



## West Coast LEAF NEWS ALERT January 9, 2008

### West Coast LEAF welcomes criminal charges against key Bountiful leaders

#### Media Release For immediate release

**January 7, 2009** - West Coast LEAF is pleased by the important step taken by the Attorney General of British Columbia today in pressing charges against Winston Blackmore and James Oler, two leaders in the fundamentalist religious community of Bountiful, BC.

"The [Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) creates a positive obligation on governments in Canada to protect women from patterns of historical disadvantage," says Alison Brewin, Executive Director of West Coast LEAF. "The lack of action to protect the fundamental freedoms and rights of the women of Bountiful has been contrary to women's *Charter* rights. These charges will allow the courts, the government, the women of Bountiful and all Canadians to determine the boundaries of religious freedom when women's equality is at stake - a question of interest to many in the world today. West Coast LEAF, as a public interest legal organization, is very, very interested in where this case goes."

West Coast LEAF is particularly concerned about the way in which polygamy is practiced in closed communities like Bountiful - in that it limits women's choices, undermines their capacity to leave the community, and creates serious vulnerability for young women and girls to sexual and other exploitation. In the case of Bountiful, these vulnerabilities are reinforced by the closed nature of the community, including the control of information.

As the case progresses, West Coast LEAF also urges that attention be given to the impact on women and children in the community and to ensure that women have the services, programs and information they need. This includes family law legal aid, transition house support, advocacy regarding social assistance and specialized religious counseling.

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### Concern for Shirin Ebadi

West Coast LEAF also notes with concern the harassment and persecution of Iranian Nobel Peace Prize winner [Dr. Shirin Ebadi](#). Dr. Ebadi was the 2009 West Coast LEAF Equality Breakfast key-note speaker.

The [BBC News Channel](#) reported on January 5, 2009 that demonstrators picketed outside Dr. Ebadi's office and accused her of not condemning Israel's actions in Gaza, and that authorities raided both her office and the Defenders of Human Rights Center she founded. Many human rights and women's organizations have joined to express their concern for Dr. Ebadi's safety.

Dr. Shirin Ebadi, internationally renowned human rights activist, lawyer, is the author of *Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope*. She was the first Iranian and the first Muslim woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. In February 2008 she spoke at the West Coast LEAF annual Equality Breakfast about human rights, gender equality and religious freedom.

The Nobel Women's Initiative has organized an [action campaign](#) in support of Dr. Ebadi.

#### About [West Coast LEAF](#)

West Coast LEAF works to realize this vision of women's full equality through public legal education, strategic litigation, and law reform.

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