



May 28, 2009

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

As you are aware, Equal Voice (EV) is a national volunteer organization dedicated to electing more women to political office. We regard political parties as the main catalyst for ensuring that more women are elected to all levels of government.

On the heels of a historic victory this past fall where the percentage of female federal candidates reached a record high of nearly 28%, Equal Voice believes we can do even better. Canada still ranks 46th out of 189 countries in the number of women elected to its national Parliament. It is imperative that political parties maintain the momentum so that Canada can attain a critical mass of female Members of Parliament, a minimum of one-third, in the near future.

We applaud the Conservative Party's success in increasing the percentage of female candidates from 12% in 2006 to 20% in 2008. We also recognize and applaud the high numbers of women in your federal cabinet. During our inaugural Canada Challenge in 2007, Equal Voice received a unanimous and public commitment from all of the federal party leaders to run significantly more women in the upcoming election. In 2008, this commitment translated into tangible progress for women seeking elected office. Previously, Equal Voice was pleased to work with the Honourable Beverley Oda, Minister responsible for the Status of Women, and we are eager to work with your office and/or other representatives again.

In anticipation of the upcoming federal election, Equal Voice is therefore inviting you and the other party leaders to take part in our **Canada Challenge 2009: Building the Momentum to Elect More Women**. We are asking each party leader to commit to nominating substantially more women as candidates for their party than in the 2008 election. Ideally, as in the 2007 Challenge, this commitment would be made in the House of Commons on the same day as the other party leaders and would be preceded by a press conference featuring lead women from all parties.

As in the previous campaign, we are not asking political parties to set specific targets but rather we are asking the parties to do better than last time. In the upcoming election, Equal Voice plans, once again, to track the numbers of women candidates nominated by each party and will be reporting the results to our members, to the media and to the public.

Your participation as Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Party would be very significant for women in Canada. First, we seek your commitment to nominating more women. As well, we ask for you to make a public commitment to the Challenge on the same day as the other federal party leaders in mid-June.

In moving forward, we would like to work with your office or that of a lead Minister as soon as possible. Equal Voice's Executive Director, Nancy Peckford, will contact your office very shortly. Alternately, she can be reached at npeckford@equalvoice.ca or by phone at 613-292-7941.

Sincerely,



Donna Dasko.
National Chair (Acting),
Equal Voice/ À voix égales
www.equalvoice.ca

cc: The Honourable Helena Guergis, Minister of State (Status of Women)
The Honourable Marjory LeBreton, Leader of the Government in the Senate
The Honourable Steven John Fletcher, Minister of State (Democratic Reform)
Nancy Ruth, Senator, Conservative Party of Canada
Doug Finley, National Director of Political Operations, Conservative Party of Canada
Jenni Byrne, Director, Issues Management, Prime Minister's Office
Axelle Pellerin, Chief of Staff, Minister of State (Status of Women)