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Mothers of Gun Violence Victims Call For More Controls on Firearms Not Less

Toronto, ON, May 8, 2009: Just days before Mother's Day, mothers of victims of gun violence launched the Mothers for Gun Control Campaign at Queen's Park in Toronto. They are calling on Canadians to stand up for gun control and let the federal government know that they oppose any measures taken to weaken gun control.

Elaine Lumley, mother of Aidan, shot and killed in Montreal, QC in November 2005; Audette Shephard, Mother of Justin, shot and killed in Toronto, ON in June 2001 and Karen Vanscoy, mother of Jasmine, shot and killed in St. Catharines, ON in September 1996 represented the group and shared their tragic stories.

As part of the ongoing campaign, a Mother's Day message video was also released to help inform and spread the word that the dismantling of the gun registry is a threat to the public safety of all Canadians. The video can be viewed at www.guncontrol.ca

The timing of this campaign coincides with the recent introduction by the federal Conservatives of two Bills into Parliament. Bill S-5 before the Senate abolishes the registration of rifles and shotguns. Private Member's Bill C-301 in the House of Commons, goes even further. In spite of strong opposition by police and safety groups, the Conservatives are pandering to a vocal gun lobby which has been running an expensive and aggressive campaign including paid advertising and promotions.

The victims of gun violence want more than sympathetic tears and condolence. They want action. "All guns are potentially dangerous," said Vanscoy. "All gun owners need to be licensed and all guns need to be registered. I really don't understand the reasoning behind this idea that we should make people accountable for their handguns but not their long guns. That would only mean use of long guns in violent crimes would increase again."

It was too late for some of the mothers of victims of gun control, but what they have learned from their tragedies could save the lives of other Canadians. "We need to reduce the chances dangerous people will have easy access to guns," said Lumley. "Gun control is part of the solution. If we want to know where relaxing our laws will take us we only need to look south of the border."

"Abolishing the long gun registry leaves no way to track how many guns a given person possesses or to hold them accountable for what happens to those guns," adds Vanscoy. It also means that police have less information about the firearms they might face when going on an emergency call."

Families of victims of gun violence fought to pass the law. And they defended it all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. Although it was forged in death and misery there is strong evidence that it is working. Police organizations argue that it is a valuable tool and use the registry nearly 10,000 times a day. With strong controls murders with rifles and shotguns have also decreased dramatically, from 107 in 1991 to 32 in 2007.

Although the government claims it is abolishing the registry to save money, the money has already been spent. The RCMP estimate that ending the registration of rifles and shotguns will save only about \$3 million a year. A small amount compared to the costs of gun violence.

Mother's Day is one of the most difficult days of the year for those who have lost a child to violence. The claim that filling out a few forms to register a firearm "punishes" law abiding gun owners trivializes the costs of gun violence and the "punishment" survivors suffer every day of their lives.

"Our Mother's Day wish is to have MORE control on firearms NOT less," said Shephard. "When I see other mothers whose sons are murdered by gun violence it's not only their sons, they are also my sons." The struggle should not be left to the victims. The silent majority must speak out. Canadians should email and call their local MPs and Senators asking them to vote against Bills C-301 and S-5 and to oppose any measures to weaken gun control.