

A Time for Inspired Leadership and Action

The second decade of the 21st century is upon us and 2010 will be an important year for our collective humanity. It is a year when decisions and actions on climate change and peace and security issues will be critical. In June, Canada hosts an expanded global summit in Huntsville, Ontario, where world leaders will have a unique opportunity to provide the political leadership required to address the challenges before us. As well, we will have reached the two-thirds point for the deadline to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals—eight goals that, if achieved, would bring hope to millions and be a major step toward a more sustainable global future.¹

Through the *2010 Interfaith Partnership*,² people in faith communities across Canada and around the world are calling for inspired leadership and action at this critical moment in history. In our diverse faith traditions we have rich histories of addressing poverty, caring for the earth and being peace-builders. While we confess our own shortcomings and inadequacies, we commit to continuing these life-giving actions. We urge our government representatives to set aside short-term agendas and work together for a future that allows all citizens of this planet to thrive.

Power and economic dominance are the basis for inclusion in a G8 and G20 global leaders' summit.³ In our faith traditions, power and money are instruments to be used for the good of all. At the summits in 2010, we expect leaders to put first the needs and values of the majority of the world's population, of future generations and of Earth itself. From our shared values we call on leaders to take courageous and concrete actions:

- to address the immediate needs of the most vulnerable while simultaneously making structural changes to close the growing gap between rich and poor;
- to prioritize long-term environmental sustainability and halt climate change, while addressing its impacts on the poor;
- to invest in peace and remove factors that feed cycles of violent conflict and costly militarism.

¹ The eight Millennium Development Goals were agreed to by 192 UN member states, to be achieved by 2015. The goals respond to the world's main development challenges.

² The *2010 Interfaith Partnership* is a multi-faith, Canadian and global movement for action on pressing issues of our day. It involves faith communities around the world, dialogue with decision-makers and a gathering of faith leaders prior to the June 2010 Huntsville Summit. It is the sixth such gathering held in conjunction with G8 summits.

³ Not represented in these summits are 172 members of the United Nations where proposals to address structural causes of poverty and ecological devastation are currently under discussion.

Address Poverty

Almost half the people on this planet live in poverty and insecurity in terms of the fundamental requirements for life with dignity. The most affected groups are women and children, Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities. A record one billion people are now chronically hungry—one in every seven does not have the food needed for basic life. All this is happening in the context of a growing gap between the rich and poor, with particular consequences for poorer regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa.

The magnitude of poverty would be overwhelming were it not for the knowledge that this global inequity can be transformed into a shared wealth. Together, we have the know-how, the human capacity and the global resources to end poverty and its impacts. In the past 18 years, a combination of health interventions and decreasing poverty levels resulted in a 28% reduction in global under-five mortality rates—from 90 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 65 deaths per 1,000 in 2008. Change is possible.

A common tenet in many faith traditions is that we should treat others as we would have them treat us. This “golden rule” is a basic human principle which cuts across cultures and faith traditions, and calls us to a collective standard of mutual care.

The most recent wave of people pushed into poverty is the result of crises not of their making; it is a result of food, energy and economic crises originating in wealthier sectors of society. Poverty is local but it is also international, and the suffering of anyone is of concern to us all.

In 2010, we expect inspired leadership and actions to address poverty!

- Wealthier countries must do their share: put the Millennium Development Goals on track; practice responsible public oversight of markets; reach the goal of giving 0.7 % of Gross National Income in development assistance; cancel debts of poor countries without regressive conditions; halt illicit capital flight; ensure workers earn living wages and receive decent treatment; and make poverty reduction a priority in trade and international financial negotiations.
- Countries in the developing world must also do their part: support the above measures; practice good governance; and put in place poverty reduction policies that ensure everyone has access to basic rights such as nutritious food, safe water, health care, education and economic opportunity.

Care for Our Earth

Climate change has become an urgent and felt manifestation of our collective abuse of the very environment that gives us life. We see the consequences in melting ice-caps and rising sea levels, lost habitats for threatened animal and plant species, and erratic weather episodes that threaten the lives of millions of people.

As scientists discover new accelerators of climate change and note the compression of time available to avoid irreparable damage, it is clear that bold action is needed now. We need to move beyond short-term political interests and arguments over who pays. In our indivisible planet we all pay—and future generations will pay dearly—if we continue to delay decisive action now.

Our faith traditions call us to make caring for the Earth a priority. Many Aboriginal spiritualities emphasize the circular nature of life and relationships of mutual care and nurture between people and ecosystems. Faith communities see the environment through a lens of life on the planet as a unified whole, not unlike the cells of a body, infinitely differentiated in form and function yet deeply interdependent. In this framework, industrialized countries have caused a disproportionate amount of environmental damage; they now owe an ecological debt to developing countries, to all life and to the future.

In 2010, we expect inspired leadership and actions that care for our Earth!

- Wealthier countries must move beyond self-interest and take the courageous steps needed to care for our planet. In the realm of climate change, we must implement concrete plans to ensure global average temperatures do not exceed a 2° Centigrade increase from pre-industrial levels.
- In developing countries, the challenge is complex since growth, poverty reduction and environmental stewardship must journey together. This requires innovative leadership in these countries along with increased collaboration between rich and poor countries to support climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Invest in Peace

The well-being of all can only be realized in shared security. Civilians in the world's poorest countries are the primary victims of war, insurgencies, criminal activities and other forms of armed violence. At the same time, we are collectively affected and implicated in global turmoil through our common humanity and through the priorities we set.

One clear example of misplaced priorities is global military spending, estimated to be US\$1,464 billion for 2008, while support for United Nations peace-keeping operations is only US\$9 billion. Another example of wrong priorities is the continuing threat of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction which represent a moral affront to human dignity and the single gravest danger to life as we understand it.

Our faith traditions are steeped in the promotion of love for one another and deep respect for all humankind. Many of our most inspiring teachings are stories of reconciliation and compassion. We confess that there are those who inappropriately use religion to justify violent acts against others, and thereby offend the true spirit of their faith and the long-standing values of their faith communities. We need to work together to create paths of peaceful and sustainable coexistence.

In 2010, we expect inspired leadership and actions that invest in peace!

- We call on governments to make new and greater investments in building peace through negotiation, mediation, and humanitarian support to peace processes, including the control and reduction of small arms that every year are the cause of over 300,000 deaths globally.
- We call on states with nuclear weapons to make immediate and substantial cuts in the number of nuclear weapons and to cease the practice of having nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert. Let these be the initial steps in a defined process leading to the complete and permanent elimination of nuclear weapons within the next decade.

Our Deep Desire for 2010

As people of faith and as concerned global citizens, we urge our communities to do our part to reduce poverty, care for the Earth and invest in peace. We also monitor the decisions our government leaders take, including decisions made at the 2010 political leaders' summit in Canada. We expect follow-through on past promises. We expect bold new actions based on the values and recommendations outlined here. Our prayers and wishes for wisdom and compassion are with our political leaders at this critical moment in our collective history.