



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

GRAN UPDATE April 2026

Honouring Stephen Lewis 1937- 2026



Photo of Stephen Lewis in Africa, courtesy SLF

Grandmothers and others across the country and beyond mourn the passing of this remarkable humanitarian and activist, who inspired so many of us to get involved in the Grandmothers Campaign and subsequently in GRAN. We also celebrate his incredible accomplishments. He was instrumental in bringing the AIDS crisis in Africa to the attention of the global community and pushed for action, drawing on his commitment to social justice, his feminism, and his gift of oratory. He believed that local communities most-affected were best placed to confront the pandemic and created the Stephen Lewis Foundation with his daughter, Ilana

Landsberg-Lewis to support these communities. GRAN Co-Chairs have sent a letter of condolence to the Stephen Lewis Foundation, which you can read [here](#).

Meg French, Executive Director of the Stephen Lewis Foundation has sent out an invitation for all who wish to gather to celebrate the life and legacy of Stephen Lewis on Sunday, April 26 at 11:00 a.m. ET. ***“Stephen believed deeply in the power of collective action and in the profound impact of standing together in solidarity. This gathering will be an opportunity to honour his extraordinary life, reflect on the lives he touched, and reaffirm the shared purpose that continues to guide us.”*** For more details and to RSVP to attend, either in person in Toronto or online, use this link: [Honouring Stephen Lewis](#).

Education Watch Group (Phyllis Webster, Ann Frost, Hilda Young, Sharon Graham, Valerie Wright, Sharon Vanclief)

We are very excited that [Peta Hall](#) has agreed to be our guest speaker at a mid-September GRAN Learning Event. She spends many months each year in Atorkor, Ghana, visiting schools and documenting projects related to WASH. She is hoping to share with us short videos of Public Health Nurse Rejoice and a student speaking about the school programs related to water, sanitation and hygiene.

Peta began volunteering in Ghana and learned that the village she visited -- which relied on fishing -- had been decimated by offshore fishing. Local fish processing plants had been forced to close, leading to high levels of unemployment. Peta had the idea of building a technical school to train young people for other trades. To make a long story short, [Atorkor Technical Insitute](#) was built, and it is now an amazing institution. Peta's latest initiative, [Good for Girls](#), involves women making re-usable sanitary napkins so girls do not have to stay out of school when they have their periods.



Above, on the left, Public Health Nurse, Rejoice, talks to girls about the menstrual hygiene kits they are about to receive. On the right, a woman who cooks breakfast food for sale is about to send her children to school.

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

Tuberculosis: Good news! On March 23, 2026, Stop TB Canada announced that Health Canada has granted regulatory approval for rifapentine, a key medication for tuberculosis prevention. This will improve access to shorter, more effective treatment.

Global Fund Director Peter Sands recently visited Ottawa and spoke of the need to unite global and domestic efforts to end TB, which affects communities in Canada and around the world.

See below for regional GRAN groups who were active in marking STOP TB days in their communities.



Victoria GRANs join with Results Canada volunteers outside the BC Legislature with their STOP TB signs.



GV GRANs Gail Mullan and Mary Spoke hosted a STOP TB and World Water Day display at the Coquitlam public library

Malaria: Scientists working on new malaria drugs now have access to an open-access artificial intelligence (AI)-powered platform aimed at accelerating drug discovery, thanks to a partnership between [Medicines for Malaria Venture \(MMV\)](#) and [Deep Mirror AI](#). Even researchers in places with limited resources will have access to cutting-edge technology. ***“By giving scientists in low and middle-income countries free access to advanced AI tools, says MMV CEO Dr. Martin Fitchet, “we can accelerate the discovery of lifesaving medicines led by the people closest to the diseases we are trying to defeat.”***

WASH: On track with GRAN’s ongoing WASH campaign, we continue to look at the strong links between health and clean water. [WaterAid](#) worked with the government of Tanzania and local partners to install a large underground water harvesting tank, connected to a solar pump, to provide tap water to the Nkome dispensary in the Geita region of Tanzania. Doctors and nurses can now treat patients with a reliable source of clean water, thus greatly reducing the risk of infections.

