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National Executive Board Statement on Hate Crime targeting the LGBT Community

Passed on November 18, 2009

In communities across the country, we've witnessed an increase in harassment and violence against lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgendered people over the last year, occurring in tandem with the rise in gendered violence as reported by women's shelters.

In Thunder Bay, a young gay man was viciously attacked with a brick by eight men in early September, along with two friends who escaped.

In London, there were two separate attacks in September, within weeks of each other. In one incident, a young gay couple was attacked by two men, in another incident a young gay man was brutally beaten after his attacker shouted homophobic slurs.

In Oshawa, a lesbian couple was attacked in broad daylight while picking up their son at school, at the hands of another parent.

In the Vancouver area there have been a number of attacks on gay people, including an attack on a gay man in a gay pub in March, and an attack on a gay couple in Kamloops, B.C.

In Toronto, a young man was brutally murdered in October while walking home from downtown. While it has not yet been called a hate crime by police, friends and family of the young man believe the incident was motivated by homophobia.

In Winnipeg, a gay bathhouse was burned to the ground in October, killing two people in the blaze.

The CAW National Executive Board is gravely concerned about this surge in attacks against LGBT people. The widely accepted statistic is that 1 in 10 of us is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, which means the CAW represents many people who identify as LGBT. Many more are strong allies.

That these well-publicized incidents have occurred in large metropolitan areas with a proportionately larger LGBT population is alarming, since these locations

are thought to have a more positive attitude about LGBT people. In the communities where there are CAW members, we have rallied in support of the LGBT community, including CAW members who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered.

We have no way of knowing how many of these incidents actually occur as the majority of incidents go unreported. Traditionally, relations between the LGBT community and police have been poor, characterized by mistrust and misunderstanding due to a legacy of persecution by police. While much work is presently underway to improve this relationship, police must be more sensitive to the difficulties faced by the LGBT people as we/they strive to live our/their lives in the dignity each of us deserve.

In 1997, the CAW passed a policy statement on pride in the workplace. In 2004, we followed this up with a policy paper promoting awareness about the lives and concerns of our LGBT members, as well as homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In the face of this rise in violent attacks, we must urgently renew our vigilance against all forms of homophobia and transphobia, including jokes, slurs, harassment, threats and any form of violent behaviour.

We must keep up this fight until each and every one of us can enjoy equal liberty, mobility and respect, to live openly with our families and loved ones in dignity.