

***ELECTION 2008 – ‘Don’t Play With Women’s Rights’ Says a Non-Partisan Coalition of Advocates***

**September 28 will be the National Day of Action across Canada**

**Ottawa, September 25, 2008** -- In Ottawa today, a non-partisan coalition of advocates for sexual and reproductive rights, including unions and women’s organizations, held a press conference to demand that political parties and future MPs clearly state their support of women’s right to choose, and their commitment to ensure access to public abortion services everywhere in Canada. Before Parliament was dissolved, a number of Private Members’ Bills and were introduced that would have chipped away at the right to abortion.

Representatives from Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, Canadian Labour Congress, Fédération du Québec pour le planning des naissances, Action Canada for Population and Development (ACPD) held the press conference, describing themselves as a united front in the mobilization of women voters.

“Political parties and candidates must realize that Canadian women are tracking them during the campaign. We want assurance from all parties that they will not erode women’s fundamental right to decide their reproductive fate,” asserted Barb Byers, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC / CTC). “Women in this country, regardless of political, socio-economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds will not lose their hard-won freedoms. We believe that this issue will be a deciding factor for many women. “

Representatives of the coalition say they are “gravely concerned” about what they feel is a hidden political agenda behind the Private Members’ Bills C-338 – An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (procuring a miscarriage after 20 weeks of gestation), Bill C-484 – The Unborn Victims of Crime Act, and Bill C-537 – An Act to amend the Criminal Code (protection of conscience rights in the health care profession).

“Women’s rights have been under threat in the past year – we want this to be an election issue. Bill C-338 to limit the term of abortion to 20 weeks was clearly an attempt to roll back women’s right to choose. Bill C-537 is more insidious – it allows health professionals to restrict and deny any women’s health care by imposing their personal religious views”, said Carolyn Egan, spokesperson for Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC-CDAC).

“The bill that went the furthest, Bill C-484 – The *Unborn Victims of Crime Act*, would have opened the door to re-criminalizing abortion. But members from various parties supported the bill at second reading, and it almost received third and final reading in the Commons before dying on the Order Paper as a result of dissolution, explained Johanne Fillion from Fédération du Québec pour le planning des naissances (FQPN). “All women, pregnant or not, deserve to live lives free from violence. The Criminal Code already recognizes spousal violence and pregnancy as aggravating factors and allows harsher sentences for such crimes.”

"Bill C-484 was not addressing violence against women as it claims to do and actually re-victimizes women, says Erin Williams from the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW). "The government needs to focus its attention on national prevention strategies and accessible housing, employment and child care, all which help to reduce violence against women long term."

These threats have spurred the coalition to declare September 28 as a National Day of Action against Bill C-484. The current election now presents an opportunity to use the Day of Action to call on parties and candidates to state their commitment to women's rights, especially women's right to choose, and clearly state that they will refuse to introduce any anti-choice bills in next Parliament.

## **NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION September 28 - BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

### **Montréal**

- **Demonstration starting at Parc Lahaie (corner of St-Laurent and St-Joseph) from 1.30pm**  
Contact: Nathalie Parent [nparent@fqpn.qc.ca](mailto:nparent@fqpn.qc.ca) or [www.contreC484.qc.ca](http://www.contreC484.qc.ca) ;

### **Ottawa**

- **Rally at Minto Park / Women's Monument from 12pm**  
Contact: Pro Choice Coalition of Ottawa (PCCO); [jsquires@chebucto.ns.ca](mailto:jsquires@chebucto.ns.ca)

### **Vancouver**

- **"Stop the Cons!" – a visual protest at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Robson Street side, at noon**  
Contact Joyce Arthur at [jharthur@shaw.ca](mailto:jharthur@shaw.ca)

### **Toronto**

- **Rally at 12 noon, at the Bloor Parkette, corner of Bloor and Spadina**  
Contact: Carolyn Egan [c.egan@sympatico.ca](mailto:c.egan@sympatico.ca)

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**For information, please contact:  
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