

Martha's Monthly August 2005 Terrorism in our homes

Like you, Martha spent July 7 glued to her television as images of the bombings in London were replayed on the screen. In the end, more than 50 people died and 700 were injured in this brutal act of violence. Within days, it was revealed that Canada has spent \$10 Billion since 2001 on enhanced security to avoid terrorist acts in Canada. Critics pointed out the remote risk (http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/1122749520008_6/?hub=Canada) and countered there were many more pressing issues in Canada that posed real threats to the lives of Canadians.

In Alberta, days after the London bombings, Martha was, like you, both stunned and saddened to hear of the murder of Liana White, an Edmonton mother. The subsequent murder charges laid against Liana's husband (<http://calgary.cbc.ca/regional/servlet/View?filename=ca-white-homicide20050720>) got Martha thinking about what threatens the lives of women in Canada and she was staggered to find out that women have far more to fear in their own homes than they do on the buses and subways of Canada. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters raised alarm bells (<http://calgary.cbc.ca/regional/servlet/View?filename=ca-spousal-violence20050728>) when they said that Alberta's rate of spousal violence and spousal murder was the highest in Canada.

A report from Statistics Canada (<http://www.statcan.ca/cgi-bin/downpub/listpub.cgi?catno=85-224-XIE2005000>) looked at family violence and homicides in Canada. Each year around 700 people are murdered in Canada and more than 10% are killed by a spouse. Most of those killed by their partner are women. In fact, from **1994 to 2003 more than 1000 women in Canada died at the hands of a family member** and of those women, more than 600 were killed by their spouse. (Canada's spy agency, CSIS, has a list of all terrorist acts against Canadians on their website (http://www.csis-scrc.gc.ca/eng/operat/ct_e.html)). The largest incident, the Air India bombing of 1985, killed 329 people. Martha notes that **twice that many women have been murdered by their spouses** since 1994)

And the reality for Aboriginal women is even worse. The same Stats Can report stated that **Aboriginal women were three times more likely to be victims of spousal violence**. The staggering number of Aboriginal women who have been murdered or are missing in Canada has led Amnesty International to start an International campaign called Stolen Sisters to put pressure on the Canadian government to do more to protect aboriginal girls and women from violence. The Native Women's Association of Canada launched Sisters in Spirit to draw attention to the 500 Aboriginal women that have gone missing in 20 years. Their

campaign needs your support and advocacy.

But Martha started to wonder, as she so often does, what her own Alberta government is doing to provide protection to women who fear for their lives from violent family members. She found that the Protection Against Family Violence Act was passed in June 1999 and offers a new measure, Emergency Protection Orders (<http://www.violetnet.org/info/epo.htm>) (EPO's), in order to provide an immediate measure to remove an abusive family member from the home. For many families, this allows victims and their children to remain in their own home while the abuser is removed. The police initiate these orders, available 24 hours a day, but they require the approval of a Justice of the Peace. **Here is where it gets a little weird.** Martha found out that only two centers, Edmonton and Calgary, have Justices of the Peace available. All other sites must go through Calgary and Edmonton. The Red Deer Women's Shelter (<http://calgary.cbc.ca/regional/servlet/View?filename=ca-justice-peace20050803>) and the RCMP raised the issue on August 3, 2005 in an interview with the CBC. They pointed out that the lack of Justices of the Peace outside of the two urban centers in Alberta means delays for these important documents to be processed. There are about 1.8 million people living in Calgary and Edmonton but over a million living in other parts of Alberta. All Albertans need to have equal access to timely protection through the Emergency Protection Orders.

The Marthas of Martha's Monthly call on the government of Alberta to immediately initiate a review of the Justices of the Peace issue and implement a process that provides the immediate protection of Emergency Protection Orders to all Albertans, not just the urban dwellers. Though these orders cannot protect all women who face the form of terrorism called family violence, it would be one small step towards a just society in which all people have equal protection under the law.

Please join in our campaign by sending the following letter to Premier Klein at premier@gov.ab.ca, Justice Minister and Attorney General Ron Stevens at Ron.Stevens@gov.ab.ca, Opposition leader Kevin Taft at edmonton.riverview@assembly.ab.ca, NDP leader Brian Mason at alison.crawford@assembly.ab.ca, Liberal Justice critic Bruce Miller at edmonton.glenora@assembly.ab.ca, NDP Justice Critic Raj Pannu at edmonton.strathcona@assembly.ab.ca and back to us at marthasmnthly@yahoo.ca

August 8, 2005

Dear Premier Klein:

The tragic death of Liana White in July and the many other murders of women at the hands of family members caused the Marthas of Alberta to look into spousal

homicide in our province. We are disturbed that Alberta has such a high rate of spousal murders and we are particularly concerned for the Aboriginal women of Alberta who face a higher risk of all forms of violence. We applaud your government for the Protection Against Family Violence Act but we are concerned about one aspect of the Act. We are concerned that justice is not being done for women and families who need Emergency Protection Orders and live outside the two largest urban centers of Alberta.

The RCMP and the Red Deer Women's Shelter have raised concern that, because Justices of the Peace are not available outside Calgary and Edmonton, there are delays in receiving EPO's. Since EPO's are meant to provide an immediate response to the threat of violence, we are calling upon you to initiate a review of this policy and to ensure that all Albertans have equal protection under the law.

We are unwilling to accept the deaths of women at the hands of their family members and we expect our government to act immediately to provide protection when there is a risk of violence. The availability of Emergency Protection Orders is a small part of the overall protection which the Alberta government can provide to its citizens and we must ensure that this measure is equally available to all, no matter where they live.

Sincerely,

Your name and address