

The latest statistics show that 1 in 5 Canadian children still lives in poverty.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHILD POVERTY IS EAGERLY AWAITING THE JANUARY 29TH THRONE SPEECH TO HEAR HOW YOUR GOVERNMENT PLANS TO DEAL WITH CHILD POVERTY.

Your Commitments

The CACP is delighted with the comments you made in Toronto on December 6, 2000. We were especially pleased to note your recognition that "prosperity in our land is not shared by all;" and that "too many children live in poverty." When you said "I deeply believe that government has the responsibility to promote social justice," you echoed the deeply felt sentiments of Canadians from all walks of life that government has a profound role in promoting human values and affirming, as you put it, "an equitable sharing of the benefits of our renewed economic strength." As just one example of national feelings, an independent poll commissioned by the Canadian Association of Food Banks in the summer showed that 78% of Canadians are seriously concerned or very seriously concerned about hunger in Canada.

Our Expectations

The CACP expects you and your government to honour the commitment made in that speech to use the "surplus for the benefit of all Canadians" and especially to "keep spending money on children, so that they can get a good start in life." We particularly agree that such spending is "an investment in the quality of the society of tomorrow." It is now time to more precisely define the nature of that investment and to ensure that it is made

on sound principles so that children and their families can fully share in the nation's hard-won prosperity.

We look upon the comments you made on December 6th as a welcome confirmation of your position in September of 1998 when you told the Canadian Chamber of Commerce that "we pay a heavy price for having children in our society who grow up in poverty. They are less likely to contribute to the growth of the economy... We know the importance of early childhood experience to success in adult life."

We applaud the Early Childhood Development Services Agreement of September 2000 as an important step in moving toward a full National Children's Agenda. Much more remains to be done.

Some Clear Proposals

In earlier communications with your Government, we set out what we consider to be the key issues that need to be addressed with respect to children in poverty. We urged the government to "support initiatives in cooperation with the provinces that deal specifically with early childhood wellness and child poverty," such as:

- a Social Investment Plan which re-directs at least 1.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product to federal investments in children and families;

- a comprehensive Child Benefit System including support for vulnerable low and modest-income earners among whom are 800,000 children whose families are forced to rely on social assistance;
- a comprehensive system of early childhood development services including affordable, high-quality child care;
- secure, affordable housing;
- the restoration of federal transfer payments to at least their levels prior to the shift to Canada Health and Social Transfer and the establishment of mechanisms to ensure that provinces are held accountable for federal funds received for social welfare and post secondary education.

Decisive Action Needed

We believe that acting quickly and decisively on these initiatives is the best way of "reaffirming," as you said in your speech, "that creating opportunity and creating a strong economy are essential responsibilities of good government, but they are not the only responsibilities."

The Campaign Against Child Poverty wholeheartedly agrees that ensuring the health and well-being of our children and their families is the most effective way of ensuring that Canada's place as "the best nation in the world" is deserved.

And there is no better time to state your Government's commitments than the Throne Speech. If not now, when?

Yours sincerely,

Members of the Steering Committee, Campaign Against Child Poverty: Julia Bass; Rabbi Arthur Bielfeld; Brother John Buckingham; June Callwood, O.C.; Ron Chapman; Caroline Di Giovanni; Peter Harris; Professor Roger Hyman; Harry Kits; Bishop Anthony Meagher; Rev. Lillian Perigo; Arlene Perly Rae; Walter Pitman, O.C.; Laurel Rothman; Gerald Vandezande; Rochelle Wilner.

Campaign Against Child Poverty includes: B'nai Brith Canada; Canadian Association of Food Banks; Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto; Citizens for Public Justice; Family Service Association of Toronto; Jewish Family and Child Service; MAZON Canada; Campaign 2000; The United Church of Canada; United Way of Greater Toronto.

Faith Communities Supporting Canada's Children includes: Baptist Convention of Ontario & Quebec; Canadian Council for Reform Judaism; Canadian Council of Churches; Canadian Islamic Congress; Canadian Religious Conference; Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice; Christian Reformed Church in North America (Canada); Conference of Mennonites in Canada; Lutheran Office for Public Justice, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; Mennonite Central Committee, Canada; Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops; The Toronto Board of Rabbis; World Sikh Organization (Canada); The United Church of Canada.