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Media Release
For Immediate Release
September 20, 2010

Gun Control Impacts Women All Over Alberta

Much has been published, debated and speculated over the last months about the repeal of the long gun registry (Bill C-391), but the voice of the victim has been lost. Quite simply, the registry helps police and courts save the lives of women and children living in violence.

In addition to using guns to control and inflict terror on women in their homes through threats on their lives, threats on their children's lives and physical torture, abusive spouses use guns for domestic homicides and homicide-suicides. According to the Alberta Center for Injury Control & Research, "Women in situations of domestic violence are at particular risk of injury or death by long guns in the hands of spouses. Saving women from death at the hands of their intimate partner is a key benefit of the long gun registry."¹

The registry saves lives by alerting police when there are guns involved in domestic violence cases, allowing these weapons to be removed before the situation escalates. The registry saves lives because the screening processes help get guns away from high-risk individuals who would otherwise have unregulated access to them. The registry also saves lives by providing a 1-800 number where women suffering from abuse can call in and recommend that their spouse not be able to register their gun.

"Alberta has among the highest cases of domestic violence homicides in the country," says Jan Reimer, Provincial Coordinator for ACWS. "And in both rural and urban instances, throughout various cultural and economic subcultures, long guns are a key tool in many of these murders throughout the province."

Brenda Brochu, Executive Director of the Peace River Regional Women's Shelter comments, "We have a particularly high rate of spousal abuse and spousal homicide in Northern Alberta where guns are prevalent, so getting guns out of the hands of domestic violence offenders is important."

Domestic abuse can escalate to homicide very quickly. Although shelters and police conduct risk assessment procedures which help identify women at a greater risk of homicide, there is no guaranteed formula.

The vote on Bill C-391 repealing the long gun registry is less than a week away, and the rumour-mill has it that the vote will be about evenly split. Every vote counts. It's not too late for Alberta MP's to be reminded about the voice of the victim – and to vote to keep the registry.

¹ Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Factum. Alberta Court of Appeal, July (1997).

Background:

Alberta`s domestic violence shelters are the front-line experts on issues relating to family violence against women and children. The Alberta Council of Women`s Shelters (ACWS) is an umbrella, volunteer non-profit organization of 43 member sheltering agencies across the province. ACWS conducts action-based research projects, organizes training for frontline shelter workers and generates awareness about issues related to domestic abuse.

ACWS`s Danger Assessment study of women in Alberta shelters found that 20% of women living with violence had abusive spouses with a gun in the home.²

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² Keeping Women Alive – Assessing the Danger. Alberta Council of Women`s Shelters. June (2009). ISBN 978-0-9812370-8