

## **Murdered Filipina's bill faces uphill battle in Canada's House of Commons**

Written by Administrator

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**Nov. 19, 2010**



### **ROXANNE FERNANDO**

OTTAWA, Ontario — A controversial bill named after a Filipina murder victim that would make it a crime to coerce a woman into having an abortion, faces a rough ride in the House of Commons.

The bill, dubbed Roxanne's Law, is inspired by the late Roxanne Fernando, a 24-year-old woman savagely murdered by her boyfriend and his two friends on Feb. 15, 2007 after she rejected pressure to have an abortion.

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It was introduced in April 2010 by Winnipeg MP Rod Bruinooge, chairman of the parliamentary pro-life caucus.

The Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) is calling upon Catholics to contact their Members of Parliament and ask them to support Bill C-510.

“Violence and coercion against women, whether they are pregnant or not, betrays a profound disrespect for the dignity and integrity of women,” said COLF director Michele Boulva, who added MP Rod Bruinooge should be commended for introducing the bill.

“No one who cares about women’s equality in Canada can oppose a bill that aims at protecting pregnant women who freely choose to bear a child,” Boulva said. “Let’s not forget that the ultimate violence — killing — is generally preceded by verbal, psychological violence, by coercion.”

But Bill C-510, which comes up for its last hour of debate and a vote in early December, is under attack by MPs from all parties, according to Canadian Catholic News.

During its first hour of debate on Nov. 1, the Conservative MP’s private member’s bill faced challenges from women MPs from the Bloc, Liberal and NDP parties who argued the bill would interfere with a woman’s “right to choose” abortion.

But Bruinooge argued his bill does the opposite, that it protects women from being threatened and coerced into ending pregnancies they choose to keep.

Bruinooge told the story of Roxanne Fernando, whose boyfriend, Nathanael Mark Plourde, tried to coerce her to have an abortion through threats.

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When the Philippine-born woman chose to keep her pregnancy, her boyfriend arranged to have her killed.

He and his two friends beat her with a hockey stick, stuffed her in the trunk of a car and dumped in a remote Winnipeg snowbank and left to die from extensive blood loss.

"This bill might be based on Roxanne Fernando but there are many Roxannes across this country and, sadly, many of these vulnerable women are often targeted for violence," he said. "When women find themselves in dangerous situations and without specific legal protection, they may feel that an unwanted abortion is their only option."

Bruinooge stressed Bill C-510 would not affect women's access to legal abortion.

Instead, it would clarify what constitutes coercive behavior and "send a clear message" that coercing women to end a chosen pregnancy "will not be tolerated."

"There is no reason that this legislation should not become law but some politicians will conclude that this is a ploy by the pro-life movement to ban abortions," the pro-life group Priests for Life Canada said.

It adds that it will simply protect women who do not want to have an abortion but are feeling pressured by a husband, partner, family or employer to do so.

The Harper government has signaled it will not support this bill because of its pledge not to "reopen the abortion debate."

All three people charged with Fernando's killing have pleaded guilty to what a judge described as a "well-planned execution."

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Two of the three killers were 19 at the time of the murder.

Nathanael Mark Plourde pleaded guilty to first degree murder, while Jose Manuel Toruno pled guilty to second degree murder.

Plourde is facing life sentence without parole eligibility for 25 years.

Toruno faces life without parole for 10 to 20 years.

The youngest murderer who was then 17, pleaded guilty to first-degree murder and was sentenced under the Youth Criminal Justice Act to a six-year prison term to be followed by four years of probation.

The death of Fernando's unborn baby didn't result in an additional murder charge because Canadian law, unlike law in the United States and other countries, does not recognize a fetus as a living being.

Fernando, fondly called Apple by her family, immigrated to Canada from the Philippines in 2003 to be reunited with her sister.

She worked as a banquet server at the Radisson Hotel in Winnipeg.

Fernando was in the early stages of her pregnancy and apparently had kept it a secret from many of her close friends.