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CANADIENNE DE LA SANTÉ

CATHOLIC HEALTH
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NEWS RELEASE

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CHAC Urges Government Not to Weaken Prohibitions in New Reproductive and Genetic Technologies Legislation

Ottawa - In a letter to the Prime Minister, the Catholic Health Association of Canada (CHAC), has called on the government not to weaken 13 prohibitions introduced in 1996 in Bill C-47. Bill C-47 was the Liberal government's first attempt to regulate new reproductive and genetic technologies. The bill died on the order paper when the federal election was called in May 1997. Recent media reports have suggested that the government is prepared to reintroduce legislation this Fall.

"The CHAC has been actively involved in the issue of genetic and reproductive technology legislation since 1989, when the Royal Commission on New Reproductive Technologies initiated its inquiry," said Mary Pat Skene, CHAC chairperson. The Association supported the final report of the Commission, issued in 1993, that strongly recommended putting legal limits on the use of certain reproductive and genetic technologies, and the setting up of a licensing body to manage the use of these technologies.

The CHAC was also supportive of the government's decision of July 1995 to establish a moratorium on 9 problematic practices or procedures. However, at that time, the CHAC wrote to the Minister of Health expressing its concern that a "voluntary" moratorium lacked the force needed to ensure that certain practices would in fact be prohibited. "Recent reports of Canadian clinics paying women up to \$2,000 for their eggs, the growth of surrogate motherhood contracts, and the increase in the number of commercial sperm banks, are indications that the moratorium has not worked," said Mrs. Skene.

While the CHAC is pleased to hear that the government is prepared to reintroduce legislation this Fall to regulate genetic research and reproductive technologies, the Association is concerned about media reports which suggest that this new legislation will back away from some of the prohibitions included in C-47.

For example, C-47 would have prohibited the buying and selling of eggs, sperm and embryos. A feature story in the *Globe & Mail* (May 1999) quotes a senior Health Canada official as saying that the new bill may not contain a ban on selling sperm, and suggests that the ban on the sale of human eggs is also being questioned. The article states that the government is also reconsidering C-47's ban on research on human embryos more than 14 days old.

“The CHAC is opposed to weakening the prohibitions introduced in Bill C-47. We are calling on the government to introduce legislation that will prohibit research, procedures and technologies that threaten such core values as human dignity and respect for life. Such legislation needs to ensure the non-commercialization of reproduction and protection for the vulnerable,” said Mrs. Skene. The CHAC has also recommended that consideration of values and ethics be incorporated as an essential component of the work of the regulatory body that is to be established to manage the use of these technologies.

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NOTE: The 13 procedure prohibited under Bill C-47 were:

1. Sex selection for non-medical purposes
2. Buying and selling of eggs, sperm and embryos
3. Germ-line genetic alteration
4. Ectogenesis (maintaining an embryo in an artificial womb)
5. Cloning of human embryos
6. Creation of animal-human embryos
7. Retrieval of sperm or eggs from cadavers or fetuses for fertilization and implantation, or research involving the maturation of sperm or eggs outside the human body
8. Commercial preconception or “surrogacy” arrangements
9. Transfer of embryos between human and other species
10. Use of human sperm, eggs or embryos for assisted human reproduction procedures or for medical research without the informed consent of the donor(s)
11. Research on human embryos later than 14 days after conception
12. Creation of embryos for research purposes only
13. Offer to provide or offer to pay for prohibited services

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