

INVESTING IN WOMEN'S EQUALITY...

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The Themis Monthly Giving Club is our fastest-growing group of donors! Monthly giving is the best way to support West Coast LEAF. It provides sustainable revenue, reduces administrative costs, and helps us to plan for the future. Please contact Fiona York at 604.684.8772 ext. 113 for more details.

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The Equality Rights Library is generously supported by Nathanson, Schachter & Thompson LLP.

Our legal and equality rights library includes current and historical material and information tracing human rights and equality legislation in Canada. It contains case histories, facts, biographical material and studies that apply to women's issues, equality issues and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

For information about sponsoring the Equality Rights Library, please contact West Coast LEAF at info@westcoastleaf.org.

AEROPLAN MONTH AT WEST COAST LEAF

October is Aeroplan Month at West Coast LEAF. Help West Coast LEAF stay province-wide in our focus with a donation of Aeroplan miles or Vancity VISA points. Aeroplan miles are used by volunteers and staff to speak at events and deliver workshops, and to bring board and committee members to our office. For more details, contact West Coast LEAF at 604.684.8772 or info@westcoastleaf.org.



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LEAFlet

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WEST COAST LEAF AGM
Vancouver, Sept. 22, 2011

TRANSFORMING OUR
FUTURE WORKSHOP
Penticton, Sept. 24, 2011

PERSONS DAY BREAKFAST
Kamloops, Oct. 18, 2011



CEDAW & THE UNITED STATES The long road to ratification

By Ashly Hubert

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was drafted and adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 18, 1979. Over 30 years later, CEDAW has been ratified by 187 countries and not ratified by only six: Iran, Palau, Somalia, Sudan, Tonga, and the United States. The United States, however, has the unique position of being the only country that has signed the Convention but not ratified it.

In 1980, former US President Jimmy Carter signed and referred CEDAW to Congress for ratification, but to this day the treaty has never been passed by the full Senate. For CEDAW to be ratified in the US, the treaty must first receive a hearing before the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) before it can be heard by the Senate. Upon a successful hearing by the SFRC, the treaty is sent to the Senate for deliberation and must pass by a two-thirds vote. Once all these steps have occurred, it is still necessary for the President to sign the treaty before it can be officially ratified. Currently CEDAW is sitting with the SFRC and, at this time, there is no likelihood that a hearing will be held in the near future.

Attempts by advocates to have the US ratify CEDAW, however, are not dormant. A coalition group called CEDAW Task Force of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (CEDAW Task Force) is hard at work to keep CEDAW alive in Washington, DC through lobbying and outreach. The CEDAW Task Force consists of 160 organizations from various backgrounds and affiliations. One such organization is Citizens for Global Solutions, which is involved in advocacy and grassroots outreach for the CEDAW Task Force.

Lara Yeo, a communications intern with West Coast LEAF and recent graduate from Wellesley College in Massachusetts, completed her summer internship with Citizens for Global Solutions. When discussing CEDAW with me, Lara gave two arguments for why the US should ratify this international treaty. Firstly, it is in the US's national interest to ratify CEDAW because American citizens will benefit from the treaty's outcomes. And secondly, the US will benefit as a global leader because its ability to discuss human rights is currently hampered by the fact that it is only one of six countries that has not ratified CEDAW.

Lara further argues that the CEDAW treaty would allow for a deeper analysis into women's rights within the US's legal and social system. CEDAW2011.org states: "ratification of CEDAW would provide a catalyst for the US to examine areas of persistent discrimination against women and develop strategies for solutions." Ratification, therefore, would create a platform to discuss as well as expose inequalities and abuses experienced by American women.

Students can learn more about CEDAW advocacy in the US by contacting studentsforcedaw@gmail.com. In BC, West Coast LEAF's annual CEDAW Report Card measures compliance with the Convention. The Report Card will be released on Persons Day, October 18.

PROGRAM NEWS

In August, West Coast LEAF and the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC) made the difficult decision to withdraw from the **Missing Women Commission of Inquiry**. The government's repeated refusal to fund counsel for community groups sadly eroded the commission's credibility and its potential for well-rounded, meaningful recommendations.

Most of the groups and coalitions granted standing have now pulled out of the proceedings. As a result of the government's funding decision, only one lawyer will represent non-police participants. Other official commissions have provided funding to more broadly representative groups.

"We are extremely concerned that the government's failure to commit the necessary resources to this Commission is an indication that the government is failing to take women's safety seriously. The failure to provide adequate resources does not bode well for the government's commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Commission."

Kasari Govender, West Coast LEAF Executive Director

While the inquiry has announced that four lawyers (two pro bono) will represent community interests, there is still concern that broad community perspective is seriously compromised.

Hearings begin October 11, and community forums will start on September 12 in Northern BC.

Last year, West Coast LEAF intervened at the BC Court of Appeal on the issue of "public interest standing" in *SWUAV and Kiselbach v AG Canada*.

West Coast LEAF argued that organizations should have a right to bring forward constitutional cases on behalf of those who do not have effective access to the justice system, and the BC Court of Appeal agreed.

SWUAV filed an application to put the case into "abeyance" at the Supreme Court of Canada until a final decision is reached in *Bedford v AG Canada* – the parallel Ontario case involving *Charter* safety rights for sex workers. The Supreme Court declined, and West Coast LEAF's application to intervene at the SCC is due by October 2011.

