

## **Marking International Women's Day: Women's groups call on political leaders to stand firm on gun control**

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Marking International Women's Day, more than 30 women's organizations from across the country signed letters to leaders of major political parties stressing the importance of gun control to the safety of women and children. The letter stated: "We, the undersigned, are concerned about proposals to repeal the 1995 Firearms Act, to weaken or eliminate licensing and remove the requirement to register all firearms. While handgun violence has attracted a great deal of media attention lately, it is important to remember that more Canadians are killed with rifles and shotguns each year in Canada than with handguns. Strong controls over rifles and shotguns are critical to any comprehensive safety strategy. Women and children, in particular, are more likely to be killed with rifles and shotguns than handguns because they are the firearms most often found in the home. Over half the police officers killed in recent years have been killed with rifles and shotguns. We strongly support the mandatory screening, licensing and renewal for all firearm owners as well as registration of all firearms contained in the current law. These measures are critical to enhancing the public safety and we urge you to stand on principle on this matter. The Canadian Firearms Act has been cited several times as a model for gun control. Amnesty International, IANSA, Oxfam International and many other NGOs highlighted the demonstrable success of Canada's gun law in improving the safety of women and youth."

The letter also noted that murders of women without firearms have declined with progressively stronger controls on firearms in Canada. In 1991, 85 women were murdered with firearms. By 2004, that had fallen to 32, a reduction of 62%. In contrast murders of women without firearms declined only slightly during the same period from 185 to 166, a decline of only 10%. It also noted that in spite of the opposition to the law from gun owners, 77% of people living with firearm owners support the law.

Signatories to the letter include national groups such as YWCA Canada - A Turning Point for Women, the National Association of Women and the Law, The National Action Committee on the Status of Women, the Canadian Federation of University Women and the National Council of Women in Canada; Jewish Women International, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions. Provincial Groups such as Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, the New Brunswick Advisory Committee on the Status of Women, The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, The Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters, the BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses, Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) METRAC and the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario and others as well as local organizations and prominent women.

**Paulette Senior, CEO, YWCA Canada – A Turning Point for Women** noted "YWCA Canada strongly supports gun control. With women's groups from across the country, we

went to Parliament time and time again to explain the particular risks to women posed by firearms and to argue in support of licensing all gun owners and registering all guns. A huge improvement to the law was the introduction of spousal notification to the screening process to give women who may be abused a chance to speak out. And the continuous eligibility checking ensures that if there is a domestic violence involving a gun owner, police will know immediately. Police also use the system routinely to check on the presence of guns when they go on calls and to know what guns they must remove when there is a prohibition order. Police are using the registry 5000 times a day and have reported many cases where it has enabled them to take preventative action. And the results speak for themselves: gun control works.” The YWCA of Canada is the largest women's multi-service organization in the country. It is made up of 36 member associations, who provide programs and services to 1 million women across Canada.

**Jan Reimer, Provincial Coordinator of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters** said "Access to firearms is one of the top five risk factors in domestic homicide. And while the gun control law is not perfect, there is clear evidence that it is working to help keep women in abusive relationships safer. No one wants to penalize law abiding gun owners. What we want to do is to protect women and children from being threatened with and killed with guns. Our gun controls have had positive results. They are recognized internationally as a model in prevention of violence against women. Let's keep them strong."