

**May 12, 2004**

**Women's groups from across Canada call on political leaders to stand firm on gun control**

**For immediate release:**

Today, a letter to party leaders, stressing the importance of gun control to the safety of women and children was released publicly today. It was signed by over 70 women's organizations and leaders, including front line women's shelters from across the country.

Jan Reimer, Executive Director of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters said: "We are alarmed by proposals to repeal Canada's gun control law and suggestions that there is a "right" to own guns in Canada. Nor can we pretend that guns are an urban problem only. Access to firearms is one of the top five risk factors in domestic homicide. Rifles and shotguns are the firearms most often used in these tragedies. In Alberta virtually every woman killed in domestic violence with a firearm has been killed with a rifle or a shotgun. We need to know who has what guns in order to reduce the chances they will be misused. You can't enforce prohibition orders if you don't know who has guns and what guns they have.

More than 70 women's organizations including front line shelters from across the country have defended this law as critical to preventing violence against women. While less than half of gun owners support the law, 77% of people LIVING WITH GUN OWNERS support it. This is not a partisan issue: politicians must remember that women vote too! No one wants to penalize law abiding gun owners. What we want to do is to protect women and children from being threatened and killed with guns."

Signatories to the letter include national groups such as the National Association of Women and the Law, The National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the YWCA of Canada; Provincial Group such as the Provincial Association of Transition Houses of Saskatchewan, the New Brunswick Advisory Committee on the Status of Women, The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Newfoundland's Provincial Association Against Family Violence, The Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters, the BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses, the Fédération des femmes du Québec, Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) as well as local organizations and prominent women.

For more information: **Jan Reimer**, Provincial Coordinator Alberta Council of Women's Shelters Phone: (780) 456-7000

Mr. Stephen Harper

Re: The *Firearms Act* and Regulations

Dear Mr. Harper,

The signatories to this letter are very concerned about plans to amend the *Firearms Act* and its Regulations. 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 safety of women and we urge you to stand on principle on this matter.

One year after implementing major structural and administrative changes in the Canadian Firearms Centre, Canada can finally be proud of a comprehensive firearms' law that puts public health and safety first and serves as a model for other countries. In short, the law is working:

- Over 2 million gun owners licensed and 6 million guns now registered;
- 525 fewer gun deaths (suicides, homicides, accidents) in 2001 compared to 1989 – a 60% decrease
- 40 fewer women per year shot each year, compared to 15 years ago;
- 100 fewer murders every year with rifles and shotguns;
- police are now using the licensing and registration database 1,500 times per day and are reporting on the successful use of this tool in fighting the illegal gun trade

Canadian women continue to support overwhelmingly the current firearms' law, including registration of all firearms, notwithstanding the Auditor General's report. Polls show that 80% of Canadian women, and 77% of people who live with an owner of guns, support this law. Women are very concerned about access to rifles and shotguns in cases of domestic violence and suicide:

- 88% of Canadian women killed with guns are killed with a shotgun or rifle, the very guns that opponents of the law say are not the cause of gun violence;
- access to guns is the fifth highest of 18 risk factors in spousal homicides;
- inquests into domestic violence (Kassonde children , Arlene May, Vernon massacre) revealed flaws in old law and recommended the changes found in current law: better screening of applicant through detailed questions, two references, spousal notification, and the registry of guns. Important information is not contained in police databases
- 50% of family homicides end in the suicide of the murderer, indicating that the key to protecting women and children is thorough screening in licensing and licence renewals for gun owners; 80% of the gun deaths in Canada are suicides, most using a rifle or shotgun that was readily accessible
- Although opposition to gun control is stronger where rates of gun ownership are higher (particularly in rural and western communities), women and children are particularly at risk from guns in the home in these areas.

We urge you to stand firm in defence of the current firearms' law, and to demonstrate your party's commitment to reducing violence and suicide in our families and our communities.