



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

Your Voice for Choice

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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May 31, 2011

Jim Watson
Mayor, City of Ottawa
110 Laurier Avenue West
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Dear Mayor Watson,

Earlier this month, you issued a “Respect for Life” proclamation at the behest of organizers of the annual March for Life. Although you have issued this same proclamation in previous years, most people were unaware of it until it garnered media attention this year. We are writing now to request that you please refrain from issuing any “Respect for Life” proclamation in the future, on the basis that they fail to meet the criteria in your Policy. (http://www.ottawa.ca/city_hall/policies/proclamations_en.html). The proclamation contradicts your policy in two fundamental ways: **1.** It endorses discrimination against women via the removal of their constitutional rights (and arguably promotes hatred against women), and **2.** It is religiously motivated because it promotes a sectarian religious doctrine on abortion.

We note that your policy “emanates from the desire to uphold the intent and spirit of the Ontario Human Rights Code” – under which “sex” is a protected ground against discrimination. The “respect for life” that is promoted by this proclamation is disingenuous because it actually promotes discrimination against women. Its context refers to respect for *fetal life* at the expense of women’s lives, health, and rights. The goal of the anti-abortion movement is to restrict or re-criminalize abortion and force women to complete any and all pregnancies. But in Canada, women have constitutional rights under the Charter, while fetuses do not. Several Supreme Court of Canada rulings have said that fetuses cannot be persons, that a pregnant woman and her fetus are “physically one” person, and that all rights must accrue to the pregnant woman because she already has established constitutional and equality rights. (See for example: **Dobson v. Dobson** 1999 2 SCR 753; **Tremblay v. Daigle** 1989 2 SCR 530; and **Winnipeg Child and Family Services v. D.F.G.** 1997 3 SCR 925.) Therefore, it is not possible to give rights to fetuses without severely compromising the rights of pregnant women. This also means that laws that restrict abortion discriminate against women, and that calls to pass such laws promote discrimination.

In keeping with the purpose of your Policy, it is inappropriate for the City of Ottawa to “encourage public awareness” or to officially “provide recognition” for an event/activity with the primary aim of recriminalizing abortion and removing women’s constitutional rights. (According to the Campaign Life Coalition: “...15,300 pro-life citizens from across Canada ... *came to demand legal*

protection for children who are still in the womb.” [emphasis added] May 24, 2011.
http://www.campaignlifecoalition.com/index.php?p=March_For_Life)

The anti-abortion movement in North America is indisputably a religious movement, as its history makes clear (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pro-life_movement). By far the vast majority of “pro-life” adherents in Canada are devout Catholics or evangelical Protestants, along with some followers of fundamentalist strains of other religions. The majority of March attendees were students bussed in from Catholic and private religious schools across Ontario, who were inappropriately given the day off school to attend. Most of the rest of the attendees were recruited from churches and also bussed in. (<http://www.vancouversun.com/news/Party+atmosphere+Parliament+Hill+anti+abortion+rally/4774099/story.html>) The March began on March 11 with “prayer services and Masses at various churches in the area...” (<http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/ottawa-mayor-declares-respect-for-life-day-in-advance-of-national-march-for/>)

The anti-abortion position itself is largely derived from and justified by patriarchal religious doctrine and Biblical teachings, even though the movement tries to use the cover of science for some of their pronouncements. A major tenet of the movement is to promote and restore the traditional family according to their religious ideals – a married man and woman with children, with the man in the role of breadwinner and the woman as a stay-at-home mother. Not only does the movement hold a narrow belief that a woman’s primary role is to be a wife and mother, but they want law and public policy to basically enforce that belief, despite the injustice and discrimination this would bring upon women in our modern society. They also believe that women are “victims” of abortion due to coercion by others, or because they do not understand what pregnancy is, or are not morally capable of making an informed independent decision for abortion. Women who have abortions but do not fit the “victim” role are often depicted as whores, or frivolous and empty-headed. All of this is blatant sexism, and amounts to misogyny – the hatred of women.

Further, we note that the Proclamation itself was worded in an inaccurate and offensive manner. It said: “The rights of the people of Canada including the unborn, the elderly and those with handicaps are gradually being eroded.” And: “...the community needs to get involved to ensure the rights of all people are respected and upheld.” The “unborn” are not people and do not have legal rights in Canada, and there is no evidence to support the statement that the rights of the elderly or disabled are “gradually being eroded.” On the contrary, most vulnerable groups in our society have gained more rights and recognition over the last few decades, including women. The second statement calls for the rights of “all” people to be respected, yet the entire March was about disrespecting women’s decision-making, and trying to remove their human rights.

Could you please confirm that the City of Ottawa will permanently deny issuing any further “Respect for Life” proclamations on the basis that they violate your Policy? We invite you to use the above evidence and arguments as justifications. If we do not hear from you, we will follow up with you next spring, and if necessary we will involve our members and the media in a campaign to ensure no similar proclamation is issued. Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Joyce Arthur, Executive Director
Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada
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