



For Immediate Release

***The No Religious Arbitration Coalition Optimistic About Government's Family Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005***

November 16 2005

The No Religious Arbitration Coalition welcomes the announcement made yesterday by Attorney General Michael Bryant which proposes amendments to arbitration in family matters. The changes are that the use of arbitration must be in compliance with the existing *Family Law Act*.

“It has been a painful and emotional struggle for all Ontarians –particularly those from Faith Communities”, says Alia Hogben, Co-Chair of the Coalition. “We are optimistic that the provisions announced are in keeping with the Premier’s commitment to one public law for all. While individuals are still free to turn to their religious leaders for personal advice, this will not be legally binding.”

The No Religious Arbitration Coalition, made up of over 100 agencies and groups active in the opposition to religious arbitration in Family Law in Ontario, came together early in 2005 to provide a unified voice opposing the state sanctioning of religious settlements in family matters. Identifying the separation of religious and secular laws, a publicly accountable legal system, and universal access to one system of law in keeping with the equality guarantees of the Canadian Charter, formed the main objectives of their collaborative lobby.

“We are pleased to find substantive legal change –not just window dressing. This Bill includes exclusive jurisdiction of public family law in matters of arbitration, monitoring through written records and reports, training and regulation of arbitrators and long-awaited changes to the *Children’s Law Reform Act* to ensure violence and abuse are considered when determining the best interests of a child in custody and access cases”, adds Pamela Cross, No Religious Arbitration Coalition Co-Chair. “In particular the inability to waive the right to appeal will go a long way to ensuring that women’s equality rights are protected”.

“One area of concern that remains”, Hogben continues, “is that the government’s proposed mandatory independent legal advice for women entering family arbitration agreements is meaningless without additional resources being directed to Legal Aid Ontario, ensuring that women of little means can access that advice.”

For more information please contact:

Alia Hogben

Executive Director, Canadian Council of Muslim Women

613-382-2847

Pamela Cross, Legal Director, METRAC

416-392-3148

Amanda Dale, Director Advocacy & Communications, YWCA Toronto

416-453-1916

**[http://www.ywca-toronto.org/get\\_involved/arbitration\\_intro.htm](http://www.ywca-toronto.org/get_involved/arbitration_intro.htm)**