

MEDIA RELEASE

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Violence against Women and Immigrant/Refugee services oppose new directive from Canada Border Services Agency.

Toronto, February 14, 2011: Women's rights experienced a serious set-back when the Canada Border Services Agency issued a new policy directive that will impact immigrant and refugee women who are seeking safety from abuse across Canada.

Over the last two years Anti-violence against women service providers, migrant women and anti-racist organizers with the Shelter | Sanctuary | Status Campaign (SSS) in Toronto have mobilized forums, rallies, protests, press conferences, delegations and actions to ensure that women fleeing abuse can access services without fear of deportation. These actions led the Greater Toronto Enforcement Centre of the CBSA to pass a policy that it would prohibit their officers from entering any space that serves survivors of violence to arrest undocumented women. The policy was originally signed in October 2010 with the endorsement of Violence against Women organizations in the GTA.

On February 11, 2011, the National Office of CBSA called a meeting with organizations that work with women who experience and are fleeing violence in Toronto to announce that a new national policy would be implemented immediately, that would replace the previously agreed to policy. Women at the meeting were shocked to find that a policy that would be effective in ensuring that women with precarious immigration status could receive essential services was being replaced by a much weaker one, which reiterated the CBSA's priority to conduct surveillance at and enter women's shelters in the name of national security.

Women's advocates present at the meeting with CBSA voiced their concerns about this policy and the complete lack of consultation prior to its implementation. The lack of consultation and absence of a gendered analysis of immigration policy, including the enforcement of deportation orders in violence against women spaces, raises serious concerns about the commitment to uphold women's rights under provincial, national and international legislation and covenants.

In response to the new CBSA policy, Eileen Morrow of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses states, "Services that work with women and children who experience violence are dedicated to keeping women safe from violence and maintaining their confidentiality. That is our mandate and it is the mandate of all services that work to end violence against women. We'll continue to follow that mandate. If CBSA isn't prepared to comply with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada, we still are. Services will need to make decisions about how they can do that to protect women and their children from violence."

We will continue to oppose any policy or action on the part of the CBSA or any other government agency that endangers women and their children. We demand that the policy that was enacted on February 11, 2011 be revoked immediately, and that the policy that was originally endorsed by anti-violence organizations be reconstituted for Toronto and the whole of Canada.

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