



Canadian Ecumenical
Justice Initiatives /
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la justice

Members

The Anglican Church of Canada
Canadian Catholic Organization for
Development and Peace
Canadian Conference of
Catholic Bishops
Canadian Religious Conference
Christian Reformed Church in
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Evangelical Lutheran Church
in Canada
Mennonite Central Committee
Canada
The Presbyterian Church in Canada
The Primate's World Relief and
Development Fund
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
The United Church of Canada

Membres

Assemblée annuelle canadienne
de la Société religieuse des Amis
Conférence des évêques
catholiques du Canada
Comité Central Mennonite Canada
Conférence religieuse canadienne
Développement et Paix
L'Église anglicane du Canada
Église Évangélique Luthérienne
au Canada
L'Église presbytérienne au Canada
L'Église réformée chrétienne en
Amérique du Nord
(Société canadienne)
L'Église Unie du Canada
Le fonds du Primat pour le secours
et le développement mondial

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23 January 2009

To: The Right Honourable Prime Minister,
The Honourable Provincial Premiers
The Honourable Leaders of Canada's Territories

Re: KAIROS Calls for a Moral Response to the Economic Crisis

Dear Leaders:

In the midst of the gravest crisis in our global financial system in over 70 years, KAIROS, a social justice organization of eleven Christian churches and church organizations, calls on you to respond decisively effectively and be guided by lasting moral values.

With one voice, our member churches ask you to work from a deep concern for all communities who call God's Earth home. We know this crisis is at the top of your agendas. Yet we are deeply troubled by the lack of attention to the moral values needed to guide us out of crisis, toward a more sustainable future.

KAIROS understands this financial crisis as a systemic failure in global financial markets. Over the last 30 years, governments have increasingly deregulated these markets, allowing them to be manipulated in favour of short-term interests of the wealthiest and most powerful.

Global markets have served private goals of profit for a few, rather than the shared goals of the majority – basic human needs and rights of peoples and their communities. The same failed global economic system that has now crippled global financial markets is also responsible for increasing the disparity between rich and poor, in Canada and in countries around the world.

The result is that we moved farther and farther away from right relationships among people and between human society and the rest of Creation. The system that destroyed so much financial wealth in the last six months is also responsible for degrading earth's ecosystems, including our atmosphere.

Now is the time to change our course, dramatically.

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Pope Benedict's Special Representative to the UN, expresses it well: "At its root, the financial crisis is not a failure of human ingenuity but rather of moral conduct. Unbridled human ingenuity crafted the systems and means for providing highly leveraged and unsustainable credit limits which allowed people and companies alike to pursue material excess at the expense of long-term sustainability."

Every day, we read of stimulus packages calling for massive spending or large tax cuts designed to restart the very same pattern of unsustainable consumption that brought us into crisis. Worldwide, governments seem prepared to spend trillions of dollars to recreate the old destructive model, while refusing to deal directly with the causes of the devastation. We must change course and invest meaningfully in a new economic framework that will combat poverty, ill health and climate change.

We have already heard some political leaders say their anti-poverty initiatives may have to be delayed, as if social and ecological justice were luxuries we cannot afford in these distressed economic times. We believe moral values are an essential foundation for public policy that responds to the economic crisis while preventing its recurrence in a few years.

The Scope of Canada's Economic Crisis

It is not only investors and banks that are suffering.

In 1989, our federal politicians promised to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. In its *2008 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada*, Campaign 2000 tells us that 760,000 children are still living in poverty, despite a decade of prosperity. Campaign 2000 has been tracking the numbers since that promise in 1989. Virtually nothing has changed since then. In 2006, Canada's child poverty rate was 11.3% – almost one child out of every nine. In 1989, it was 11.7%. In most families facing hardship, children get fed first. In our country's priorities, it must be so.

Since 2002, the average Canadian family classified as "low-income" has had to subsist on an annual income more than \$7000 below the poverty line. Social assistance benefits across Canada have dropped almost 21% and food bank use has nearly doubled since 1989. The poverty that flows from these cuts harms individuals, families and communities. Poverty has increased, in spite of our promises to eliminate it.

As members of the global community, we have a moral duty to adopt the point of view of the victims of both the financial and the climate crises – the nearly one billion people who live in poverty and the 150 to 200 million refugees likely to be forced to leave their homes due to climate change. They are calling on us to reverse the perverse transfer of wealth from impoverished peoples in the global South to wealthy Northern investors through payments for illegitimate debts that have already been paid many times over.

They are also calling on us to recognize the enormous ecological debt that we in the North owe to peoples in the global South due to decades of our over-consumption of their finite natural resources. Our wasteful over-consumption of energy contributes both to climate change and to the marginalization of the poor, both in Canada and abroad.

Our greenhouse gas emissions have accelerated and will destabilize our climate unless we reduce them. Recent research by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change shows that if we are to give ourselves a real chance to stop an increase of more than two degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels (a measure of dangerous climate change), global emissions must peak no later than 2015. Then they must decline by between 6% and 8% per year from 2020 to 2040, leading to a complete

elimination of carbon emissions from the global economy soon after 2050. Even this program can work only if some optimistic assumptions about the response of the biosphere hold true.

Some Canadian political leaders claim that Canadians are not committed to taking clear measures to combat climate change, or that they are only willing to do so if no costs are incurred. Recent research commissioned by the United Church of Canada shows that 83% of Canadians think Canada should commit to *strong action on global warming* without waiting for other countries. The same research shows that 78% of Canadians think Canada's global warming targets should be based on what leading scientists say is needed to avoid serious harm to the environment, *even if meeting these targets entails some cost to the economy*.

www.united-church.ca/files/ecology/climate_poll.pdf

The Economy of Creation

We come to this crisis with a special commitment to speak on behalf of the most vulnerable members of our whole Earth community, of whom human beings represent one part. This is God's economy of Creation, within the limits of which all other economies function.

