



4 November 2015

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Re: On Promoting Climate Justice and Ending Poverty in Canada

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

Congratulations on becoming Canada's 23rd Prime Minister. You may remember meeting with a delegation from The Canadian Council of Churches in May 2014. May you and your ministers govern with wisdom and a commitment to justice and fairness for all.

I write to commend to you the attached statement on climate justice and poverty signed and endorsed by the denominational leaders of members of The Canadian Council of Churches – 25 member denominations representing more than 85% of the Christians in Canada – along with endorsements from leaders of many faith communities and faith-based organizations in Canada.

Today we understand the twin challenges of climate and poverty are linked by a spiritual, moral and ethical human crisis: how will Canadians act as a good neighbour in both the natural and human communities since in the long run the health of one depends on the health of the other?

Through religious institutions we aspire to model and teach faithful living in response to a divine imperative of love and care for all. We cherish opportunities to share the beliefs and values that come from our scriptures and guide us: a balanced relationship between people and the environment, an ethic of care for the poor and disadvantaged, and support for the well-being of all.

We therefore respectfully call upon our government to

- develop a Federal plan for leadership on climate that connects and coordinates federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions and provides global leadership,
- develop, legislate and implement a federal plan for poverty elimination that complements provincial and territorial plans, and
- respond fully to those recommendations directed to government in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools (TRC).

In addition, The Canadian Council of Churches co-organized with the Church of Sweden a conference on the *Future of Life in the Arctic – The Impact of Climate Change. Indigenous and Religious Perspectives*. Meeting on Sami Territory in Sweden, October 5-8 2015, the participants attending the conference appealed to the leaders and representatives of Indigenous Peoples and faith communities to call on our public representatives to take brave action and make bold decisions on promoting climate justice.

As President of The Canadian Council of Churches I also commend the Storforsen Appeal to you and have attached it here.

Prime Minister Trudeau, please be assured that churches across Canada hold you and your government in our prayers.



Canon Dr. Alyson Barnett-Cowan
President

Attachments:

On Promoting Climate Justice and Ending Poverty in Canada: Faith Communities in Canada Speak Out. September 2015, Updated November 2015.

Appeal to the leaders and representatives of Indigenous Peoples and faith communities Storforsen, Sweden. October 2015.

Cc: Right Honourable Stephen Harper, M.P., Leader of the Official Opposition
Thomas Mulcair, M.P., Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada
Rhéal Fortin, M.P., Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Elisabeth May, M.P., Leader of the Green Party of Canada

Catherine McKenna, M.P., Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Jean-Yves Duclos, M.P., Minister of Families, Children, Social Development
Carolyn Bennett, M.P., Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs

The Canadian Council of Churches is the broadest and most inclusive ecumenical body in the world, now representing 25 denominations of Anglican; Evangelical; Free Church; Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox; Protestant; and Catholic traditions. Together we represent more than 85% of the Christians in Canada. The Canadian Council of Churches was founded in 1944.

On Promoting Climate Justice and Ending Poverty in Canada
Faith Communities in Canada Speak Out
September 2015

Introduction

1. In our day, the causes and effects of global climate change are becoming more and more visible. The measurable amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has surpassed 400 parts per million, more than at any time in recorded human history. This most serious development is caused mainly by humans removing forests and burning fossil fuels, namely oil and gas. We see the interconnected effects of these unprecedented levels of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere: rising average global temperatures leading to more extreme weather and related disasters that affect ever greater numbers of people; changing ocean chemistry and its seemingly irreversible impact on marine life; and the declining diversity and health of land-based communities of plant and animal life. These effects are causing the precious and unique environment for life on Earth to fall into serious disrepair.

2. In our day, we still see and experience widespread poverty despite the abundant production of food and availability of the basic necessities of life in Canada. When the wealth and sharing gap between those with access to more resources and those with fewer resources widens, it is the poorer communities who feel the effects of ecological and economic changes sooner and for longer periods: the traditional livelihoods of communities in the Arctic is undermined; access to health care services for newcomers and refugees is reduced; income and life support services for the young and old declines; and First Nations peoples face serious social and economic challenges.

