

Social Planning Council of Winnipeg *est. 1919*

412 McDermot Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3A 0A9  
• Telephone (204) 943-2561 • Fax (204) 942-3221  
• E-mail [info@spcw.mb.ca](mailto:info@spcw.mb.ca) • Internet: [www.spcw.mb.ca](http://www.spcw.mb.ca)



END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY IN CANADA

[www.campaign2000.ca](http://www.campaign2000.ca)

IN HONOUR OF JOSEPH ZUKEN AND HIS LEGACY OF SOCIAL ACTIVISM

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## Draft Opinion Editorial/Letter to Premiers

(Opinion editorials appear on the page opposite the paper's editorial and are usually initiated by an individual who is not connected to the newspaper)

The Council of the Federation is a council in Canada made up of the premiers of Canada's thirteen provinces and territories. Its main function is to provide a united front amongst the provincial and territorial governments when interacting with Canada's federal government.

The Council of the Federation's objectives are to:

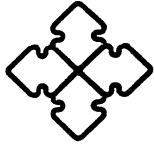
- Promote interprovincial-territorial cooperation
- Foster meaningful relations between governments based on respect for diversity and the constitution
- Demonstrate leadership on issues important to all Canadians

The Council of the Federation meets twice a year to discuss issues between the provinces and territories and the federal government.

Their next meeting is August 5-7, 2009 in Regina, Saskatchewan. This is the perfect opportunity to write them a letter and let them know that poverty reduction is an issue important to Canadians. You could also adapt the letter and send it to your local newspaper and try to get it published as an opinion editorial (Op-Ed). Below is a sample of a letter to the premiers, based on the letter Campaign 2000 sent to last year's Council of the Federation. There is also an adapted sample Op-Ed.

To learn more about the meeting, as well as their other activities, you can go to the website of the council of the federation at

<http://www.councilofthefederation.ca/>



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[Date] (this content is adapted from a letter that was sent to the Council of the FederationP

Honourable [ ]

Address (addresses of Premiers can be found at the end of this document)

OR you can send a letter to all the Provincial and Territorial Premiers. Additions for this action are in [ ].

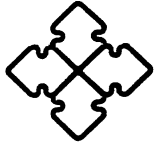
Dear [ ]:

We're/ I am writing to urge you, as Premier, to make poverty reduction central to your up-coming discussions at the 2009 annual meeting of the Council of the Federation. Canada's on-going success relies upon a healthy population that can sustain itself and flourish. You and other Premiers are in a strong position to ensure that all of our young people thrive, not merely survive. [All of] you, [with your federal counterparts], need to use your individual [and collective] position[s] to ensure that no child or family suffers the debilitating effects of poverty.

Using even a conservative measure, nearly three-quarters of a million children – about 760,000 - and their families lived in poverty in Canada in 2006 – that's one out of every nine children. Those are pre-recession figures, which are likely to jump significantly due to the substantial job loss of these recent months. As Canada enters this period of economic insecurity, it is even more crucial that public policies focus on vulnerable individuals, families and communities.

This November will mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1989 unanimous House of Commons Resolution to seek to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. However, 20 years later, we are no closer to this goal. Child and family poverty in Canada is not going away on its own. At 11.3% the child poverty rate (most recent 2006 data based on after-tax income) remains stubbornly high and about the same as it was in 1989. Canada's aging population is going to rely increasingly on its younger generations to sustain them in their retirement. But that will not be possible if we do not support young people and their families now.

Children's poverty is family poverty. And some families are more vulnerable than others. Poverty rates are disproportionately high for children in mother-led families, racialized families, recent immigrant families and children with disabilities. Poverty rates are a formidable barrier in Aboriginal communities. Almost one in every two (49%) Aboriginal children under the age of six (not living in First Nations communities) lives in low income family. At least 80 First Nations' communities do not have enough school space to meet the needs of their children. Aboriginal children are drastically over-represented in the child welfare system, with one in ten children in First Nations communities versus one in 200 non-Aboriginal children in care. This overrepresentation is fuelled by neglect associated with poverty and poor housing.



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The gap between the rich and the poor in Canada has grown more than in any other OECD country during the last decade, with the exception of Germany, and it continues to widen. By 2006, the richest 10% of families earned 71 times more than the poorest 10% - almost two and a half times the ratio in 1976.

Canada prides itself on being a fair and equitable society. In recessions, it is well documented that inequalities deepen. Do not let this happen. This is not the Canada that Canadians want.

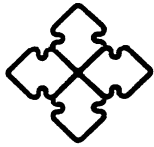
In contrast to the previous recession, we enter into this recession less prepared, with our social safety net full of holes. Eligibility for EI is drastically low, with the majority of Canadians unable to qualify for benefits (in some places, less than 30% of those who pay into it). Social assistance, which is meant to be a last resort, is characterized by low rates, low eligibility, and punitive rules in most jurisdictions. Many Canadians fall through the cracks. In addition, Canadians have less savings and more debt. The average savings rate has fallen from \$7,300 per year in 1990 to \$1,000 in 2006 while the average household debt has risen from 70 cents on every dollar of income in 1984 to \$1.27 on every dollar of income in 2007. And 39% of Canadians say they are one or two paycheques away from being poor.

