



March 11, 2015

Open Letter Child Poverty 25 Years Later: It Is Time to Act

Dear Prime Minister Harper, Mr. Mulcair, Mr. Trudeau, Ms. May and Mr. Beaulieu,

Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty in Canada commends all parties for starting the 2015 session of Parliament by reaffirming the federal commitment to eradicate child poverty in Canada through the near-unanimous passage of Motion 534 on February 4th. As a crucial next step, Campaign 2000 calls on each party to release publicly a plan to eradicate poverty in Canada as part of the next federal election campaign. Such a plan should include clear accountability measures such as targets and timelines that define success and track progress.

There are compelling reasons for federal government leadership to eradicate poverty. First, it is the right thing to do for our children and for all of us. Your leadership and will to act can ensure that every child can realize his or her full potential and escape poverty while meeting Canada's obligations to uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Second, poverty is expensive, costing Canada an estimated \$72-\$86 billion annually; child poverty leads to more illness throughout life, impairs educational attainment and presages employment vulnerability. Finally, Canada has the fiscal capacity to act. The projected multi-billion dollar budget surpluses beginning in 2015-16 show that money is not lacking. Even if revenues decrease, poverty reduction should have the first call on resources. Strong, effective management of our economy must include a decisive plan to eradicate poverty.

Campaign 2000's annual monitoring reports on child and family poverty mark the passage of the unanimous 1989 all party resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Reporting on poverty can cause debate because Canada has no official poverty line; however, there is no debate about the fact that by any measure, Canada has failed to eliminate poverty among Canadian children. Data collected through tax files by all Canadians show that 19.1%, or over 1.3 million children, live in poverty in Canada (Low Income Measure, After Tax).¹ Even the most restrictive measure shows that 10.8% or 734,000 children live in poverty.² Of particular concern is the fact that 40% of Indigenous children live in poverty (LIM-AT).

The persistence of child and family poverty in Canada is in stark contrast to Canada's status as one of the wealthiest and most stable countries in the world. Since 1989, our economy has more than doubled in size but child poverty has increased by 17%, from 15.8% to 19.1% by 2012 (LIM-AT).

The Canadian and international evidence shows that public policies can reduce poverty. Canada has succeeded in reducing poverty among seniors by 25% since the 1970s through the introduction of a suite
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of targeted income security programs, including the Canada Pension Plan. Denmark and Norway have reduced child poverty to below 7% by investing in national childcare programs, affordable housing and post-secondary education. OECD figures show that while Canada has one of the lowest rates of poverty among the elderly in the industrial world, it is worse than average when it comes to child poverty.

Through substantial research and leadership from people living in low income, Canada has amassed the knowledge and solutions to eradicate poverty. Campaign 2000 and its diverse network of partners recommend that your plan to eradicate poverty include the following components:

1. A commitment for The Government of Canada to introduce a federal action plan with targets and time lines to eradicate poverty in consultation with provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal governments and organizations, non-governmental organizations and people living in poverty. Secured in legislation, this plan should identify key roles for all levels of government and recognize the particularities of how Québec pursues social policy in the Canadian context.
2. An enhanced child benefit for low income families to a maximum of \$5,600 per child (2014 dollars, indexed to inflation), which can be partially funded by streamlining support to low and modest income families through the taxation and transfer systems.
3. A plan to reduce, prevent and eradicate child and family poverty among Indigenous families developed in conjunction with Indigenous organizations.
4. A good jobs program that addresses the rise in precarious work, involuntary part-time work and working poverty. This program should include employment equity in the public and private sectors to address the disproportionate levels of poverty experienced by people with disabilities, racialized and Indigenous people, women, and recent immigrants; and enhancements to Employment Insurance that expand access, duration and levels of benefits.
5. A national early childhood education and care program, led by the federal government and developed collaboratively with provinces/territories and Indigenous communities, which includes a well-developed policy framework based on the principles of universality, high quality and comprehensiveness.
6. A renewed approach to Canada's social safety net that rebuilds transfers for social assistance and social services. A new funding formula, negotiated with the provinces and territories, must provide sufficient, stable and predictable funding and recognize regional economic variations while ensuring government accountability for adequate income support to be available to all low income Canadians who are without other adequate means of support.
7. A comprehensive national housing strategy reflecting the needs of local communities and First Nations in partnership with provinces, territories, municipalities, First Nations, the non-profit and private sectors.

Campaign 2000 calls on each party to demonstrate the leadership and will to provide equal opportunities and an equal future to all children. The call for a nationally coordinated strategy is getting louder and broader. Dignity for All recently released a national anti-poverty plan at an event supported by the federal All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus. Campaign 2000 contributed to this plan as it was developed over 5 years of consultations. The call for a national anti-poverty plan has been supported by over 15,000 Canadians to date.

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Campaign 2000 is willing to meet with you and your policy advisors at any time. Our full list of recommendations is outlined in our 2014 report card on child and family poverty in Canada, which is entitled "[Child Poverty, 25 Years Later: We Can Fix This.](#)"

Sincerely,



Anita Khanna, National Coordinator, Campaign 2000

Co-signed by Campaign 2000 Steering Committee Members:

- Michele Biss and Leilani Farha, Canada Without Poverty
- Mary Boyd, P.E.I. Coalition for a Poverty Eradication Strategy
- Aggie Brockman, Alternatives North (North West Territories)
- Leslie Frank, Assistant Professor, Acadia University and Research Associate of Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia
- Sid Frankel, Associate Professor Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba
- Martha Friendly, Executive Director, Childcare Resource and Research Unit
- Joe Gunn, Executive Director, Citizens for Public Justice
- Kate Kehler, Executive Director, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg
- John Kolkman, Research Coordinator, Edmonton Social Planning Council
- Hemant Kumar, President, Saint John Human Development Council
- Stella Lord, Community Society to End Poverty - Nova Scotia
- Lyndsay Macdonald, National Coordinator, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada
- Ryan Meili, Executive Director, Upstream (Saskatchewan)
- Adrienne Montani, Provincial Coordinator, First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
- Bill Moore-Kilgannon, Executive Director, Public Interest Alberta
- Laurel Rothman, Campaign 2000

CC to:

- The Honourable Pierre Poilievre, Minister of Employment and Social Development
- Jinny Sims, MP, NDP Critic for Employment and Social Development
- Rodger Cuzner, MP, Liberal Critic for Employment, Social Development and Labour
- Rathika Sitsabaiesan, MP, Scarborough-Rough River (initiator of Motion-534 on Eliminating Child Poverty)

Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of 120 national, provincial and community partner organizations committed to working to end child and family poverty. For Campaign 2000's 2014 report cards, visit <http://www.campaign2000.ca>

ENDNOTES

¹ 2012 Low Income Measure After Tax, T1 Family File.

² 2012 Low Income Cut Off – After Tax, Canadian Income Survey



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