

MEDIA RELEASE

**For Immediate Release
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BC SUFFERS HIGH RATES OF MISSING AND MURDERED WOMEN AND GIRLS

Vancouver – As the list of women found on the killing fields called British Columbia continues to grow; 15 year old Loren Leslie of Fraser Lake BC and 36 year old Cynthia Maas found in Prince George recently added, and all the women being killed and victimized in BC's North, in the Downtown Eastside and all across the province, the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC) wants first to express our deepest sympathy to the families and friends and acknowledge how deeply impacted whole communities are by these horrific crimes.

The murders of Loren and Cynthia and hundreds more reminds us that, despite the growing numbers of missing and murdered women and girls in BC, public outcry and system transparency seems limited. What have we been told about the Hwy of Tears murders and missing, where is the urgency about these extreme levels of violence on the part of all our leaders. What is being done? Who among our leaders will be attending December 6th vigils across BC today. We don't need to wait for the outcome of the soon to begin Commission on Missing Women in BC in order to act. We have known what is needed for many years, yet our leaders seem loathe to move forward to support more programs.

In 2005, EVA BC, in partnership with Aboriginal women and health providers wrote a report called, *Researched to Death; BC Aboriginal Women and Violence*. The report calls for Aboriginal women to be involved at policy tables where programs, legislation and services are considered; more support and outreach services run for Aboriginal women by Aboriginal women; training and education, both for Aboriginal services providers and for mainstream responders. Aboriginal advocates have been calling for a healing centre to provide support services, trauma counselling and child development support for the hundreds of family members, including children who have lost their mothers, their aunties, their cousins, but where is the support for this practical solution. Action is needed now.

EVA BC is calling on the Province of BC to open the vault called the *Victims of Crime Surcharge Fund*, which currently holds approx \$50 Million in accumulated funds that can only be used for programs and services for victims of crime; and begin to put into place some of the innovative recommendations that have been made by us and others for decades. BC has for example, only 62 community based victim assistance programs, these programs are central to the safety of women and children, yet the few that exist have such high case loads, those working in these programs are barely keep up with the violence they are responding to.

EVA BC is also calling on the RCMP to issue safety alerts to women in northern BC in response to the growing number of disappearing and murdered women and girls in that region. In Vancouver and the Lower Mainland, assaults on women typically trigger public safety alerts from police to create awareness among the female population that they may be at risk. The same is not true along the Highway of Tears between Prince George and Prince Rupert. The public needs to be aware of the reality that dangerous predators are actively seeking women and girls and often those from marginalized groups, including Aboriginal women, women who live with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women, and young girls.

Highway of Tears Coordinator Mavis Erickson has said, "It's dangerous to be an Aboriginal woman in Canada today." This is reinforced by recent research findings from the Native Women's Association of Canada. Their Sisters in Spirit database shows that as of March 2010, BC had 160 known cases of Aboriginal women that were murdered or missing, up from the 137 known cases in 2009. Their data also shows that almost half of the cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in BC remain unsolved, (information taken from *What Their Stories Tell Us: Research findings from the Sisters In Spirit initiative*, Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010, p.28).

On December 6th, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, EVA BC wants to bring attention to the many murders and disappearances of women and girls in this province. EVA BC is concerned about the safety of all women and girls, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. As we remember the women killed at l'Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989, let us also remember the missing and murdered women all across BC. Let us recognize that these tragedies are not historical, women and girls are being victimized today, in every city and every community. The time for action is now.

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