



WOMEN'S LEGAL EDUCATION AND ACTION FUND

FONDS D'ACTION ET D'ÉDUCATION JURIDIQUES POUR LES FEMMES

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## Renowned author speaks at milestone breakfast

**Toronto**, June 2002: -- Over 1000 people will gather to mark the greatest milestone for women in Canada's history at the annual LEAF Person's Day Breakfast on Thursday November 28, in Toronto. The milestone is the 20th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The breakfast is held every year to celebrate the landmark 1929 'Persons Case' that guaranteed women the right to participate in all aspects of public life. Securing women's rights is a job that is never over, and leading the way is LEAF - the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund

Respected author and academic feminist Jill Ker Conway will be the keynote speaker at this 16th LEAF Persons Day Breakfast. Mrs. Conway was the first woman vice president of the University of Toronto, and went on to become the first woman president of Smith College (USA). She is the author of several best-selling books – including her memoir "The Road from Coorain" which was recently dramatized by Masterpiece Theatre on PBS TV. She is currently a visiting scholar and professor at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

This event is one of a number of LEAF Persons Day Breakfasts being held across the country, attended by over 3000 people. The breakfast is the LEAF Toronto major annual fundraiser, and last year more than \$70,000 was raised to fund the organization and the various stages of intervention required to help build a more equitable society for women in Canada.

Other participants in the breakfast include Beth Symes, lawyer and founding member of LEAF, along with internationally recognized singer and Canadian comedian Mary Lou Fallis.

This year, 2002, marks several extremely important dates:

20th Anniversary of the establishment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

17th Anniversary of the founding of LEAF

16th Anniversary of the first LEAF Persons Day Breakfast in Toronto, now celebrated in cities across the country.

In today's supposedly "post-feminist" era, some might ask why an organization such as LEAF is still needed. But the facts are sobering – women in Canada still face significant inequalities:

Women constitute 98% of spousal violence victims including sexual assault and kidnapping

Girls are victims in 60% of reported cases of physical abuse

Despite recent improvements, women still earn 21% less than men

20% of all women and 29% of Aboriginal women who work full-time earn less than \$30,000 annually.

LEAF is the only women's organization in Canada that focuses on court action to bring about social change. LEAF has undertaken over 140 cases, more equality rights litigation than any other women's group in this country; helping women win landmark legal victories. One such case is the "Spouse in the House" ruling, currently under appeal by government. (LEAF often must return to court to re-argue cases in areas where it was felt rights had been secured for women.)

"LEAF not only goes to court to secure new rights, it must also go to court to protect existing rights", said Sondra Gibbons, LEAF's Director of Litigation. "It is a continual effort, not only to advance women's equality rights, but to ensure the rights we have already won are not eroded".

LEAF, a national non-profit organization, was founded in 1985 to advance the equality of women and girls in Canada through litigation, law reform and public education using the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For more information on LEAF and the current cases that LEAF is involved in, check out their website: [www.leaf.ca](http://www.leaf.ca)

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