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## CANADIAN VOICE OF WOMEN FOR PEACE

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October 18, 2007

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

As Co-Chairs of the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (VOW), we write to express our concern, dismay and outrage that Code Pink: Women for Peace co-founder Medea Benjamin and Retired Colonel/Diplomat Ann Wright were denied entry into Canada at the Rainbow Bridge, Niagara Falls, en route to a speaking engagement at the invitation of the Toronto Stop the War Coalition.

These two very high profile peace advocates and anti Iraq war activists were prevented from entering Canada because their names appeared on the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. Ms. Benjamin, who travels all over the world on a regular basis, said in an October 4<sup>th</sup> statement that Canada is the first country to use the NCIC database to keep peace activists out of their country. Ann Wright, in a news conference Thursday outside the Canadian Embassy in Washington, said the FBI should not have put their names on that list and that the Canadian government should not be engaged in political intimidation work for the Bush administration by using that database.

Code Pink opposes the War on Iraq by such benign actions as chanting peace slogans, staging White House lawn sit-ins, embarrassing U.S. diplomats and disrupting hearings. Both Benjamin and Wright have been detained on trespassing charges and released as soon as they paid their fines but were never incarcerated for purpose of punishment of a crime. According to Benjamin, the so-called crime she was stopped for was trespassing outside the US Mission to the UN while trying to deliver over 150,000 signatures collected on behalf of Iraqi women on International Women's Day 2006. As accredited UN members, we were representing VOW at that time and recall the outrage amongst the hundreds of NGO's attending the UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings at the time.

The categories of individuals covered by the NCIC include wanted persons; individuals who have been charged with serious and/or significant offenses; missing persons; individuals designated by the US Secret Service as posing a potential danger to the President and/or other authorized protectees; members of violent gangs; unidentified persons.

**The use of the NCIC database to detain and deny entry into Canada on the basis of alleged misdemeanors involved in peace activism is tantamount to the "criminalization of peaceful dissent".**

Peaceful protest such as Benjamin and Wright engage in is not a criminal activity in Canada and it is indeed shocking and shameful that Medea Benjamin and Ann Wright should be so treated by a country that has traditionally stood for peace and supported its own Charter of Human Rights, democratic process while honoring the United Nations treaties it has signed.

Equally disturbing is the broader trend toward arrests and detention of peace activists in Canada and at its border. We wrote to you last week in support of Alison Bodine, a U.S. Citizen and



peace activist living in Vancouver, who on September 13, 2007 was arrested by the Canada Border Services Agency at the Peace Arch border crossing and later detained by the RCMP. VOW demanded that the Canada Border Services Agency drop any and all charges against Alison Bodine and we further more demanded that Ms. Bodine's right to freely travel between the U.S. and Canada be reinstated without further delay. Swift action and protest by the peace movement led to her release. VOW members in BC were also part of a swift and massive mobilization by the War Resisters Campaign, which led to the release of war resistor Robin Long who was arrested October 1<sup>st</sup> on the streets of Nelson, BC and faced a deportation hearing. We remind you as well that this was not the first time that retired Colonel Ann Wright was prevented from speaking in Canada. On August 19th she was detained at the Ottawa Airport en route to a speaking engagement at the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) teach-in at the University of Ottawa where one of us spoke with her at length as she arrived after the teach-in was over. She explained how she had been detained for several hours at the Ottawa Airport and then allowed to enter after buying her way in with a \$200.00 three-day permit.

These arrests, detainments, attempted deportations, and now the use of the NCIC database moves Canada further down the slippery slope of compliance with the Bush administration demands for harmonization of 'security' measures which in the post 9-11 era have included Bill C-36, Canada's version of the US Patriot Act, the Safe Third Country agreement, the SMART Border accord with its 40 point action plan, no-fly lists, etc. This excessive border security response has led many Canadian NGOs and legal experts, like security analyst and lawyer Maureen Webb, to warn of the fundamental principles at stake in these agreements: "things like due process, presumption of innocence, the right to know the evidence against you, and to respond, the right against unreasonable search, and seizure, rights under data protection laws, rights of mobility and asylum rights."