“We need water to clean anything in order to stop the transmission of infections. We use water from the taps at the dispensary, and it is available all the time. There is enough water for all our needs. It makes me feel happy to come to work here every day now these services are available,” says Dr. Queen Kulwa Machella, clinical officer, Nkome dispensary.

Mining Watch Group (*Liz Dill, Ann Young, Gaye Frances Alexander, Diane Scaletta, Phyllis Webster, JoAnn Mulhern*)

LNG, Fracking and the Impact on Clean Water - Fracking uses billions of litres of freshwater every year to extract “natural” gas from the ground. It leaves the water laced with toxic chemicals, sitting in pits for decades, or pumped underground to leach into the soil. In BC, by exploiting short-term licences, these operations avoid paying even the low rates BC usually charges industry, and leaves taxpayers paying the cost of cleaning up! If you live in BC, tell your MLA it's time to end this loophole, using

[this letter-writing tool](#) or this [phone message tool](#). Victoria GRANs joined other organizations on April 15th to make the point that LNG is ***Not in Our National Interest!***, a campaign led by [Stand.earth](#). Rallies are taking place in cities across Canada this week to send the same message to the federal government. Find a rally near you [here](#).

Protecting Water in the Mining Rush: Lessons from Africa and SE Asia - This webinar, held just prior to World Water Day, provided insights into the impact of mining, including mining for minerals used in clean energy, on communities' access to clean, safe water. Speakers from Africa and Southeast Asia shared concrete examples of how unregulated mining, toxic spills, and mining accidents have contaminated the water on which local people rely. Speakers concluded that the biggest gaps they faced were in transparency, enforcement, and governance practices and they highlighted the need for precautionary actions. As 70% of the world's mining companies are registered in Canada, it is imperative that we as Canadians ensure corporate accountability on the global stage. So, we continue to press for an effective Ombudsperson. You can watch a recording of the webinar [here](#).

WASH Campaign (*Sandy Milakovec, Rae Yates, Sandra Stec, Susan McNamara, Ruth Buckinger, and Gail Mullan*)

To celebrate World Water Day, GRANs in various regions across the country created public info displays, raising issues of WASH both at home in Canada and around the world. GRANs shared information about WaterAid's newly-launched [Time to Deliver](#) campaign, encouraging members of the public to sign the global petition demanding clean water in health clinics everywhere to ensure safe births. GRANs are asked to continue spreading word about the lack of clean water in health care centres worldwide and sharing the Time to Deliver [petition](#) widely. We want to do all we can in the next few months to help WaterAid reach and even exceed their goal of 100,000 signatures in advance of the UN Water Conference in December.



To that end, the WASH campaign team is currently putting together an idea kit and resources for GRAN groups to plan public info displays around the theme of a baby shower to help draw attention to the urgent need for clean water for safe births. Stay tuned for a GRAN Action on baby showers and begin now to imagine what you might do in your community this spring or summer to host a Time to Deliver-themed baby shower!

WASH for Climate Resilience - On Earth Day, Wednesday, April 22 at 1:00 p.m. ET, the WASH Team invites you to a learning event on Climate Resilient WASH. Our guest speaker will be Adnan Qader, Manager for Water Governance and Resilience at WaterAid Canada. Adnan will outline the increasing hazards caused by climate change, how they impact access to water, sanitation and hygiene, and what can be done to build climate resilience into WASH systems. You can [register here](#).

Current events have raised the issue of the vulnerability of WASH in regions of military conflict. [Click here](#) to learn more in a recent GRAN news post on the weaponization of water.



