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Media Release

Women's Day 2012 one more step to end gun control protections for women

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TORONTO—International Women's Day is meant to be a day to celebration women's rights. In Canada, the day will mean another step in the federal government march to destroy both the long-gun registry and its records of long-gun ownership, according to the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH). The Association is a province-wide network primarily of first and second stage women's emergency shelters for women escaping violence.

Today, as the Senate will vote to send *Bill C-19* to committee for examination the Association is joining the effort to seek changes to the legislation in the Senate committee process.

The registry, set up after the Montreal Massacre and now marked by the December 6th *National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women* in Canada, has been the target of private gun owners since before its inception. With the Conservative Party in a majority position, gun owners finally hit their bull's-eye.

Women's anti-violence and gun control advocates have the evidence to support the value of the registry in reducing long-gun violence against women by abusive men. Police agencies use the registry daily in the thousands to prepare when they respond to 'domestics'. Yet concerted and ongoing attempts to reason with the Harper government have not moved the Conservatives off their politically inspired agenda to destroy both the registry and its records.

"It seems the 'rights' of gun owners to be free of the inconvenience of registering their lethal weaponry trumps the rights of women and children to be safe from violence against women," said Leighann Burns, Executive Director of Harmony House in Ottawa and representative of the OAITH's Social Justice and Action Committee.

The Conservative Party, gun owners and especially controlling and abusive gun owners, may celebrate again today, as the CP drafters of the bill did when it passed the House of Commons; with laughter and toasts to victory. Women's groups, however, especially those who work with women on the frontlines of women's shelters in rural and Northern communities, won't be joining the grim party.

Instead, they will be continuing their efforts to protect women in the Senate process.

The Senate could reduce the dangerous impact of *Bill C-19*, including rejecting sections that would further erode the tracking and checking of gun licences, as recommended by the 1998 inquest into the long-gun murder of Arlene May by her ex-boyfriend in Ontario. Arlene May was shot to death by Randy Iles on International Women’s Day, 1996.

In that case, the jury made a number of recommendations about gun tracking and licence checks along with police and system control of guns and Firearms Acquisition Certificates that, at the time, the jury felt would help prevent similar deaths in the future.

(Recommendations in the inquest into the deaths of Arlene May and Randall Iles can be accessed online at: <http://www.oaith.ca/assets/files/Publications/May-Iles-inquest-recommendations.pdf>.)

The Arlene May inquest is only one of many points of process, research, and practice that have both identified the dangers of long-guns to women in abusive relationships and the value to Canadian women—and police—of tracking and controlling the purchase and ownership of long-guns.

“Governments like to talk of ‘evidence-based’ policy and action,” said Burns. “We have the evidence to support the registry and other gun control mechanisms. We need to see action in the Senate to respond to the evidence we have to offer both statistically, and in the lived experiences of women like Arlene May and many others living under the threat of gun violence by partners.”

It is a shame on our government that on International Women’s Day women can no longer celebrate federal action to ‘keep the guns in check and to keep the checks on guns’.

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