

June 28, 2006

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister
Prime Minister's Office
Langevin Block 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1Q 0A2

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to follow-up on our May 8 church leaders' letter to you on the subject of HIV/AIDS. Thank you for referring our letter to the Minister for International Cooperation.

At a recent meeting of the Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches, member churches resolved to strengthen their own commitment to addressing the AIDS pandemic. Please find a copy of our resolution attached.

In relation to the points made in the earlier letter, we note that Minister Verner acknowledged in her June 2 speech to the United Nations General Assembly that "We have all made strong commitments to bring an end to this horrible pandemic. It is time to deliver on those commitments." But Canada did not make any new commitments at the General Assembly and Canada and the G8 have not yet delivered on their commitments. At a news conference in New York during the General Assembly Stephen Lewis called the lack of progress on new funding commitments a "scandalous betrayal" of the commitments made at the G8 meeting last year in Gleneagles.

We are therefore deeply concerned that the government of Canada has not yet seized the initiative to demonstrate leadership at the International AIDS Conference in Toronto this August. Indeed it has been reported that you will not be attending the Conference. We appreciate the complexities of your busy schedule, but we urge you to please reconsider and attend the event.

We will be looking for an announcement regarding increased funding commitments from Canada at the Mid-Term Replenishment Conference of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria at Durban South Africa on July 4-5.

You will have an important opportunity to personally show leadership at the G8 Summit in St. Petersburg where President Putin has made infectious diseases one of the principal agenda items.

Since we sent our previous letter the World Bank has released new data showing that last year Sub-Saharan Africa paid US\$23.4 billion in debt service payments which is almost three times as much as the \$6 to \$8 billion shortfall for AIDS funding for 2006 and 2007 respectively. We remain convinced of the urgency of finally canceling 100% of African countries' external debts.

We look forward to an opportunity to discuss these important items with you and the Honourable José Verner and any other members of the Cabinet you deem appropriate. The membership of the Canadian Council of Churches is representational of 85% percent of the Christian community in Canada.

Please be assured of our continued prayers for you and your government.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Dr. James Christie
President

Cc: The Honourable José Verner, Minister for International Cooperation
Stephen Lewis, United Nations Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa