

Leaders' Debate Reveals Conservative Contempt for Women

So-Called "Tough on Crime" Agenda Will Put More Women and Children at Risk

Ottawa, April 13, 2011 – In an unprecedented abuse of the democratic process, the Harper government now proposes to consolidate multiple Conservative crime bills into a single bill, literally ramming it through Parliament at breakneck speed, without any meaningful discussion or debate, and regardless of the consequences to ordinary Canadians. If passed into law, the bill will cost Canadian taxpayers tens of billions of dollars, while putting the safety of women and children at significant risk, says the Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights.

"Stephen Harper bragged about his plan to implement his proposed Law and Order Agenda in tonight's leaders' debate, but didn't mention women once. He proposes to "get tough on crime" but abandons proven strategies that actually keep women and children safe, such as gun control. In fact, his agenda will not help women and children who are victimized. "Our government should be investing these billions in child care, affordable housing, social, educational and health services, all of which are proven means to prevent crime and benefit all Canadians," said Kim Pate of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. Imprisoning woman for a year in federal prison costs an average of \$185,000. Over 80% of women in prison are incarcerated for poverty-related offences. Eighty-two per cent of women who are federally sentenced in Canada have experienced physical or sexual abuse, 75% have less than a junior high school education, 34% are Indigenous, and the majority live with mental health issues.

"Money allocated to the tough on crime agenda would be better spent addressing poverty, education, violence against women, mental health issues, homelessness, addictions, and services that enable women and children to escape violent situations," said Leighann Burns of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH), the largest shelter association in Canada. "Nobody wants crime, but this tax money is better spent preventing violence and other crimes and the factors that lead to crime rather than building prisons. There are currently over 580 documented cases of missing and murdered First Nations, Inuit and Métis women in this country but not a single word about that from Mr. Harper. Canadian women expect more."

The Conservative government fell on a non-confidence motion, following revelations that it had withheld critical information regarding the costs implementation of its 'law and order agenda' would impose, leading to the current election.

The Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights is comprised of 37 organizations including women's organizations, human rights organizations and Canada's major unions.

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