3. Today we understand these twin challenges are linked by a spiritual, moral and ethical human crisis that can be expressed in this question: how will Canadians act as a good neighbour in both the natural and human communities since in the long run the health of one depends on the health of the other?

Faith Communities in Canada

4. People of faith have a long tradition of joining together to promote health care, education, social service and to advocate for peace and the common good. Through religious institutions we aspire to model and teach faithful living in response to a divine imperative of love and care for all. This statement lights a path for people of faith and good will to walk together in their shared efforts of education, reflection, civic participation and action.

5. On March 8, 2011 the *Interfaith Declaration on Faith and Poverty: A Time for Inspired Leadership and Action* was signed after reflection and meetings on Parliament Hill. Similarly, on October 25th, 2011 the *Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change* was signed by over 60 faith community leaders. Faith communities have studied and attempted to live into these calls to action. Today more needs to be done. Our work for justice, human wellbeing, and a liveable planet are now joined.
6. Member states of the United Nations will adopt a global commitment to Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015 as well as a new international agreement to lower greenhouse gas emissions at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris in December 2015. Here in Canada we are approaching Canada's 150th anniversary and a Federal election is scheduled for October 2015.
7. We cherish opportunities to share the beliefs and values that come from our scriptures and guide us: a balanced relationship between people and the environment, an ethic of care for the poor and disadvantaged, and support for the well-being of all. The ethics of right relationship in social, economic and environmental policies is so urgently needed in our country and our global community. So it is timely that in 2015 we again join voices of faith in prayer and action on promoting climate justice and ending poverty in Canada.

Promoting Climate Justice in Canada

8. In 2009 Canada committed to addressing climate change by lowering our greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Commissioner for the Environment, these targets are not likely to be met. A new target has been announced in preparation for the Paris climate conference: it is the least ambitious target of all G-7 countries announced to date. Together with other G-7 country leaders our Prime Minister has committed to decarbonize our economy by 2100. We need a comprehensive plan, with the appropriate policies in place and the full encouragement of Canadians, to keep our promise to reduce emissions, meet or surpass the agreed targets, and so do our part in slowing the effects of climate change. The rapid advances in solar energy systems in the past five years make this change from a carbon energy economy to a renewable energy economy technically and economically feasible. Leadership and citizen support are now needed.
9. As faith community leaders we understand the climate crisis demands more than technical fixes – a spiritual and moral, even ecological transformation is needed. We commit to play our part to honestly and directly name our current crisis, to raise our

awareness of its urgency, to encourage transformative actions that change our consumption based economy of growth into a stewardship economy of care, and to develop our own community operations and use of buildings in ways that respect sustainability standards and the ecological integrity of human and natural life.

10. As we approach the United Nations COP 21 meeting in Paris at year end, we respectfully call upon our government to develop a Federal plan for leadership on climate that connects and coordinates federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions and provides global leadership to:
 - a) Positively influence negotiations in Paris to conclude a binding international agreement ensuring the long-term stability of our climate. Scientists tell us that this requires global average temperatures to remain well below a 2 degree Celsius increase from pre-industrial levels;
 - b) Establish more stringent and ambitious emission targets in Canada by working with all levels of government to put in place a range of policies which could include: a price on carbon emissions, developing and promoting a national renewable energy policy, ending fossil fuel subsidies, and encouraging through public policy the creation of an increasing number of high quality, sustainable jobs in the renewable energy sector;
 - c) Provide material assistance to assist the poorest and most affected countries to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. This could be achieved by means of the UN's Green Climate Fund (Canada's annual fair share in new disbursements would be at least \$500 million).

Ending Poverty in Canada

11. *Dignity for All: The campaign for a poverty-free Canada*, supported by many faith communities, reports that almost 4.8 million Canadians struggle to make ends meet. Motions in Parliament have been passed, studies presented and recommendations delivered all aimed at the development of a national anti-poverty plan for Canada – yet food bank usage has increased by 25% since the 2008-9 recession.
12. Many Canadian faith communities work actively to mitigate poverty. Faith communities will continue to deliver services and programs to hungry Canadians, provide shelter to the homeless, and settlement resources to newcomers. Along with services for and with people in poverty, faith communities have a long history of faithful advocacy to government and other societal institutions for structural reforms that aim to eliminate poverty.

