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## BOUNTIFUL ROUNDTABLE PLEASED WITH POLYGAMY DECISION

After lengthy hearings into the constitutionality of Canada's criminal prohibition of polygamy – held earlier this year at BC's Supreme Court in Vancouver - Chief Justice Robert Bauman has upheld Section 293 of the Criminal Code of Canada stating that multiple marriages are illegal.

The members of the Bountiful Roundtable, an ad hoc committee consisting of representatives from concerned women's groups, are extremely gratified to learn of the decision of Mr. Justice Bauman regarding the polygamy law.

They thank Mr. Justice Bauman for his patient hearing of all the witnesses in the case and for his thoughtful and measured decision. This decision, made after many weeks of hearings, is the first step towards enabling the prosecution of those who continue to practice exploitative polygamy in Canada.

The Bountiful Roundtable has, since its inception in 2005, contended that the harmful effects of the practice of polygamy result in sexual abuse of women and girls, lack of adequate education for members of the polygamous community of Bountiful and in cross-border trafficking of girls, many of them under the age of 18, to satisfy the precepts of their religious beliefs that the men of the community must have many wives to enter heaven. Basic human rights of the women and children, and many of the young men in this community, have been denied by this practice.

The Bountiful Roundtable members have long supported the evidence gathered by the RCMP, in which the RCMP recommended charges against individuals in Bountiful pursuant to the "sexual exploitation" provision of Section 153 of the Criminal Code. This provision prohibits an adult from having sexual contact with a young person between the ages of 14 and 18 toward whom the adult is in a "position of trust or authority."

Once this case is finally resolved, the Public Prosecutions Service will now be encouraged to bring charges against polygamists, and the courts will be free to hear cases resulting from those activities that are not only incompatible with women's equality, but also contrary to the laws of Canada.

Members of the Bountiful Roundtable include representatives from CFUW (Canadian Federation of University Women), BC Teachers Federation, West Coast LEAF, Vancouver Council of Women, Vancouver YWCA, Mennonite Central Committee, Canadian Council for Refugees (BC Steering Committee, Anti-Trafficking), and Altering Destiny through Education.

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