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NEWS RELEASE

Major Parties Asked to Support Consumer Rights in Telecommunications

Ottawa – A coalition of consumers groups from across Canada today asked that each of the five major parties take a stand on consumer protection in Canada's telecommunications sector.

The coalition composed of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre ("PIAC"), the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC), the Consumers' Association of Canada (CAC), the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO), Option Consommateurs (OC), Consumers Council of Canada (CCC), asked each of the five major political parties contesting the federal election to outline their positions on specific measures to ensure that the benefits of competition in telecommunications are delivered to Canadian consumers and businesses.

"Over the past few years, successive Canadian governments have quietly adopted a policy of deregulation for the sake of deregulation in telecommunications markets," said Michael Janigan, Executive Director of PIAC. "Increasingly, the onus has been placed on individual consumers to police and pursue instances of abuse of market power by telephone and cable companies. We are concerned that the interests of Canadian consumers are systematically being overlooked in Canada's telecommunications markets. "

Many wireline telecom markets in Canada and in particular, local and broadband services markets, continue to be dominated by a single incumbent telephone company or, in the case of the residential market for high speed Internet services, a duopoly. Three providers dominate the wireless market. The negative effects of the lack of competition have recently been quantified and documented in a number of international studies, which show that Canada's early lead in the broadband services segment of the telecom market has been squandered, and that Canadians pay some of the highest mobile wireless rates among western countries.

"Telecommunications and broadband access in particular is critically important to the social and economic fabric of this country", said Philippa Lawson, Executive Director of CIPPIC. "Canadians deserve lower prices, fair terms of service, and better quality of service. We don't see enough of these benefits being delivered to consumers by the existing players. Instead, we see market consolidation, continued high prices, unfair practices, and a degradation of service quality especially for voice services. We are concerned that the Government of Canada is not doing enough to correct this state of affairs. We think that Canadians are entitled to know the positions of the major political parties on policies that are important to the economic and social well-being of Canadians."

For a copy of the Coalition's questionnaire and more information, go to [www.piac.ca or www.cippic.ca under "Telecommunications Policy Questionnaire."]. The Coalition has asked each of the five major political parties to complete the questionnaire by noon on Wednesday, October 8, 2008. All responses and the Consumer Groups' reaction will be made public on Friday, October 10, 2008.

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