13. As the United Nations General Assembly meets to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in September, we note that the first SDG calls on states to end poverty in all of its forms, everywhere, including at home. Thus, we respectfully call upon our government to develop, legislate and implement a federal plan for poverty elimination that complements provincial and territorial plans that, among other public policies:
- a) Ensures sufficient federal investment in social security for all Canadians. This could include increasing financial assistance to low-income families with children, expanding eligibility for Employment Insurance, and by working toward a minimum basic income for all citizens;
 - b) Includes adequate federal funding for social housing;
 - c) Introduces a more comprehensive system of early childhood education, affordable care, and support for parents of young children.

Indigenous Peoples in Canada

14. Indigenous Peoples in Canada have long experienced the effects of poverty, and are commonly among the first to experience the effects of climate change. As the first human inhabitants and caretakers of the land First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples offer important insights from which we all need to learn. Walking together we can face the challenges of creating new covenants and improved relationships to promote climate justice and end poverty.
15. We welcome the Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners' Calls to Action as providing the basis for wide and transformative conversations and actions among Canadians around the better future we intend to foster. Faith communities who long to live in a society grounded in right relationships and equity will continue to seek and live into reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. We will do so when led by, and accompanied by, Indigenous Peoples, so as to ensure authentic processes in developing renewed relationships, especially in schools and educational programs.
16. We will encourage the wider changes necessary in our society so that true reconciliation is unimpeded. Thus, we respectfully call upon our government to respond fully to those recommendations directed to government in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools (TRC), including:
- a) Use the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the foundation for improved relations with Indigenous Peoples and publish regular accounts concerning its implementation;

- b) Lead and fully participate in an inquiry into the tragic and continuing reality of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls;
- c) In coordination with Inuit, Métis, First Nations including urban Aboriginal communities, address specific funding needs for clean water, health care, housing. Similarly, we echo the TRC report in calling upon the Federal government to ensure equal federal funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated in comparable off reserve locations, in order to facilitate those communities taking charge of their own education.

17. The undersigned faith communities are united in our prayer that climate justice, the eradication of poverty, and a new foundation for the wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples become beacons of our commitment to becoming good neighbours - working together and with our elected governments - in these important last months of 2015 and beyond.

May the Creator guide us as we continue in the work of healing, justice, and right relations “and guide this country on a new and different path.” (*Remembering the Children: 2008*)

Leaders of Faith Communities

The Most Reverend Fred Hiltz
Archbishop and Primate
The Anglican Church of Canada

Mobeenuddin H. Khaja, O.Ont., President
Zul Kassamali, Vice President.
Association of Progressive Muslims of Canada

Dr. John Florentine Teruel
Patriarch
Apostolic Catholic Church of Canada

The Rev. John Tonks
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Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms

His Grace Bishop Abgar Hovakimian
Primate
Armenian Apostolic Church Canadian Diocese

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+Douglas Crosby, O.M.I.
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Animator
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Sister Denece Billesberger
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(Kalistchuk)
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Dr. Amritpal Singh Shergill
President
World Sikh Organization of Canada

Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo
Director
World Renew

Dennis Kirkley
Lead Chaplain
Vancouver Airport Chaplaincy

The Canadian Council of Churches is coordinating this statement and welcomes leaders of faith communities and faith-based organizations to speak out and endorse the statement. For more information on how to endorse, please contact Peter Noteboom (noteboom@councilofchurches.ca). For communications, please contact Jesse Hair (hair@councilofchurches.ca)

The Canadian Council of Churches represents 25 denominations of Anglican; Evangelical; Free Church; Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox; Protestant; and Catholic traditions. Together we represent more than 85% of the Christians in Canada. The Canadian Council of Churches was founded in 1944.

