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Media Release

DEBATE ON FEMINISM PLAYS TO PACKED HOUSE

In front of a standing-room only crowd at the National Archives, a number of high profile women and men held a lively debate and discussion on the relevance of feminism today. The event, organized by more than ten organizations working for women's rights and equality at the local, national and international levels, was held in honour of International Women's Day. Close to four hundred Ottawa residents, from all walks of life, came to celebrate, learn and be inspired.



The debate “Be It Resolved That: Canada and the world need more feminists”, also featured a lighthearted film screening in which a variety of Ottawa residents spoke from the heart about what feminism means to them, and the first annual Femmy Awards, recognizing the contributions of women activists in the National Capital region. As well, Raghad Ebied and Agathe Gramet-Kedzior read from their powerful essays entitled “I’m not a feminist but...” and “I’m a feminist and...” which they wrote as part of a writing contest for the event.

As the main focus of the event, the debate allowed the audience a chance to engage with local, national and international issues in a funny, educational, inspiring, and sometimes unusual way. The debate began as a friendly sparring on the debating topic. Debaters engaged on such topics as whether or not the feminist movement is inclusive and accessible for women of color, how indigenous women inspired the suffragettes, the relevance of feminism to young women, and the stigma surrounding the use of the word “feminist.”

The debate focused on the capacity of women to be change agents. “If there were more feminists making the decisions, it wouldn’t only change who is making the decisions – it would change the decisions,” argued Robert Fox, Executive Director of Oxfam Canada and one of the night’s debaters.

Dilani Mohan is one such woman of change. One of the founding members of The Miss G__ Project for Equity in Education, a grassroots organization devoted to the elimination of sexism and the promotion of active citizenship among youth, Mohan also participated in the event as a debater. The Miss G__ Project is currently working on getting Women's and Gender Studies added to the Ontario Secondary School Curriculum.

“As an inspiring woman told me, feminism is not an employment agency. It’s about strength, autonomy, unity, and decision-making,” Mohan told the audience during the debate.

Maureen Welch of the CBC emceed the evening, with Joanna Kerr from Oxfam Canada as debate moderator. Other debaters included Jane Doe*, Ellen Gabriel from Quebec Native Women Inc, and Jessica Yee of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network.

The night wrapped up with the inaugural Femmy Awards, honouring fearless feminists in the national capital region. Oni the Haitian Sensation hosted the awards. This year’s winners include Suzanne Doerge of CAWI (City for All Women Initiative), Lucya Spencer of Immigrant Women’s Services Ottawa, Leilani Farha of CERA (The Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation), Cindi Foreman of The Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Sue Genge of The Canadian Labour Congress, Karen Seabrooke of Inter Pares, Ghislaine Sirois of Action Ontarienne contre la Violence faite aux Femmes, Kathryn Trevenan, Faculty Member of University of Ottawa,

*Please note, there is a media ban on photos of Jane Doe, and publication of her real name.

Margery Ann Wardle who volunteers with a number of organizations, and Joan Wright of Planned Parenthood.

Over 10 organizations, working for women's rights and equality at the local, national and international levels participated in the event, including: Amnesty International Canada Nobel Women's Initiative, Oxfam Canada, Harmony House, Inter Pares, Peacebuild: Gender and Peacebuilding Working Group, Women's Event Network, OCTEVAW, Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights, Women's Worlds 2011, PACT Ottawa, Planned Parenthood Ottawa, Comité Réseau d'Ottawa, and GalldinLiew Feminist Legal Practice.

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