



West Coast LEAF NEWS ALERT April 28, 2008

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Women and Children at Risk for Their Lives in Family Law Disputes - Press Conference Report

A press conference dealing with anti-violence and family law in the wake of the tragedy in Merritt, British Columbia, was organized by West Coast and five women's advocacy groups took part. It was held on Thursday, April 17th. Coverage of the press conference included Global TV, CBC AN, BC-CTV, Channel M, The Province, 24 Hours, Fairchild Television and Radio Canada.

The following are excerpts from presentations by two of the participating women.

Shashi Assanand- Vancouver Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services

The issue of violence against women and children is pervasive. There is a need to continuously work towards ensuring the safety of women and children by all those who have the responsibility to support their transition from violence to non-violence.

Recognizing the fact that women and children are most vulnerable in intimate relationships, every serious effort must be made to meet their safety needs. I also want to make sure that we acknowledge the vulnerability to the marginalized groups such as immigrant and refugee women, especially those who are not able to speak English and, therefore, cannot reach out

to the system.

It is absolutely essential that adequate resources are given to the service providers so that they are able to support families in a holistic manner. Coordination and collaboration between the justice system and the community service provider is also a key factor in preventing crimes. The planning for the safety of women and children has to be an on-going, continuous goal without any minimization of this problem.

Zara Suleman- West Coast Women's Legal Education Action Fund (LEAF) Family Law Project

How could the murders of Kaitlyne, Max, and Cordon have been prevented? What needed to be in place to protect their mother Darcie Clark?

We know from our review of the research in this area, our work with front-line anti-violence organizations and from our work with women experiencing violence, that the most dangerous time for women and children is when women leave abusive relationships.

We have statistics, reports, research but most importantly we have the expertise of front-line anti-violence workers who assist women through the process of addressing the violence in women's lives. We also have the countless experiences of women facing violence that continue to identify the systemic barriers they experience in the legal system and with government policies. This is where we can learn - this is where we need to be listening - this is where the answers to our questions are - this is how we will be able to make the concrete changes needed to protect women and children in BC.

Women are entitled to "equal protection of the law". This is a fundamental concept of our Section 15 equality rights provision under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 15 equality rights came into force 23 years ago on April 17, 1985. 23 years later we are still fighting for women's fundamental equality rights to be protected.

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West Coast LEAF Urges the Attorney General to Refer the Question of Polygamy to the Courts

The Board of Directors of West Coast LEAF (Legal Education and Action Fund), voted on Thursday, April 10th to support Special Prosecutors Richard Peck, Q.C. and Leonard Doust, Q.C. recommendations to refer the question of the constitutionality of Canada's polygamy laws to the Court of Appeal. Mr. Doust's opinion, released Monday, April 7th, made a strong case for proceeding by way of a constitutional reference* to the court, rather than lay polygamy charges against an individual.

"The reality of polygamy as it is practiced in the FDLS church and Bountiful is that women and children are the property of the male leadership," says Executive Director Alison Brewin. "West Coast LEAF urges the BC Government to move quickly to uphold Canada's laws through the reference procedure."

* In a reference, the court is asked for an opinion about the constitutionality of a law.

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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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