

Opinion Statement for 14 May 2009

On May 14th, Ottawa will be the stage for a pro-life march, an action to countermark the 40 years since the adoption of the Omnibus Bill which amended the laws on abortion and contraception. This march is part of a series of actions that have taken place since the beginning of February 2009. On each day of Lent, demonstrators have organized vigils at abortion clinics across Canada and the United States, the origin of the initiative four years ago. These vigils are the work of anti-choice Canadian organizations who are on a crusade to maintain "good morality", to respect life in all its forms including the unborn, and to maintain the traditional family.

As pro-choice groups, the Fédération du Québec pour le Planning des Naissances, Canadians For Choice, and Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, we are hardly against life, but in favor of women's rights to exercise a most fundamental choice, that is, whether or not to give birth. We cannot stand by silently while these vigils take place.

The demonstrators in front of the clinics are anti-choice religious groups that, on the pretext of respecting life, show no respect for women's rights to choose either the privacy or the medical treatment that is their right in confidence. These demonstrations intend to intimidate and pass moral judgment on the women seeking abortion services by making them hostages at the entrances to the clinics, tormenting them at the very time and place they seek this medically and legally recognized procedure. This, despite numerous laws, court decisions and injunctions that have limited or banned such activities in front of the clinics in order to preserve confidentiality and the right to privacy for women who face a personal choice that is important for their future.

These recent actions of the anti-choice movement reveal the demonstrators' complete lack of respect for women. We are reminded of the recent controversy involving a 9-year old Brazilian girl, pregnant with twins as a result of being raped by her step-father. After having undergone an abortion, her mother and her medical team were all excommunicated from the Catholic church. The religious leaders clearly demonstrated no understanding of the girl's situation.

Moreover, these anti-choice actions remind us once again of the "debate" surrounding women's rights, most specifically, the right for women to choose which is necessary for them, the right to equality and respect for their decisions, the right for a risk-free pregnancy. A woman who chooses an abortion never takes the decision lightly. It is a complex and difficult choice. This choice deserves our respect and support.

In parallel with these actions, petitions have been distributed, especially by some Catholic school boards, to propose a new law "to protect the foetus". Once again, it is inconceivable to us that a number of Catholic primary schools, all of whom receive funding from our Canadian taxes, would promote such archaic and disrespectful anti-woman ideas. We mustn't forget that access to abortion services has saved the lives of countless thousands of women worldwide. We know that respect for life includes respect for women's lives and their reproductive rights.

For 20 years, women have continued the struggle to guarantee abortion rights in Canada. Many anti-choice threats, coming from the conservative religious right-wing, constitute a relentless abortion-centered attack which no longer has legitimate purpose in our society in 2009. Shouldn't we be moving on to more important struggles?

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