

VISION TO ACTION: A FAITH-BASED MOVEMENT FOR A CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY

May 30, 2007

Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, M.P., P.C.
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Harper,

As faith-based organizations cooperating in working to reduce poverty in Canada, we are writing to request a meeting with you to encourage the Conservative Party to commit to the development and implementation of a poverty reduction strategy in your platform for the next federal election.

In November 2006, we organized together a two-day Forum entitled "From Vision to Action". At the Forum, 75 people from across Canada – including people of faith, low-income people, and parliamentarians – explored ways to work together to achieve a Canada without poverty.

We are deeply concerned about the continued presence of poverty in Canada today – and the lack of a federal plan to reduce poverty.

Statistics Canada reports indicate that:

- 788,000 children in Canada live in poverty (2005 data), the same percentage (11.7%) as in 1989, when Parliament resolved to end child poverty by the year 2000
- one in six Canadians is inadequately housed (2001 data)
- 42% of urban Aboriginal people live in poverty (2001 data)
- 65% of new immigrants experience poverty sometime during their first ten years in Canada (40% experience poverty in their first year)
- the gap between richest and poorest Canadians is increasing (between 1989 and 2004, the gap increased 35%)

Something *can* be done and something *must* be done to reduce poverty in Canada.

Now is an opportune time for your Party to make a commitment to develop and implement a poverty reduction strategy with specific targets and timelines for reducing poverty in Canada.

European Union countries and three provinces in Canada have already done so – with some success. Ireland developed a poverty reduction strategy in the mid-1990s, and has reduced its poverty rate from 15% to 6.8%. Quebec implemented a poverty reduction law in 2002 – and has achieved a 40% reduction in its child poverty rate since 2000.

When Canada signed the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development in 1995, it made a commitment to implement a strategy "geared to substantially reducing overall poverty in the shortest possible time." While the European Union has moved forward on this commitment, Canada has yet to formulate a national strategy to reduce poverty in Canada.

The economic, political, environmental and moral reasons to take action are clear:

- a) Poverty is a root cause of violence, crime, unemployment, social exclusion, and ill health – all of which undermine the economic and social well-being of our communities.

- b) Canada has the resources available to take action on poverty.
- c) Canadians are deeply concerned about the growing gap between rich and poor; and many Canadians feel they are only a missed paycheck or two away from poverty themselves.
- d) Poverty and inequality contribute to resource waste and environmental degradation, for example, through the lack of access to quality housing and other sustainable technologies and products.
- e) Canada has a political obligation to take action to reduce poverty, as underlined in recent reports by the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights and the United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights.
- f) Finally, Canada has a moral duty to address poverty because, quite simply, we have a responsibility to our neighbours in need; a commitment that is deeply rooted in the diverse faith communities in Canada, and in the basic values of all Canadians.

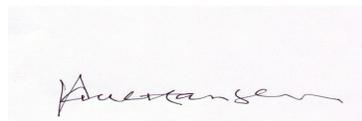
In summary, we urge your Party to commit to developing and implementing a poverty reduction strategy for Canada in consultation with a wide spectrum of citizens (particularly those who live in poverty), with specific targets and timelines, and mechanisms of accountability to the people of Canada.

In doing so, you will appeal to the best of Canada and its people: our desire to grow healthy families and communities, to show compassion to and seek justice for those in need, and to steward and protect our natural environment.

Thank you for considering this letter. We will follow up with you by phone in the hope of scheduling a meeting with you to further discuss the process for developing a poverty reduction strategy for Canada.

For more information, please contact Michael Polanyi, Program Coordinator at KAIROS, mpolanyi@kairoscanada.org or 416.463.5312 x237.

Sincerely,



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Bill Phipps
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cc: Hon. Monte Solberg, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives unites eleven churches and religious organizations in a work for social justice in Canada and around the globe. In so doing, we give life to our name, KAIROS, a Greek word meaning a moment of crisis and opportunity, a moment to act in faith with hope for real and lasting change.

Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) has been promoting public justice in Canada for more than 40 years. CPJ aims to shape key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing and public dialogue. With more than 1,500 supporters across Canada, CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society and governments to support policies and practices that reflect God's call for love, justice and stewardship.

The Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches provides a forum for sharing information and concerns among those involved in ecumenical work on peace and social justice in Canada and the world; reflecting biblically and theologically on peace and social justice; and facilitating the cooperation of the churches in peace and justice concerns. The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) is the largest ecumenical body in Canada, now representing 21 churches of Anglican, Evangelical, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions.

Street Level: National Roundtable on Poverty and Homelessness is a self-commissioned, self-directing partnership that was created in June, 2003, and operates under the auspices of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). It is composed of leaders of 14 significant Canadian Christian agencies that work among our nation's poor and homeless, who have committed to work together to advocate on issues of poverty and homelessness before the church, before government, business and media, and to educate, network, resource and gather together those who work on the frontlines caring for those who are poor and homeless.

The Campaign Against Child Poverty is a national, non-partisan coalition of citizens from faith-groups, social justice groups, charities, child welfare organizations and others concerned about the unacceptably high levels of child and family poverty in Canada. We are affiliated with no political party, and our only special interest is to reduce the numbers of poor children in Canada. We are funded by private citizens across Canada, by foundations, faith communities and NGO's, all of whom share our vision of a poverty-free country.

Faith and the Common Good is a national interfaith/intercultural network of faith communities working together on issues of the "common good." Most recently, our work has focused on eco-sustainability, particularly related to economic, ecological, and world ecumenism. A description of our work is available on our website: www.faith-commongood.net.