverty, depression and family disintegration. The men are driving taxi cabs; while the women are cleaning the offices at night. In some cases, the men in our families have returned to our home countries to find jobs, while the women are left alone to raise the children. This results in a disintegration of our families; while the city does not benefit from the skills we have to offer.

The report mentions that women immigrants face greater challenges. We wish to name a few that we have experienced:

- If we have children, it is especially difficult to access employment and training if affordable childcare is not available.
- If we have children, we are more likely to remain in the home than attend language classes, which in turn keeps us from acquiring jobs.
- If we came from countries where women did not have the same opportunity as men to be educated, we are more likely to lack the literacy skills or educational to obtain a good job.
- If we are Muslim and wear a hijab, we encounter suspicion or a questioning of our abilities.
- As we often hold jobs at night or at irregular hours, it becomes unsafe and difficult for us to get to work when bus routes and hours are reduced.

My organization, Karibu Canada, serves women who are immigrant, francophone and black. We know what it means to be up against multiple barriers. In addition to the barriers mentioned above:

- If we are a woman of colour, we often encounter racial prejudice in seeking employment.
- Many of us already speak several languages from our home country as well as French. However, we are not considered employable without the English and we find there are limited opportunities for francophones to learn English.
- All of these factors are compounded when our diplomas and credentials are not recognized.

As immigrant communities, we know very well what is needed to help us integrate, but when we present funding proposals to address such needs, we face further discrimination as the funding is often denied.

In order to be successful, Immigrant Ottawa Initiative must address these barriers,

**There are three key elements we ask be part of this initiative:**

- 1) That differences and inequalities between women and men in immigrant populations be integrated throughout the work of the initiative so as to address barriers experienced by women, such as family responsibilities, safety and literacy levels.
- 2) That the initiative address the specific barriers of immigrants who face multiple barriers due to race, religion and language, including that of francophone immigrants.
- 3) That the City's Employment Equity program be an integral part of this initiative so that the City of Ottawa demonstrates leadership in this area.

We urge the Committee to support this important initiative.

We look forward to working with you to create a more inclusive work force in our city.

Thank you.