

Campaign 2000 End Child Poverty Now E-newsletter
Winter 2008 Edition
(final draft of Dec. 22/08)

1. National update

With Ottawa in a state of fluidity, the opportunity has arisen to encourage federal MPs to make ending child and family poverty a priority for the 2009 Budget to be released January 27, 2009. The Department of Finance has asked the Canadian public to consult on the matters of priority to them by submitting their ideas by January 9th, 2009. Follow this link to offer your input at:

www.fin.gc.ca/scripts/prebudgetsurvey/selectMainPriorities_e.asp.

In our National Report Card, published November 21, 2008, Campaign 2000 argued that in the wake of the global economic crisis, it has become even more imperative for our government to intervene and provide security for our nation's most vulnerable. We asked the federal government to take the following steps as part of a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy:

- An enhanced child benefit to a maximum of \$5,100 (\$2007) per child
- Restore and expand eligibility for Employment Insurance
- Increase federal work tax credits to \$2,400 per year
- Establish a minimum wage of \$10 per hour (\$2007)
- Create a national housing plan including social housing
- Establish a universal system of early childhood education and care
- Include a strong equity plan to address system barriers
- Develop appropriate poverty reduction targets, timelines and indicators for Aboriginal families, irrespective of where they live, in coordination with First Nation and Aboriginal communities

2. Regional updates:

Campaign 2000 and its provincial partners in BC, AB, SASK, MB, ON, NS and NB released the new Report Cards on child and family poverty on Friday, Nov. 21, 2008 to mark the 19th anniversary of the all-party House of Commons resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000. To download a copy of these report cards or fact sheets, please visit our Report Card section on the web: <http://www.campaign2000.ca/rc/>.

Below is some further update from each province which did a Report Card this year:

New Brunswick:

New Brunswick has joined the list of provinces formulating a poverty reduction strategy. On October 17th Minister of Social Development, Mary Schryer, announced a three stage process that will culminate in the publication of a poverty reduction plan by the end of 2009. The first stage is a public engagement initiative. Fourteen dialogue sessions open to the public will take place across the province in January and February. The Minister will be joined by two co-chairs, including Léo-Paul Pinet, director of the *Centre de bénévolat de la Péninsule acadienne* (Volunteer Center of the Acadian Peninsula). The *Centre* is a long-time member of Campaign 2000. A round table phase followed by a final forum gathering will complete the process.

Nova Scotia:

While Nova Scotia's child poverty rate continues to go down, the situation for young families is precarious. Many young families are leaving the province permanently and others who commute to the West for high-paying jobs may suffer in the recession that is expected to affect all regions.

The province of Nova Scotia's poverty reduction strategy appears to be missing - whether it is missing in action or just plain derailed is not clear. When community members of the Bill 94 Working Group (named for Bill 94, a compromise between the Liberals and Conservatives that established a committee of non-governmental individuals to work with two govt. departments) submitted their report to the Nova Scotia government in June 2008, they were told to expect a response by the end of the year. To date, there has been no response. In fact, government departments are stating there is no new money for any initiatives. NS activists are expecting poverty reduction to be a campaign issue when the election is called in the spring.

Ontario:

Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy was announced December 4, 2008. Campaign 2000 welcomed the Ontario government announcement on Dec 4th of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy which commits to reduce the provincial child poverty rate by 25% within 5 years. The plan includes many of the elements that Campaign 2000 and other partners in the "25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction" have been calling for: specific targets and timelines, an income measure and other poverty indicators to track progress, introduction of poverty reduction legislation in 2009, annual reporting, and public consultation halfway through the plan. This is the 1st provincial poverty reduction strategy in Canada to include a specific numerical target for poverty reduction.

Announced by the 16 member Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction headed by Minister Deb Matthews, the plan also signifies an important change in the way poverty and low income people are viewed. The 25 in 5 Network held its own press conference to comment on the plan, and Pat Capponi of Voices from the Street commented:

"Today, Ontario is turning a corner on poverty. We are closing a chapter on the days where government believed it could make political gains on the backs of the poor. This is the kind of foundation on which we can build real progress against poverty and achieve a better society for all Ontarians."

