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**For Immediate Release**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**NAWL Closure Sets Back Advocacy for Women's Equality:  
West Coast LEAF saddened by closure of national women's advocate**

**September 19, 2007** – West Coast LEAF, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund joins LEAF, its national partner in equality work, in expressing tremendous sadness that the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) has been forced to close its doors. NAWL's closure will leave a void in legal research exposing women's experiences of discrimination and identifying gaps in constitutional protections and provisions for women.

NAWL's closure follows the 2006 closure of the Status of Women regional office in Vancouver, and continues a troubling trend in reducing the level of support for women and women's issues in Canada and BC particularly. The closure of the Status of Women office in BC represents a loss of access to research and policy analysis in a major western centre, and the loss of NAWL means there are fewer groups focused on legal equality awareness and the protection of *Charter*-enshrined equality provisions for women.

NAWL has been instrumental in improving legislation for women in the areas of family law, reproductive choice, violence against women, socio-economic rights, and more. NAWL's role has been to ensure that laws and policies reflect and are responsive to the realities of women in Canada.

NAWL and West Coast LEAF together continually examined the application of charter rights to ensure access to equality legislation for BC women. The closure of NAWL undermines this work in a concrete way. It also makes a statement to those working for justice and equality that those concerns are not being honoured on a formal, national level.

NAWL and West Coast LEAF have often worked together in the past. Most recently the two organizations brought together lawyers, government, academics and community organizations to mark the 20th anniversary of equality rights provision (section 15) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The conference was a unique and dynamic opportunity to explore the history of equality rights work and examine the future needs and realities of women and women's rights in our changing society. It would not have happened without the skill, commitment and credibility of NAWL. In addition, NAWL supported the development and research of West Coast LEAF's 2003 submission to the Federal Justice Committee on the proposed amendments to the *Divorce Act*, work that continues to provide a unique voice in the call for justice for women in Family Law here in BC.

"Equality law today is increasingly complex. Some principles of substantive equality are accepted, while others are over-turned, ignored by government or have simply never been achieved," says Alison Brewin, executive director of West Coast LEAF. "Contrary to popular belief, women's lives continue to be detrimentally affected by different factors and in different ways than men's. For example, women's role in parenting and the impact of marriage break-down isolate women from social, economic and political freedom others take for granted. NAWL supported our family law reform work, such as the Divorce Act – important work that wasn't being done by any other organization."

Since 1985, West Coast LEAF has been working to educate British Columbians on key issues that impact women's status and rights. This non-profit, federally registered charity works to change historical patterns of systemic discrimination against women by conducting equality rights litigation (using the Charter of Rights and Freedom), advocating for law reform and carrying out related public legal education.

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