**Canadian Voice of Women for Peace calls upon the Prime Minister to redress the spectrum of repressive security and surveillance legislative changes enacted since 9-11.** This includes those that threaten the rights of peace, social justice and global democracy advocates and activists by confounding them as terrorists and criminals. Many of these harmonized policies are found under the umbrella of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America which was exposed recently at the SPP Montebello Summit for its undemocratic nature, for operating behind closed doors with input from 30 of the most powerful CEOs in North America, and without input from citizens, civil society NGO's and meanwhile operating under the radar screen of public or Parliamentary scrutiny. This exposure has led some journalists and CEO's to infer that the SPP may have been sidelined while others fear it has simply gone further underground in the shell game tactics of corporate economic globalization's attempt to advance directives and disciplines that override democratic rights and freedoms. It is obviously time for the government of Canada to reconsider its commitment to these rigid and repressive security measures within a regime that strips Canadians of their civil, human, and democratic rights and sovereignty.

It is imperative that Canada rethinks and distances itself from US domestic security, defence and foreign policies based on an unfounded global 'war on terror' and the Security and Prosperity Partnership.

**More specifically, the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace calls on the Canadian government to immediately reverse its policy of complying with US Security demands in regard to the FBI NCIC database surveillance of peace and social justice activists.**



**We also want to remind you that Canada has been a firm supporter of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security which acknowledges the imperative of women's participation in all levels of decision-making and peace processes in achieving a peaceful world.**

Medea Benjamin is one of the 1000 Peace Women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005, a project supported by VOW and with several VOW members listed in its distinguished profiles. The 1000 Peace Women were re-nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize again this year and we remind you that in taking such action against Ms Benjamin, the Canadian government implies that it does not support the qualities valued by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee which include commitment to nonviolent methods, quality of character, and sustained contributions to peace, justice, human dignity, and the integrity of the environment, and global impact.

We also remind you that Retired Colonel Ann Wright, in addition to a distinguished military career in active and reserve service, has been a diplomat for the US State Department serving as Chief of Mission at the US embassies in Afghanistan and was awarded a State Department award for heroism for helping evacuate 2,500 people from the devil war in Sierra Leone.

The government of Canada should be honoring Medea Benjamin and Ann Wright and welcoming them into our country as highly respected valuable contributors to a just, sustainable and peaceful world.

Yours sincerely,

Janet M Eaton, PhD, Co-Chair, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace

Janis Alton, Co-Chair, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace

cc: Minister of Public Safety Hon. Stockwell Day, Minister of National Defence, Hon. Peter MacKay, Minister of Status of Women, Hon. Josée Verner, Minister of Citizenship & Immigration Canada, Hon. Diane Finley, Minister of Justice Hon. Robert Nicholson, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, Hon. Stéphane Dion, Liberal Foreign Affairs Critic, Hon. Bob Rae, Liberal Defence Critic, Hon. Denis Coderre, Liberal Status of Women Critic, Maria Minna, Liberal Citizenship and Immigration Critic Maurizio Bevilacqua, Hon., Liberal Justice Critic, Hon. Marlene Jennings, Leader, New Democratic Party of Canada, Hon. Jack Layton, NDP Foreign Affairs Critic, Hon. Paul Dewar, NDP Defence Critic, Hon. Dawn Black, NDP Status of Women Critic, Hon. Irene Mathyssen, NDP Citizenship and Immigration Critic, Hon. Olivia Chow, NDP Justice Critic, Hon. Libby Davies, Leader Bloc Québécois, Hon. Gilles Duceppe, BQ Foreign Affairs Critic, Hon. Francine Lalonde, BQ Defence Critic, Hon. Claude Bachand, BQ Status of Women Critic, Hon. Nicole Demers, BQ Citizenship and Immigration Critic, Hon. Meili Faille, BQ Justice Critic, Hon. Réal Ménard, Green Party leader Elizabeth May