West Coast LEAF will celebrate one of the most important milestones in Canadian women's history on October 18. Persons Day is the victory that established many women as "persons" under the law and eligible for appointment in the Senate. **Persons Day** will be celebrated with an event in Kamloops and the launch of the 2011 CEDAW Report Card.

We are expecting a decision on one of our most significant cases: the **Reference on the constitutionality of section 293 of the Criminal Code**. West Coast LEAF argued for an end to exploitive polygamy, and we are prepared to follow this case to the Supreme Court of Canada.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Melanie Ash

By Sania Ahmed



Born and raised in British Columbia, Melanie has been a West Coast LEAF Board member for the past year. Before joining Heenan Blaikie's litigation group in 2008, she practiced litigation for eight years in New York City. Melanie has

a Master of Laws from Columbia University, a Bachelor of Laws from the University of British Columbia, and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from Carleton University. In addition to her involvement with West Coast LEAF, she is a member of the Canadian Blind Association's Equality and Diversity Committee.

Ever since her student years, Melanie has been active in the community and has had many interesting experiences. During her time at Carleton, Melanie served as a page in the House of Commons. While at UBC, she served as a law clerk to Justice Beverley McLachlin of the Supreme Court of Canada. In New York, Melanie was Co-Chair of the Board of Directors of the Fifth Avenue Committee, a non-profit organization working to advance social and economic justice.

Melanie first heard about West Coast LEAF while at UBC. Her former professor and now-colleague Nitya Iyer, West Coast LEAF Board President, introduced her to the Board. Seeing it as a good way to contribute to important work towards achieving equality, Melanie chose to become part of the West Coast LEAF Board.

Seeing youth as the future, Melanie is especially impressed with West Coast LEAF's Education work as it raises consciousness about issues that young people might otherwise not recognize. Also, Melanie believes that West Coast LEAF's litigation work has significant consequences. For instance, she mentions the *SWUAV* case as, "fundamentally important for equality rights and for the ability to get in front of a court to be heard."

Melanie believes that we must continue to move forward and protect our past gains on the path towards equality.

DONOR PROFILE

Barbara Bell

By Avandi Wallace

Barbara Bell currently serves as the Treasurer for West Coast LEAF. She generously supports the organization with her financial contributions and her time.

Q: What has been keeping you busy these days?

A: I sit on the board of the Elizabeth Bagshaw Women's Clinic and we are currently looking at extending our services to improve women's health. I am active on the finance committee of the University Women's Club of Vancouver. I volunteer with other non-profits as well as work in my part time estate tax practice.

Q: What initially sparked your interest in advocating for women's rights?

A: The spark was literal – many years ago I fell head over heels in love with a feminist who opened my eyes to the many inequities facing women daily. I had grown up just expecting a woman's life to be a certain way and from this mentor learned that things could be and should be changed to improve our lives.

Q: What, in your opinion, makes West Coast LEAF such a special organization?

A: I am consistently impressed with the basic and practical work of West Coast LEAF to inform, educate, train, and argue that human rights should be available to ALL people - not based on gender, race or wealth.

Q: How has West Coast LEAF allowed for you to expand your advocacy?

A: I have learned so much being part of the West Coast LEAF Board and this has helped me speak with more knowledge and understanding with others who like me are ignorant on many of the issues facing woman today. I want to thank the staff and board members that I have worked with for their knowledge of the issues and willingness to share and discuss openly with me.

SUPREME COURT CHALLENGE FUND

This summer, West Coast LEAF launched our "Send us to the SCC" fund, to secure our place at the Supreme Court of Canada to argue for equality for all.

POWER, CONSENT AND QMUNITY

By Avandi Wallace

This summer, I had the opportunity to observe West Coast LEAF's No Means No workshop for GAB Youth at the Qmunity Centre in Vancouver. According to their website, GAB's aim is 'to provide information, support and referrals to queer youth as well as resources for family, friends and professionals'. The initial turnout was incredible, with around 30-40 participants attending. The atmosphere was immediately welcoming with curious questions of how my week had been and what type of unicorn I would be if I had the choice. I was quite anxious to see what else was in store.

Led by West Coast LEAF's Education Manager Deanna Ogle and Youth Facilitator Nadia Zamzul, the discussion began with a brief acknowledgment of several ground rules. These included to always show respect, to allow anyone to speak at any time and not to 'call anyone out'. This further reinforced the notion that the Qmunity Centre is truly a safe and respectful space.

The issue of power and how one should define it was next on the roster. One participant immediately emphasized the crucial distinction between positive and negative forms of power, and a role play activity allowed the participants to apply this issue to actual situations. The wide array of responses was impressive but this was only the beginning of an educational and engaging evening. When the issue of sexual assault and the laws around "consent" were covered, many participants shared their own personal stories. This definitely added an emotional dimension to my experience.

The workshop lasted for a total of three hours and those three hours flew on by. As an observer, I felt reassured that the systemic discrimination of queer youth and adults in this city is actively being combated through spaces such as GAB Youth. For further information, please visit www.qmunity.ca or www.westcoastleaf.org.

TRANSFORMING OUR FUTURE WORKSHOP: Penticton

Transforming Our Future is a two-day practical public legal education course designed for activists, advocates, and community service providers to learn about the Canadian justice system, human rights law, equality rights, and how to develop strategies to address the impact of systemic discrimination.

October 27 and 28, 10:00 - 4:00
Penticton, BC

\$100 per participant
subsidies available upon request

For more information and to register contact:
Penticton and Area Women's Centre at
250-493-6822 or info@pawc.ca.

