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For immediate release

“Who’s Afraid of Elizabeth May?” YWCA Canada calls for a woman’s voice in election debate

TORONTO, September 9, 2008 - YWCA Canada, the country’s oldest and largest women’s multi-service organization, is calling for the inclusion of Green Party leader Elizabeth May in the televised federal election debate and encouraging other social justice organizations to do the same.

“Our daughters need to see what equality looks like,” says Paulette Senior, YWCA Canada CEO, “and equality isn’t four men debating the future of Canada while freezing out the one woman who leads a national party. It’s time for inclusion.”

The media consortium decision to bar Ms. May from the debate is shocking, particularly in a year of major firsts for women in national politics in the U.S., as Hillary Clinton became the first woman to make a credible run for a presidential nomination and the Republicans named Sarah Palin as the first woman ever on their presidential ticket. YWCA Canada calls on the media consortium to re-issue the invitation to the leaders of all five national parties, and hold a debate with whoever accepts.

“If you hold it, they will come,” says Senior, admonishing those federal party leaders who said they won’t show up. “Threatening not to participate if Elizabeth May is in the debate smacks of bullying. It sets a poor example to the girls we work to empower every day in our programs and services. And the message it delivers to boys is deplorable.”

Elizabeth May is the fourth woman to lead a national party in Canada. The NDP was the first party to elect a woman as leader, selecting Audrey McLaughlin in 1989 and is the only party to be successively led by women. Progressive Conservative Kim Campbell is the only woman to have served as Prime Minister of Canada and did so for less than half a year. For more than 130 years, or well over 99% of Canadian history, men have served as Prime Minister of Canada.

At the present time, all first ministers across the country are male. In fact, Canada's international ranking on the Inter-Parliamentary Union, "List of Women in National Parliaments," is 48th in the world. Despite our relative economic prosperity and political stability, Canada now has fewer women in parliament than most of Europe and many so-called less developed countries including Uganda, Rwanda, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Fairness and equality are important values that all Canadians share. It's time for the parties to live up to the standards they claim to cherish and include Ms. May in the electoral debate.

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For further information on YWCA Canada and its programs and services, or to set up an interview with Paulette Senior, CEO of YWCA Canada, please contact Laura Tilley, Communications Coordinator at 416.962-8881 x 233.

About YWCA Canada:

YWCA Canada is the country's largest women's multi-service organization. With 34 Member Associations operating in more than 400 districts and communities across the country, our Turning Point Programs for Women™ - which address personal safety, economic security and well-being - reach 1 million women and girls in nine provinces and one territory. YWCA is the largest national provider of shelter to women, serving 25,000 women, children and teen girls including 6,000 fleeing woman abuse each year. We are the largest provider of literacy, life skills, employment and counselling programs in the country, and the second largest provider of childcare services. YWCA Canada is a member association of the World YWCA which unites 25 million women and girls worldwide and spans 125 countries. For more information about YWCA Canada and our Member Associations, visit www.ywacacanada.ca.