Highlights:

- The Strategy identifies the Low Income Measure (LIM) as the poverty indicator that will be used to measure progress, along with 7 other indicators.
- Ontario gov't will review social assistance over the next year with the goal of reducing barriers and increasing opportunity. 3 rule changes were announced.
- The Ontario Child Benefit will be increased to reach a maximum of \$1,310/child.
- Ontario gov't will hold a public consultation in '09 on affordable housing. The 10-year, \$60 billion infrastructure plan starting 2009 will include social housing. New commitment of \$5 million/yr for rent bank program was announced.
- Employment standards: \$10 million will be spent to hire new employment standards officers. New legislation regulating temp agencies was introduced on Dec 9th reflecting many of the changes that C2000 partner the Workers Action Centre had called for.
- Gov't said they will continue to make progress on minimum wage which reaches \$10.25 by 2010

- Will set up new Community Opportunities Fund at \$5 million/yr to encourage neighbourhood revitalization and support local poverty reduction efforts.
- At the federal level, the Ontario gov't is calling for: doubling the working income tax benefit; increasing the national child benefit supplement by \$1200/year; a summit on EI reform; and partnerships on early learning & child care, affordable housing and Aboriginal issues.
- For more details, see: www.ontario.ca/breakingthecycle or www.25in5.ca

Manitoba: waiting from Sid and Joel...

Alberta:

Our Alberta partners released their provincial report card on the same day as the national release, on Nov. 21, 2008, in cooperation with United Way across the province and other partners. Media coverage was quite extensive, with both print media and radio/TV covering the findings from the report card. Some media reports focused on the big story that 1 in 10 Alberta children live in poverty while others talked about the need for affordable housing.

SASK:

Saskatchewan released its provincial Report Card also on Nov. 21st, attracting media attention to the fact that things didn't change much at either the national or provincial level since the all-party resolution back in 1989. The child poverty rate is only second in the country, following BC's highest rate, with about 19.9% of children under 18 living in families whose income is below LICO.

BC:

First Call had a successful release of the 2008 Child Poverty Report Card, with significant coverage in local papers, radio, and on CTV local news. First Call collaborated with the CCPA and Victoria Community Council to release a living wage calculation report for Metro Vancouver and Victoria, focused on low income families. First Call is building a campaign around the living wage with a variety of community partners, and is also supporting three communities through our Leveling the Playing Field for Children project to do grassroots organizing and raise awareness of income inequality issues. Find out more on the First Call web site – www.firstcallbc.org.

The CCPA released a Poverty Reduction Plan for the province (available here: http://www.policyalternatives.ca/reports/2008/12/poverty_reduction/?pa=BB736455), and while the Premier admitted that more work was necessary, according to CTV BC he was quoted as saying: "We've made progress but there's more progress to be made and the strongest progress comes from a strong stable economy that people can have confidence in". Most activity in BC is taking place at the community level. The only substantive commitment politically is the NDP pledge to raise the minimum wage to \$10.00/hour.

First Call continues to participate in the Raise the Rates Coalition, which is hosting the 2nd annual Poverty Olympics in Vancouver on February 8, 2009 – www.povertyolympics.ca.

3) Recently Released Reports:

National

1. UNICEF child care report finds Canada ranks dead last compared to other developed countries in early learning and child care:

http://www.unicef.ca/portal/Secure/Community/502/WCM/HELP/take_action/Advocacy/rc8.pdf

2. OECD report *Growing Unequal* finds that inequality is growing faster in Canada than any other OECD country with the exception of Germany. For more information on this report, visit:

http://www.oecd.org/document/53/0,3343,en_2649_33933_41460917_1_1_1_1,00.html

3. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that a clear majority favour national leadership on poverty reduction:

http://www.policyalternatives.ca/documents/National_Office_Pubs/2008/Poverty_Poll.pdf

Ontario

1. Breaking the Cycle

The Ontario Government released its poverty reduction strategy on December 4, 2008. To read the full report visit:

http://www.growingstronger.ca/english/pdf/Ontario's_Poverty_Report_EN.pdf

2. Cost of Poverty

This groundbreaking report presents a rigorous analysis conducted by economists demonstrating what poverty costs Ontarians:

<http://oafb.ca/assets/pdfs/CostofPoverty.pdf>

3. A Living Wage for Toronto

This report released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives finds that in order for a two-parent household with two children to be able to afford a decent standard of living free from poverty, a living wage of \$16.60 is necessary:

http://www.policyalternatives.ca/~ASSETS/DOCUMENT/Ontario_Office_Pubs/2008/A_Living_Wage_for_Toronto.pdf

British Columbia

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in BC has recently outlined what an effective poverty reduction strategy would look like in this province:

http://www.policyalternatives.ca/~ASSETS/DOCUMENT/BC_Office_Pubs/bc_2008/ccpa_bc_poverty_reduction_full.pdf