Humans are called to participate in God's Creation with love and care. This leads us away from using and exploiting the Earth and its peoples primarily for profit, toward understanding Earth as a community of interconnected life, mutually dependent for survival.

Our analysis of the current global crisis and our attempts to imagine a different and restored future are rooted in our faith. The biblical call to love our neighbours as ourselves and do unto others as we would have them do unto us, leads us beyond seeking our own well-being at the expense of others.

The foundation for economic life must be a right relationship among humans and within Creation. This right relation is a matter of justice. As the Anglican Communion Bishops recently said in Lambeth: "The Gospel is not just the proclamation of individual redemption and renewal, but also the renewal of society under the reign of God; the ending of injustice and the restoration of right relationship with God, between human beings and with the whole of Creation."

For over 30 years, the Christian Churches have been developing a series of ethical principles that have come to be known as principles of Ecojustice. These principles affirm that there is no contradiction between seeking justice in human society and seeking wholeness in all of Creation. Though we affirm these ethical principles out of our own tradition, they are not exclusively Christian. They have developed in other religious traditions as well as through the United Nations, first with the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983 and 1987, then with the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and finally with the Earth Charter in 2000. The Ecojustice principles involve attention to solidarity, sustainability, sufficiency and equity.

Solidarity

This ethical principle involves a commitment not to abandon other people or creatures, but to stand with them as companions and allies – in one Earth community, reflecting deep respect for the diversity of Creation.

Sustainability

This ethical principle requires us to adopt environmentally fitting habits of living and working that enable life to flourish. It involves utilizing ecologically and socially appropriate technology. Adopting this technology will require major new investments, appropriately organized so everyone can benefit. Our current carbon-based economy, which treats the atmosphere as a toxic dump without end, is clearly unsustainable.

Sufficiency

This ethical principle requires a standard of organized sharing, which requires basic floors and definite ceilings for equitable or “fair” consumption. The scandal of child poverty in Canada is an example of the absence of this basic floor for consumption. The outrageous escalation of executive compensation in recent years is an example of the absence of any meaningful ceiling for equitable consumption. The resources of the world are sufficient for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed.

Equity

This ethical principle refers to fairness in decision-making as well as in outcomes. It requires socially just participation in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage community life for the good in common and the good of the commons. It also requires an examination of the ethical floors and ceilings referred to in the principle of sufficiency above. Particular attention needs to be focused on those who have historically been marginalized in decision making and power sharing, such as those living in poverty, women, Indigenous people and racial minorities. As we broaden our contemporary understanding of our place in the created order, we will recover the wisdom of our ancient traditions and awareness of how our decisions impact on other species and ecosystems.

Action for Just, Sustainable Economies

The principles we recommend here are supported across the political spectrum. We think the crisis is serious enough to warrant joint action by all parties in all jurisdictions.

The Better Aid Bill is an example of recent federal legislation guided by the ethical principles we endorse. Members of all parties in the House of Commons supported this bill so that it became law. According to this new law, Canadian aid spending must now go exclusively to programs that reduce poverty, are consistent with international human rights standards, and take into account the ideas and priorities of the poor. This is an example of the ethical principle of **solidarity** applied to the international level.

In that same spirit, we call on Canada’s federal parliamentarians to embrace the ethical principle of **sufficiency** by revisiting their 1989 commitment to end child poverty in Canada and examine why the child poverty rate remains the same now, as it was then, with 25% of children in First Nations communities and almost 12% of children nationally, living in poverty.

We call on federal politicians to partner with the provinces to develop a comprehensive national poverty reduction strategy including affordable housing initiatives. We urge them to embrace the

ethical principle of **equity**, and in so doing, consult those most adversely affected by poverty – women, youth, and Indigenous peoples.

The principle of **sustainability** is key to the ethical re-orientation of our economy and society. It is vitally important that governments shift their subsidies away from the current carbon-based oil and gas industry. We urge our governments to invest instead in conservation, efficiency and renewable sources of energy, and low-carbon transportation infrastructures in order to facilitate a transition to a sustainable economy. We believe that such investments must be at the core of any fiscal stimulus package addressing the current financial crisis and devoted to creating sustainable jobs.

In the words of United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon: “Investment that fights climate change creates millions of green jobs and spurs green growth. We need a Green New Deal ... a deal that works for all nations, rich as well as poor.” Investments in energy efficiency and conservation measures create five times as many jobs as investments in oil, natural gas and coal production.

The moral principles cited above require the creation of a just and sustainable international financial order – not minor reforms that will shore up an unjust system. We need measures like a Currency Transactions Tax to deter currency speculation by putting a small levy on foreign exchange transactions. A 0.005% levy would yield US\$33.4 billion per year in revenues for investment in genuine sustainable development. It should also include a sovereign debt cancellation mechanism for assessing and writing off illegitimate debts and an end to the imposition of structural adjustment conditions that have impoverished Southern countries and denied their self-determination.

These principles have been distilled from decades of reflection on ancient wisdom and contemporary problems. We urge you to use these moral values to guide your decisions, and to include in your strategies the actions we recommend.

We offer our recommendations with humility. Our recommendations exhaust neither what is possible nor what needs to be done.

As people of faith, with great hope, we call on you, our political leaders to exercise your role in shaping Canada’s economy by acting as stewards of the common good, serving the people and caring for the earth. We commit ourselves to pray for you, and work as churches to help promote a life-sustaining Canadian and international economy.

Yours sincerely,



Mary Corkery
Executive Director