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## **National Women's Group Denounces Regressive Law & Order Agenda as Costly and Ineffective**

**May 29, 2006 (Ottawa)** – The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) emerged from their annual general meeting clear in their commitment to steadfastly oppose the imposition of more mandatory minimum sentences, the reduction in the use of conditional sentences and potential interference with opportunities for conditional release. CAEFS is a federation of 25 local, community based service providers who work with and on behalf of victimized, criminalized, and imprisoned women and girls.

“The Harper government refuses to acknowledge the vast amount of international research discrediting the effectiveness of the proposed law reform agenda. Mandatory minimum sentences are seductive to citizens unfamiliar with the complexities of crime, and to politicians who want to be seen by those citizens as taking action to protect them,” stated Dr. Ailsa Watkinson, President of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. “Canada already has approximately 45 mandatory minimum sentences; more mandatory minimum sentences will mean that people who are ensnared in the prison system are likely to be kept there for longer periods of time.”

“Most people realize that the increased use of mandatory minimum sentences and decreased use of conditional sentences, sometimes known as house arrest, will vastly increase the cost of the criminal justice system. Imprisonment is expensive – far more expensive, in fact, than other means of preventing crime. To keep a person incarcerated in Canada, it costs anywhere from \$50,000 to \$250,000 per year, depending upon the nature of the prison and the needs of the prisoner. If even just half of the seven billion dollars currently spent on imprisoning people was invested in welfare, housing, health, education and other community based services, the resulting resources would benefit whole communities, not merely those who are criminalized,” continued Dr. Gillian Balfour, a member of the Social Action Committee of CAEFS.

“Based upon what has happened in the United States, there is every reason to believe that additional mandatory penalties for firearms will have the same effects in Canada of increasing unfairness in the enforcement of the law, generating wrongful convictions, and devastating the African Canadian community by incarcerating young men at a disproportionate rate. Mandatory minimum penalties and fewer community release opportunities will also likely exacerbate the over-incarceration of Aboriginal people, especially Aboriginal women,” said Kim Pate, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. “The United Nations Human Rights Committee has already expressed serious concern about Canada’s treatment of women prisoners. These measures will only make things worse for the women with whom our membership works.”

-- 30 --

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