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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Reaction to lenient sentencing of Paul Clark from domestic violence support charity

“We are extremely disappointed by this sentence. This man has a history of violence towards his partner and admits threatening to kill her. She was so convinced that he intended to kill her that she leapt from a second-storey window to escape him.

“He already has previous convictions for violence against her, and yet he was charged only with ‘making a threat to kill’ and two offences of ‘destroying property’ and given a suspended rather than custodial sentence.

“This lenient charge and sentence shows that not only do the courts not understand domestic violence or the dynamics of domestic violence relationships, but that they do not take it seriously or care about the women involved.

“It is clear to me that Clark’s previous conviction contains several aggravating factors. He threatened to stab her with a knife; he has a previous conviction for common assault against her, demonstrating a pattern of repeated assaults on the same victim; and he clearly deliberately targeted a vulnerable victim [see Notes to Editors note 1].

“I believe that not only should Clark have received a custodial sentence, but that he should also have been charged with attempted murder and assault.

“On average, women suffer 35 incidents of domestic violence before they report a crime. We know that Clark already has one previous conviction; how many incidents of domestic violence will this man perpetrate before he is seen as a serious threat?

“The courts have, in my opinion, failed in their duty to protect women experiencing domestic violence.”

Karen Ingala-Smith
Eaves assistant chief executive for domestic violence services (Eaves Women’s Aid)

– NOTES TO EDITORS –

1 According to CPS sentencing guidelines, a court should decide if previous convictions count as ‘aggravating factors’ when sentencing a crime. Aggravating factors for the court to consider include:

- The deliberate targeting of a vulnerable victim
- The use of a weapon to frighten or injure victim
- A sustained assault or repeated assaults on the same victim

When two or more aggravating factors are present, a custodial sentence should be given.

2 Paul Clark was charged at St Albans Crown Court on 8 April 2008 with threatening to kill his girlfriend and two offences of destroying property. Despite previously being convicted for domestic violence against the same woman, he received a suspended sentence only.

3 Eaves provides high quality women-only supported housing in London for women experiencing domestic violence (through Eaves Women’s Aid) and for women who have been trafficked into prostitution (through the POPPY Project). It also runs a research department called the Lilith Project, which works to support the violence against women sector through research, education and training. Visit www.eaves4women.co.uk to find out more.

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