

– Brief –

The Federal Contribution to Reducing Poverty in Canada
The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development
and the Status of Persons Disabilities.

11:00 – 12:30 on June 1, 2009

Radisson Admiral Hotel, Admiral Ballroom (3rd Floor), 249 Queen's Quay West, Toronto.

1. The Canadian Council of Churches is the largest ecumenical body in Canada, now representing 22 churches of Anglican, Evangelical, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions; together the Canadian Council of Churches represents 85 per cent of the Christians in Canada.
2. On May 13, 2009, MP Tony Martin noted in the House of Commons that the Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada had together hosted an MP Roundtable on Parliament Hill on Faith and a Sustainable Economy. He noted that the religious left and religious right were coming together to call for ending poverty. While we wonder which one of us is religious left and which one is religious right, churches in Canada are united in their determination to contribute to ending poverty in Canada.
3. In a letter sent on November 26, 2007, 21 member churches of the Canadian Council of Churches unanimously signed a letter to the Prime Minister calling on the Government of Canada to establish a high level task force to develop a national poverty reduction strategy within the next budget year, incorporating these features:
 - Measurable goals and timelines;
 - Indicators that are publicly comprehensible to measure poverty in Canada;
 - A means to monitor and evaluate progress;
 - Budget commitments that focus on the needs of vulnerable people.

To date the federal government has not established a poverty reduction task force, nor initiated a poverty reduction strategy.

4. At the recent May Roundtable with MPs in Ottawa, there was a striking agreement among participants, which included representatives from each political party. They all agreed that a resolution calling for the end of poverty in Canada would not be enough unless it included a plan of implementation. They agreed that a unanimous vote for an action plan to end poverty in Canada would carry more weight and be more effective if it included measurable goals and timelines, publicly comprehensible indicators, and a means for monitoring and evaluating progress.

Canadians want to hold their government accountable for ending poverty in Canada.

5. Throughout Canadian history, churches in Canada have long proclaimed the need for people to stand with those who have less, to give charitably and to work for justice. In the 1960s, churches were instrumental in advocating for Medicare and universal public health care for all in Canada regardless of economic circumstances. And today The Salvation Army, to give one example, is the largest non-governmental direct service provider of social services in Canada.
6. But it is the Government of Canada that is charged to establish justice for all and secure the common good for all. We join with our member churches in specifically calling for the Government of Canada to include these concrete policy initiatives:
 - A federal plan for poverty elimination that complements provincial and territorial plans;
 - Poverty reduction targets, timetables, indicators for Aboriginal families in coordination with Inuit, Métis, First Nations and urban Aboriginal communities;
 - Sufficient federal investment in social security for all Canadians, including an increased child benefit for low income families, expanded eligibility for Employment Insurance;
 - A national housing plan that includes substantial federal funding for social housing and a means for holding provinces and territories accountable for delivering social housing;
 - A universally accessible system of early childhood education and care affordable to all children; and finally
 - A Federal Anti-Poverty Act that ensures enduring federal commitment and accountability for results.
7. We urge the panelists themselves to demonstrate support for the *Dignity for All Campaign*, recently launched by Citizens for Public Justice in partnership with A Canada Without Poverty (formerly the National Anti-Poverty Organization), by going on line to <http://dignityforall.ca/> and clicking the button “I Support”.

Submitted by Maylanne Maybee, Eco-Justice Network Coordinator, The Anglican Church of Canada, and Peter Noteboom, Associate Secretary, Justice and Peace, The Canadian Council of Churches.