



Equal Rights for Women Must be Paramount in the House of Commons

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Presentation by

The Réseau des Tables Régionales De Groupes de Femmes du Québec

Description

The Réseau des Tables Régionales De Groupes de Femmes du Québec (RTRGFQ) is a provincial umbrella organization, duly constituted since 1997 and incorporated in 2001, which consists of 17 regional women's round tables in Quebec. It is a women's rights collective that is active in issues where the interests and the rights of women are at stake.

Analysis and action

The RTRGFQ finds that women continue to face systemic discrimination and experience persistent inequalities. These inequalities are particularly present in the systemic types of discrimination against women and the mechanisms that replicate these types of oppression, access of women to power, the financial autonomy of women, women's health, the merchandizing of public services, and resourcing. The RTRGFQ wants to take action against these inequalities.

The RTRGFQ believes that these persistent inequalities must be understood and fought with a feminist analysis while taking into account the intersection of various systems of oppression. The RTRGFQ prefers and promotes a gender based analysis while taking into account the intersection of forms of oppression.

In addition to fighting against the inequalities experienced by all women, the RTRGFQ also proposes alternative measures for building a world that is just, egalitarian, supportive, democratic, where there is freedom of choice, and that respects life and human dignity.

The expertise and achievements that foster women's access to power

The regional women's round tables and the RTRGFQ have been working for more than 20 years to promote women's participation in Quebec's democratic life. All round tables are concerned by the growing democratic deficit and have declared that it is time for women to fully participate in the decisions that affect their community. This is about equality. (manifesto, *Pour le développement d'une réelle démocratie au Québec. Il faut que les femmes « s'emmêlent »*, 2014.)

To help women access power, the regional women's round tables have established seven networks of elected women, set up four mentorships in municipal politics, and created 35 online tools, guides,

training sessions and videos. Events have been organized by the regional women's round tables where men and women have discussed the low levels of women's representation in politics (one-day conference, *Égalité femmes-hommes: Nos municipalités au Coeur de la solution*, September 2017 in Montérégie; networking panels in Gatineau, MRC, Gatineau Valley, Pontiac and Papineau; seminar, *Pour une gouvernance équitable*, November 2011 in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean; engagement workshop to promote the participation of women in municipal politics in the Gaspé-Magdalen Islands region, etc.). Two briefs were submitted concerning the Election Act and the electoral system. We also submitted a brief in December 2017 on the place of women in politics to Quebec's Committee on Citizen Relations. Finally, hundreds of news releases have pointed to the slow progress being made on equality and were sent to the minister responsible for the status of women in Quebec (2016 campaign, *Connaissez-vous la politique Madame la Ministre?*).

Recommendations Concerning the Most Pertinent Measures

In order to create the right conditions to elect women, any **new electoral system** that is put in place must include effective measures that result in tangible outcomes. The following are a few examples that emerged from discussions about Quebec's National Assembly, and these could be implemented in national politics.

To promote greater political pluralism and thus better reflect the will of the people

- Establish a national proportion. Assign at least 40% of the seats in Parliament in proportion to the number of votes received by the parties across Canada and, accordingly, establish a national list.
- Use two ballots. Every voter should have two votes to express all the nuances of their political persuasion.

To promote equitable representation of the regions in the House of Commons

- Make it mandatory for the parties' national lists to include names of candidates from all the regions in the first half of the list.

To promote equal representation of women and men in the House of Commons

- Believe that equality needs to be set out in the Election Act as an objective in order to send society a clear political message. Binding measures as well as incentives need to be adopted for determining whether this objective is met.
- Establish national lists with mandatory alternation of female and male candidates, starting with a woman, while ensuring a minimum representation of all the regions in Canada.
- Require parties to develop an action plan for implementing concrete measures that will achieve equality and require that they report back annually on their equality action plan to the Chief Electoral Officer.
- Change the basis for the subsidy for party operations to the number of women elected rather than the number of women candidates, once women make up 35% or more of those elected from the party.

- Require the political parties to invest the top-up of their annual subsidy into a special fund specifically for promoting and supporting equality in each party (to achieve the goals in the action plans).
- Increase the reimbursement of election expenses paid by female candidates and women elected once 35% or more of a party's candidates are female.
- Maintain all of these measures for three elections after equality has been reached.
- Maintain and expand any public program designed to prepare and train women to hold and stay in public office.

Given that the current system does not allow for the full exercise of democracy and presents challenges in obtaining fair representation of women and ethnocultural diversity, it is vital that a new electoral system based on the principle of equality for all women be implemented.

A feminist and intersectional representation

The RTRGFQ and its 17 members believe that any progressive concept of democracy should involve a sustained effort to take into account the ethnocultural diversity of women and men of our community. The RTRGFQ wants a differentiated, pluralistic equality consisting of men and women of different origins and cultures. To that end, a feminist intersectional analysis must be applied to identify specific measures in view of the intersection of various types of oppression that women may experience. Hence, the RTRGFQ looks at the socio-economic factors, social inequalities and prejudices that make the role of representation not as accessible for some individuals. Everyone should have equal access to this role and feel equally welcome in seeking it.

Furthermore, the RTRGFQ would like to express its solidarity with its indigenous sisters and its desire to achieve political representation together while affirming that they are better positioned than anyone to make known and defend their view that they need representation in Canada's Parliament and the structural changes that must be brought about.

To foster ethnocultural representativeness in the House of Commons

- Require political parties to have a percentage of racialized candidates during elections.
- Ensure that parties' national lists reflect ethnocultural diversity and that these candidates are well-positioned on the lists to obtain seats.
- Require political parties to justify any discrepancy between the percentage of racialized candidates and the percentage of candidates elected.
- Require parties to develop action plans to achieve equitable representation of ethnocultural communities and require that they report back annually on their action plans to the Chief Electoral Officer.
- Change the basis for the subsidy for party operations to the number of candidates elected.
- Include data about racialized candidates in the election statistics.

In closing, the RTRGFQ and its members would like to recognize the commitment and engagement of all groups of women in the Province of Quebec in seeking to achieve de facto equality. The RTRGFQ

reiterates that it is willing to work with all those who care about real and fair de facto equality for all women. Together and in solidarity we will succeed!

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