



Advocating for the human rights of older women
Défense des droits de la personne des femmes âgées

GRAN Update March 2026

A special thank you to all who donated during our annual fundraising campaign, making it possible to exceed our goal of \$5000!

WASH Action Accelerates: It's Time to Deliver!



[Time to Deliver](#) is a global advocacy campaign calling on world leaders to deliver clean water and safe healthcare for women and babies everywhere. Women, healthcare workers and allies across eighteen countries have begun raising our voices in support of the campaign launched this week by [WaterAid International](#). GRAN is a part of this global effort.

The eighteen countries where advocacy activities have begun are: Cambodia, Ghana, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Australia, Germany, Japan,

Scotland, Sweden, UK, USA, and Canada. The goal of the campaign is to raise awareness of lack of water in healthcare facilities and create a groundswell of public support for action that world leaders will not be able to ignore.

The campaign launched with [this global petition](#) targeting world leaders, a powerful [3-minute video](#) featuring women from Cambodia, Liberia and Malawi, and a new report, [Born Without Water: The Crisis in Our Delivery Rooms](#). We encourage you to sign the petition, watch the video, and read the report. We also hope that you will find ways to raise awareness among your social circles and community contacts and invite others to take action too.

WaterAid Canada has taken out a full-page ad in the [March 18 issue of The Hill Times](#) to draw the attention of politicians and decision-makers to issues around gender and WASH. WaterAid has generously included our GRAN logo in their ad to highlight our partnership in this campaign. You'll find the ad on page 5 in the Hill Times link above. We have also included it on the final page of this *Update*.

2026 is an important year for WASH with a [UN Water Conference](#) taking place in December where world leaders will assess progress on [SDG 6](#) (Clean Water and Sanitation), identify implementation gaps, and explore strategies for accelerating action. Participation at the Conference will include governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, Indigenous Peoples, the private sector, and international financial institutions. GRAN will be partnering with [WaterAid Canada](#) throughout this year to build public support to pressure world leaders to take action to deliver clean water and safe healthcare for women and babies everywhere. Together we can make the lack of WASH in healthcare impossible for world leaders to ignore. It's time to deliver clean water for every woman, every birth.

[WASH Campaign Team members: *Sandy Milakovic, Gail Mullan, Sandra Stec, Rae Yates, Susan McNamara, Ruth Buckinger* Anyone interested in joining the WASH Campaign Team, our door is open! Please contact Gail Mullan at tgmullan@shaw.ca to find out more.]

GRANs Raise Awareness on International Women's Day!



Victoria GRANs Phyllis Webster, Liz Dill, and Anne Young



Golden Horseshoe GRAN Sandy Milakovic



GV GRANs Gail Mullan, Kathleen Wallace-Deering and Ginger Shaw with GRAN display at the Coquitlam Public Library

GRAN member, Rae Yates, was one of the guest speakers at the Trenton, ON library's celebration of International Women's Day (IWD). She related her journey of becoming a below-the-knee amputee and linked it to the importance of WASH in healthcare settings for everyone everywhere, after having contacted MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) in a clean, hygienic, and sanitized hospital.



Check out our [Photo Gallery](#) for more IWD photos, along with larger versions of the photos above.

Rural Education in sub-Saharan Africa: A Personal Story

by Phyllis Webster, member of GRAN's Education Watch Group

My teaching career began in South Africa in 1965-1966 at the height of Apartheid when there were three levels of education for White, Black, and Coloured South Africans. Because I was white, I was required to teach in a white school but did spend one evening a week on the Cape Flats teaching Coloured adult students.

In 2000, I returned to teach in a small farm school where I gave lessons to students in the upper grades, although I also taught several younger grades when teachers were away. We had fun, even though my Afrikaans and their English were almost non-existent. The school infrastructure was very poor: one classroom had a hole in the floor caused by a fire pot burning through the floor, windows were often missing, the toilet structure for teachers was on the verge of collapse, and there was no electricity. Other than a twice-weekly delivery of bread, peanut butter, and an orange drink, the students did not eat during the school day.

The teachers had few resources but did their best to engage the students. They were often away for courses to improve their qualifications, hence the need for my help in the lower grades. Some of the younger teachers had only high school education. They were poorly paid and had second jobs to make ends meet; many had to hitchhike to get to the school on time. The disciplinary method at the school was corporal punishment, which troubled me greatly.

The only water source was a large tank in the courtyard. When I returned in 2017, conditions were much better because there was running water and electricity. There was a fence around the school which kept the nearby pigs and cows out of the yard and a hot lunch program, a source of great delight.

In 2017, I wrote a Reader's Theatre play called "*Climbing the Ladder to Success; Barriers to Education for Girls in sub-Saharan Africa*" which describes the problems which remain in so many rural schools across sub-Saharan Africa. You can find it [here](#). The [Global Partnership for Education \(GPE\)](#), is working to improve infrastructure and support for teachers in lower-income countries. I encourage you to read these two hopeful stories from the GPE's work in Zimbabwe: [Water access reshapes education for rural Zimbabwean pupils](#) and [Zimbabwe: Improving conditions to help teachers stay and thrive in rural schools](#).