A Personal Story about Caregiving and WASH: The Things We Don't Talk About in Public (*Warning: We are going to talk about those things now...*)

by Ruth Buckinger, member of GRAN's WASH Campaign Team

I am an older woman caring for my husband, an older man with mobility challenges and dementia. In the past seven years or so, a good portion of my caregiving time and effort has centred around dealing with the accidents that come with my husband's increasing urinary and fecal incontinence. I cannot count the number of hours I've spent on my hands and knees cleaning the bathroom floor around the toilet when a stream of urine hasn't managed to hit the bowl, or sanitizing the living room carpet, or mopping the bedroom floor when a river of pee has been dribbled across it en route to the washroom, or worse, a full urinal has been spilled.

As my husband's incontinence grows worse, we accommodate the problem with increasingly bulky and absorbent disposable underwear and "soaker pads" that protect the furniture. The Canada Revenue Agency allows us to claim these as medical expenses on our income tax. I save the receipts each year and do the arithmetic: we spend an astonishing \$2500 a year on these products -- that's more than \$200 every month. This is what personal hygiene and sanitation cost when incontinence comes to stay. Only those with the financial means can afford to be incontinent with some measure of dignity.

In these "golden years", our household demands on water and soap have increased significantly. There's simply more of everything: loads of laundry, toilet flushes, handwashing, floor washing, and personal hygiene care after "accidents".

Do not feel sorry for us. We are navigating this season of life surprisingly well. We have help. We have water. We have soap. We have two working toilets in our home and a washer and dryer. We can afford disposable incontinence products and have a place to safely dispose of them. And I am strong and healthy and can do the necessary physical work.

One of my lifetime fears has always been: "*I don't want to be a smelly old woman when I grow up.*" I also don't want my husband to be a smelly old man. I make efforts to keep him as clean and comfortable and sweet-smelling as possible -- for reasons of both love and hygiene. What truly gives me horrors, is imagining trying to care for him without access to water or soap or toilets or garbage collection. What would our life -- my life, his life -- look like then? And what would it smell like? Thankfully, I don't expect to ever have to find out.

But what of the millions of caregivers in the Global South who also want their loved ones to live in dignity and be clean and smell sweet, but haven't got the same access to water, sanitation and hygiene? Why must their work be so much harder and their loved ones less comfortable and clean? What of their human rights to water and sanitation?

When I think of the challenges that I face as a caregiver in Canada and compare them to the far greater hardships that my caregiving sisters in the Global South face, it makes me want to do all within my power to fight for their rights to water and toilets and soap. To ease their caregiving burden. To protect them and their loved ones from disease. To ensure that they, too, can be sweet-smelling older women when they grow up. May it be so.

Book Corner

This downloadable photobook from the African organization [WoMin](#) is definitely worth a look. [In the Embrace of the Earth | Dans l'étreinte de la Terre](#) celebrates forest communities in the Congo rainforest which covers 300 million hectares across six different countries.

A quote from Wangari Maathai at the beginning of the book speaks to the heart of our relationship with the earth: ***"We are called to assist the earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own -- indeed, to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. This will happen if we see the need to revive our sense of belonging to a larger family of life, with which we have shared our evolutionary process."***



Baka Community Women in Congo, courtesy WoMin

Save the Date! – June 10th GRAN Annual General Meeting



We look forward to welcoming GRAN members and supporters to our 12th Annual General Meeting via Zoom on **Wednesday, June 10th, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. ET**. This is a great opportunity to look back on our busy year, celebrate our successes, and be grateful for the GRAN community we have built together. An invitation with registration link will arrive in your inbox next month. Watch for it!

Actions and Events

Sign and share the ***Time to Deliver*** [petition](#) demanding that world leaders deliver clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene for every woman, every birth.

LNG: Not In Our National Interest Week of Action April 13-18 - Join a rally in a city near you. [Click here](#) for dates and locations.

BC GRANs can take part in the [Code Blue](#) action to protect BC's fresh water. Write a letter to your MLA [here](#). Or leave a phone message [here](#).

[Register](#) for the GRAN Learning Event on Climate Resilient WASH Wednesday, April 22 at 1:00 ET with guest speaker Adnan Qader, Manager for Water Governance and Resilience at WaterAid Canada.