END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY IN CANADA

MEDIA RELEASE March 26, 2009

Campaign 2000 comments on 2009 Ontario Budget

Toronto – The Ontario government is heading in the right direction with measures in the 2009 budget that will help low income families weather the economic storm, but there are some glaring gaps in support for child care and people on social assistance.

The 2009 budget includes measures that respond to two key recommendations from Ontario Campaign 2000 to address family poverty: an increase to the Ontario Child Benefit to a maximum of $92/child/month effective July 1st, and an investment in construction and retrofit of affordable housing of $600 million over two years. To offset the impact of the new single sales tax beginning in 2010, the government is increasing sales and property tax credits for low income people and exempting key items for parents – both are positive steps.

"We're pleased to see the increase in the Ontario Child Benefit which will get more money directly in the pockets of low income parents who need it in these tough economic times. But this budget fails to deliver the funding needed to sustain and build a real Ontario child care system. Parents can't work or get training without affordable, quality child care," said Jacquie Maund, Coordinator of Ontario Campaign 2000.

"Affordable housing is a pressing issue across Ontario so we're pleased the Province has committed to a significant investment of $600 million with matching federal funds for housing construction and retrofit. We'll be watching closely to ensure these funds are spent soon so that we get the economic spin offs from construction jobs now, and families get the homes they need," said Greg deGroot –Maggetti with Mennonite Central Committee, a partner in Campaign 2000.

"The 2% increase to social assistance rates is seriously inadequate. We appreciate the significance of the increases to the sales tax and property tax credit, but the number of unemployed Ontarians relying on welfare is growing. The government must move forward on the urgent work of fixing the welfare system now so it provides adequate benefits and meaningful support," said Sarah Blackstock, Income Security Advocacy Centre.

"The failure to fund child care means Ontario will be going backwards and up to 22,000 subsidies could be lost. Parents will lose child care and some centres will have to close, making economic survival even tougher for families," said Jenny Robinson, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

Campaign 2000 will continue to call for an investment of $285 million in capital and operating funds which would save 22,000 subsidized child care spaces and create 7,500 new affordable spaces for Ontario families.

"As the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy moves into implementation phase Campaign 2000 will continue to call for funding for child care, reform of social assistance, and a Good Jobs Strategy with an increased minimum wage of $11/hour by 2011 and an updated Employment Standards Act to cover precarious workers," said Jacquie Maund.

"Targeted measures, such as an Equity & Anti-Racism Directorate, must also be part of the Strategy to support those most at risk of poverty: racialized groups, newcomers, people with disabilities, and lone mothers. We support the position of our partner the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres that based on the legislative and historical root causes contributing to Aboriginal poverty, a separate and distinct Aboriginal poverty reduction strategy is needed.

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Campaign 2000 is a cross-Canada movement of over 120 organizations working to end child and family poverty in Canada. The Ontario Campaign 2000 coalition includes 66 partners across the province.
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