Appeal to the leaders and representatives of Indigenous Peoples and faith communities Storforsen, Sweden

Introduction

Meeting on Sami Territory in Sweden, October 5-8 2015, we – participants attending the conference on the *Future of Life in the Arctic – The Impact of Climate Change. Indigenous and Religious Perspectives* – appeal to the leaders and representatives of Indigenous Peoples and faith communities to call on your fellow citizens; your public representatives; your delegates to the Paris Climate Conference; Mary Robinson, United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy on Climate Change; and Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to take brave action and make bold decisions on promoting climate justice.

Future of life for the Arctic peoples

Climate justice for the Arctic is a spiritual issue, and the power to change comes from spiritual sources. Climate justice is intergenerational, needs to include the peoples of the Arctic, and calls for common but differentiated responsibilities.

Here in Storforsen we have shared stories on how climate change is affecting all forms of life in the Arctic. Both traditional knowledge keepers and scientists are describing the changes that are occurring.

We have been moved by the concerns youth have for their future and their cultural way of life. A melting Arctic is a melting future.

We witness the ongoing dispossession of the peoples of the land from the land and acknowledge the responsibility to include peoples of the land in decision-making that affects the future of all.

We see the connection between the suffering of the land and its effects on traditional livelihoods, the mental health, identity and well-being of all who live there.

We know that climate change constitutes the single most important threat to food security due to the changed and changing environment, disrupted migratory patterns, and the high cost and limited availability of market foods.

People of the North are witnessing these changes. Their stories are a testimony of the relationship between humanity, land and the Creator.

The ancestors and Indigenous Peoples bear witness to a worldview, spiritual relationships with the land, animals, water, and the Creator, and traditional practices. We believe these are indispensable resources for addressing climate change.

Spiritual nature, respect for creation

All the land, all the cosmos is sacred, a sacrament, infused with meaning. Each being has a purpose. This is the soul and spirit of the land and all life. The purpose of each human being then is to be a responsible caretaker. All human beings are called to this priestly vocation.

Our traditions stress the interconnectedness and the solidarity between humanity and the living Earth. It is our hope that we can change and make peace with each other and with the creation. The spiritual resources and

traditional knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic can serve to overcome the climate challenge we are all facing today. Our spiritual traditions and ancestral sources tell us human life is open to the possibility of transformation.

The wisdom of the elders tells us that by forging good relationships with the Creator, each other and with nature, we enhance our capacity for peace, transformation and reconciliation. We believe the spiritual roots of climate change point to a need for this conversion, to repent from individual and collective patterns of consumption that put the creation and life at risk. There is still time to change but we must now hurry.

An essential framework and guide for political action on climate change and Indigenous Peoples is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the 2015 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples Outcome Document¹.

Some businesses operating in the Arctic, including shareholders and investors, also need a new influence: spiritual guidance in their investments and actions. Love of the land and respect for the land is a first principle of being for all. In this context we reaffirm the right to self-determination and self-government.

Faith, Love, Joy and Praise the Creator

We have gained a new respect for the interconnectedness of spirit and nature. For example, berry picking is itself a spiritual practice; it connects us to the land and its spirit. This seasonal and community activity illustrates and reminds us of the way to live together in our common home (*oikonomia*, economy, or rules for the household): sharing and equity, the participation of all, respect for the land, and the enjoyment of its fruits.

The gift of Indigenous worldviews enhances the possibilities of transformation through the acknowledgment of soul and spirit in all created life.

The recognition, respect and implementation of Treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements are a concrete commitment to the youth, Indigenous Peoples, and all peoples for the right to a future. We are working together for a world where healing, reconciliation and healthy relationships are present.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada affirmed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for reconciliation, and its 94 *Calls to Action* are a model for the world. We see that protection from climate change is a collective right and responsibility.

Closing

Creation is alive with God and with the Spirit. Life is precious. The future of seven generations is at stake.

Therefore we also ask faith communities and people everywhere to rededicate themselves to stand in solidarity and support the peoples in the North, who are now already survivors and leaders in responding to climate change.

¹ UN Declaration preambular paragraphs 11, 14, 15; operative paragraphs 20.1, 25, 26.2, 29.1, 32.3, and 37; also the 2015 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples Outcome Document paragraphs 34, 36, 37.