Health Watch Group (Cathy Thompson (co-chair), Sandra Stec (co-chair), Diane Scaletta, Linda McFarlane, Sheila Pepper, Mary Spoke)



World Tuberculosis Day is Tuesday, March 24th. This year's theme is '**Yes! We can end TB!**' TB is preventable, treatable, and curable, yet it remains the world's deadliest infectious disease. Canada's overall TB rate is low but continues to be found in Indigenous populations and among people experiencing homelessness. Contributing factors are overcrowded housing, poor ventilation, and geographical isolation.

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 25% of new global cases and over 33% of global cases. The primary cause of these high rates is co-infection with HIV. Challenges include lack of funding and diagnostic tools, and also TB that has become drug-resistant. It's possible to get back on track by making investment in TB a strategic political choice, accelerating innovation to reach people faster, and protecting essential TB services which already exist. Ending TB will strengthen health systems and global health security. Learn more by reading the World Health Organization's [Global Tuberculosis Report 2025](#).

Mining Justice Watch Group (Liz Dill, Anne Young, Diane Scaletta, Gaye Francis Alexander, Phyllis Webster, JoAnn Mulhern)

Prime Minister Mark Carney has launched Canada's first [Defence Industrial Strategy](#), tying domestic defence capacity to the supply of critical minerals like lithium, cobalt, and rare earths. While the plan promises jobs and stronger supply chains, it also signals growing pressure to expand mining in British Columbia and across Canada, raising questions about environmental oversight, Indigenous consent, and [who truly benefits](#) from the country's mineral boom when the materials extracted can serve both batteries and military purposes.

We encourage you to watch the two webinars below, co-hosted by [Mining Watch Canada](#) and [Above Ground](#). The growing global focus on prioritizing the exploration and extraction of minerals deemed of critical importance to economic security, defence, and an energy transition comes with many questions about human rights, including Indigenous rights and labour rights, environmental justice, and corporate accountability.

Webinar recording: [Canada's approach to critical minerals at home and abroad](#) This webinar brought together panelists from civil society and government to discuss and critique Canada's approach to critical minerals at home and abroad. As Canada's investment in critical minerals exploration and extraction expands, it is necessary for civil society to understand the government's plans as well as the potential harms that could result from them. Presentation slide deck available [here](#).

Webinar recording: [Indigenous Perspectives on the Global Critical Minerals Rush](#): This webinar featured five Indigenous speakers from around the world discussing global, regional, and local fights for justice related to the global push for critical minerals extraction. The panelists discussed specific harms and human rights violations they are facing and what civil society groups working on related issues should know.

Where is the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise?

Since 2018, GRAN's Mining Justice Watch Group has been advocating for the appointment of an independent Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE). Its mandate is to review complaints about possible human rights abuses by Canadian companies when those companies work outside Canada in the garment, mining, and oil and gas sectors. Despite no action to date, our efforts continue.



Climate SILENCE is a Serious Issue!

While climate impacts are accelerating and public concern remains high, conversations regarding climate have diminished, especially among our political leaders. The strongest predictor of climate action is whether people talk about climate change. Climate Silence doesn't mean people don't care; it often means people are uncertain that others share their views and uncertain that it is safe to talk about climate with family, friends, and neighbours.



Climate silence is also:

- Politicians ignoring the real and growing threat of the climate crisis;
- Media not connecting their reporting to the impacts of climate change;
- Disinformation being used to promote fossil fuels and suppress clean energy solutions.

Conversations and visibility of the issue can change that. Seniors can make a difference. We are trusted, civically engaged, and we vote. It is not about getting louder, but about making our concern visible.

[Seniors for Climate](#) is a national organization focused on building a safe, just, and livable future for all by engaging seniors in climate action. Many GRAN groups have participated in Seniors for Climate rallies and learning events in recent years. Their 2026 campaign aims to rekindle the conversation around climate and to break through the Climate Silence.

Check out the Seniors for Climate [website](#) to stay abreast of climate action in 2026. Consider signing their [climate pledge](#), and view their recent webinar, [Where Do We Go Next? A Climate Conversation with Steven Guilbeault](#). We will keep you up to date as the *Break Through the Climate Silence* campaign unfolds.

Actions & Events

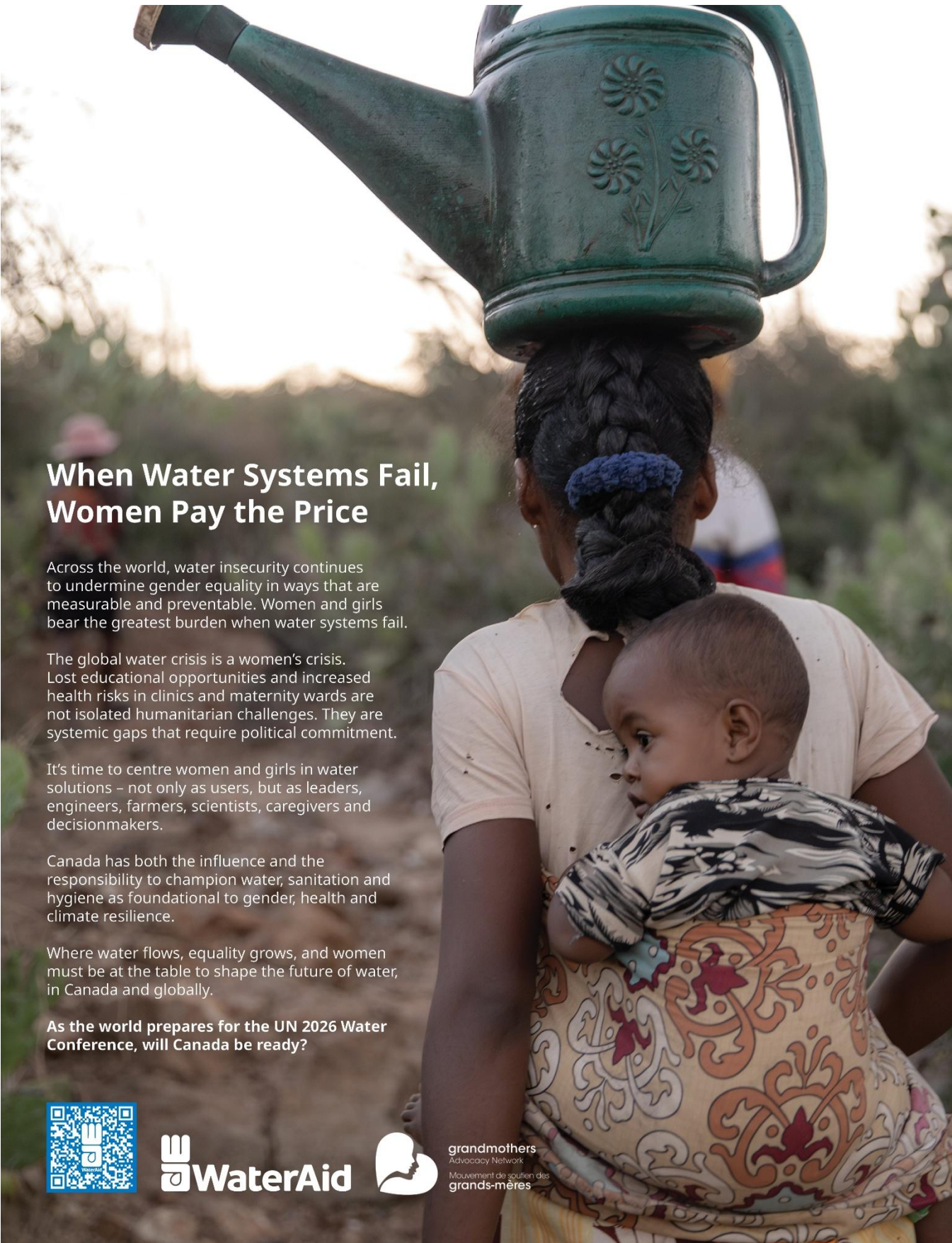
Action on WASH: Sign the [Time to Deliver petition](#) to world leaders. Share it widely.

Action on Water: [Sign Petition e-7165](#) calling on Canada to establish an annual Canada Water Week in March to celebrate, learn, and take action to protect Canada's water. The petition will be closing to signatures soon. It will be open until Saturday, March 21, 2026 at 3:45 p.m. (ET)

[World Water Day](#) is Sunday, March 22. This year's theme: *Where Water Flows, Equality Grows*.

Webinar for World Water Day: [Protecting Water in the Mining Rush: Lessons from Africa and Southeast Asia](#) Friday, March 20, 9:30 a.m. (ET)

At a time of seemingly intractable conflicts and entrenched patriarchal leadership that too often refuses to pursue courageous paths to peace, women's leadership must shape the way forward. Our voices matter. Our actions matter. And together we carry the promise of a more peaceful world. -- Graça Machel, Co-founder of [The Elders](#)



When Water Systems Fail, Women Pay the Price

Across the world, water insecurity continues to undermine gender equality in ways that are measurable and preventable. Women and girls bear the greatest burden when water systems fail.

The global water crisis is a women's crisis. Lost educational opportunities and increased health risks in clinics and maternity wards are not isolated humanitarian challenges. They are systemic gaps that require political commitment.

It's time to centre women and girls in water solutions – not only as users, but as leaders, engineers, farmers, scientists, caregivers and decisionmakers.

Canada has both the influence and the responsibility to champion water, sanitation and hygiene as foundational to gender, health and climate resilience.

Where water flows, equality grows, and women must be at the table to shape the future of water, in Canada and globally.

As the world prepares for the UN 2026 Water Conference, will Canada be ready?



grandmothers
Advocacy Network
Mouvement de soutien des
grands-mères