

October 25, 2006

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

Fax: 613-941-6900

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

In a letter addressed to you earlier this year on May 8, the national leaders of the Canadian Council of Churches expressed their concern about the human impact of the global AIDS pandemic, and urged you to announce several initiatives when the government addressed the UN General Assembly, the G8 Summit and the International AIDS Conference. While we were disappointed that you decided not to attend the Toronto Conference, we were pleased to note the participation of International Cooperation Minister Verner and Health Minister Clement. However, we were dismayed when a pending announcement of new Canadian initiatives was abruptly postponed until later in the year. We are concerned that this announcement still has not been made.

Prime Minister Harper, the immense human cost of the AIDS pandemic remains a top priority for Canadian churches and we remain deeply committed to churches and partners overseas who are at the forefront of caring for persons living with HIV and AIDS. For us, the Ecumenical Pre-Conference hosted by the Canadian Council of Churches and the International AIDS Conference itself served as an occasion for renewing this commitment and for a new level of resolve to address the roots of the pandemic in poverty. As the Canadian Council of Churches, we have urged all our members to show leadership in addressing the HIV and AIDS crisis. For details, please see the attached Invitation to Canadian churches.

We are dismayed, however, by the lack of progress in each of the proposed initiatives for the Canadian government contained in our letter in May of this year:

1. *Cancel 100% of the bilateral and multilateral debts owed by countries with high HIV rates:*  
While Malawi qualified for multilateral debt remission at the end of August, there has been no further progress on this request. The situation has worsened with the revelation that international creditors collected US\$23.4 billion in debt service from sub-Saharan Africa in 2005, almost three times as much as the shortfall of funding for AIDS programs in 2006 and 2007.
2. *A Canadian initiative to untie debt remission from IMF and World Bank conditions involving privatization of health care services, limits on hiring of health care workers and user fees for public services.*  
We have not yet seen any meaningful changes to IMF policies. According to the African Network on Debt and Development the IMF prevented Zambia from hiring additional health care workers despite Canada's willingness to pay their salaries over a five-year period.
3. *A Canadian contribution of 5% of the funds needed for the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and announcement of a timetable for increasing Canada's Official Development Assistance to 0.7% of Gross national Income.*  
There has been no response to this request though it would cost Canada very little, only about C\$60 million, to top up the C\$250 million already pledged to the Global Fund to reach the 5% target for 2006-07.
4. *Amendments to Canada's pharmaceutical laws to remove disincentives for exporting less expensive medicines to countries without pharmaceutical production capabilities.*  
In the two years after the passage into law of *Bill C-9: An Act to Amend the Patent Act and the Food and Drugs Act* not a single low-cost pill has been shipped from Canada. On this issue we see that there has been some progress as Health Minister Tony Clement has admitted that Canada's Access to Medicines Regime "isn't working" and pledged to seek advice on how to change the law.
5. *A commitment to give priority to women and children in all efforts to address HIV and AIDS.*  
Although Madame Verner, the Minister for International Cooperation, has reiterated CIDA's policies supporting gender equality and for the improvement of women's health, there were no new initiatives announced at the International AIDS Conference.
6. *Measures to ensure health care for all people in Canada with HIV including immigrants and refugees.*  
We have received no response to this request beyond an alert that this would be forwarded to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship.

The Canadian government's failure to show leadership in these areas during the International AIDS conference was an opportunity lost. The eyes of the world were on

Canada and we came up short, losing precious time and momentum in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Today the Canadian Council of Churches reiterates our call for Canada to take leadership in efforts to overcome AIDS, and urge you, Mr. Prime Minister, to take an active role in bringing forward concrete actions by the government of Canada.

On December 1, World AIDS Day will again highlight the disparity in access to life-saving medicines, the crippling unpayable debt of national economies, and a shortage of funding for programs of prevention and treatment. May your commitment to the Gospel of the Good Samaritan, the call of Christ to care for the sick and release the prisoners, and the promise of Christ's return guide you as you lead our government in addressing this important global challenge.

In hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James Christie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

The Rev. Dr. James Christie  
President

Cc: The Honourable Josee Verner, Minister for International Cooperation  
The Honourable Tony Clement, Minister of Health  
The Honourable Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance  
The Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of Foreign Affairs