This is a crucial time for our Premiers to act. Why not show leadership by agreeing to the basic tenets of a poverty reduction strategy to be implemented in every province and territory? Why not push the Federal Government for a National Poverty Reduction Strategy?

Taking action to reduce poverty makes social and economic sense and will benefit us all. Recent estimates put the cost of poverty at \$38 billion due to loss of income tax revenue and value of lost output due to high unemployment, increased costs of health and social services, policing and criminal justice systems.

Poverty reduction is smart stimulus spending because there are significant returns generated from poverty reduction. Public investment that goes into the pockets of low and modest-income families is a counter-cyclical measure because that money is spent in local communities to pay rent, buy food and purchase other necessities. In contrast, higher-income families usually spend or invest funds outside of Canada, or put the money into savings.

European countries are successfully cutting their child poverty rates by implementing coordinated action plans. From 1999 to 2004, the UK succeeded in removing 600,000 children from living in poverty. Quebec, Newfoundland & Labrador, Ontario and Nova Scotia are actively pursuing poverty reduction while New Brunswick's is in the planning stages. An effective poverty reduction strategy will not be a "one size fits all" but must ensure: sustaining employment; livable incomes including for those unable to work; and strong community supports such as affordable housing;



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early learning and child care services and well-resourced public education and training programs. As part of this broad poverty reduction strategy, specific policies and investments that address systemic barriers are required that create equity measures to address the concentration of poverty in racialized communities, Aboriginal communities and amongst immigrants and refugees.

The current recession means that robust public policies, as well as targets and timelines are needed to help prevent families from falling into poverty, and to help those that are in it get out. Timely, well-crafted attention to poverty reduction will bolster a sustainable society and contribute to prosperity for all Canadians. Poverty Reduction is both the best form of economic stimulus and the right thing to do for Canada's children and families living in poverty who would otherwise be left out in the cold in the current climate of economic turmoil.

90% of Canadians say it is time for strong leadership to reduce the number of poor people in Canada, and it would make them proud to see their Premier taking leadership on poverty reduction in their province. 89% say both the Prime Minister and Provincial Premier need to set concrete targets and timelines to reduce the number of poor Canadians. And 81% agree their provincial government should reduce poverty by at least 25% over the next five years.

The council of the federation was created to show leadership on issues important to Canadians. IN these trying economic times, poverty reduction is clearly one of those issues. Don't pass up this chance. Help ensure that Canada's double-digit poverty rates are a thing of the past and that we emerge from this recession a stronger, more sustainable and equitable society.

Sincerely,  
[name]

**It would be good to send a Carbon Copy of this letter to people in these positions (the names of the individuals may change over time) :**

The Right Hon. Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P. Prime Minister of Canada - [pm@pm.gc.ca](mailto:pm@pm.gc.ca)

The Hon. Leona Aglukkaq, P.C., M.P. Minister of Health - [Aglukkaq.L@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Aglukkaq.L@parl.gc.ca)

The Hon. Diane Finley, P.C., M.P. Minister of Human Resources and Social Development - [Finley.D@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Finley.D@parl.gc.ca)

The Hon. Jason Kenney, P.C., M.P. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration - [Kenney.J@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Kenney.J@parl.gc.ca)

The Hon. James Flaherty, P.C., M.P. Minister of Finance - [Flaherty.J@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Flaherty.J@parl.gc.ca)

The Hon. Chuck Strahl, P.C., M.P. Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs - [Strahl.C@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Strahl.C@parl.gc.ca)

The Hon. Rona Ambrose, P.C., M.P. Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs - [Ambrose.R@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Ambrose.R@parl.gc.ca);

You can find the contact information for your Premier (or all the premiers) at:

<http://canadaonline.about.com/cs/premiers/a/writepremiers.htm>



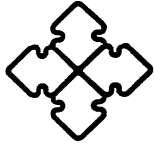
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For People. For Change.

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c/o Family Service Toronto  
355 Church Street, Toronto, Ontario M5B 1Z8

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### Sample Op-Ed

This November will mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1989 unanimous House of Commons Resolution to seek to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. We have some cause for celebration, as many provinces are in the process of or have implemented poverty reduction strategies. However, federally, at 11.3%, the child poverty rate (most recent 2006 data based on after-tax income) remains stubbornly high and about the same as it was in 1989.

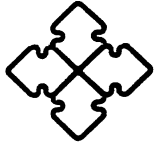
Canada's on-going success relies upon a healthy population that can sustain itself and flourish. Canada's aging population is going to rely increasingly on its younger generations to sustain them in their retirement. Young people and their families need to be supported so they are able to thrive, not merely survive. This means that no child or family should have to suffer the debilitating effects of poverty. This means healthy, recession-proof public policies that enable all Canadians to contribute to our society and be that best that they can be.

Using even a conservative measure, nearly three-quarters of a million children – about 760,000 - and their families lived in poverty in Canada in 2006 – that's one out of every nine children. Those are pre-recession figures, which are likely to jump significantly due to the substantial job loss of these recent months. As Canada enters this period of economic insecurity, it is even more crucial that public policies focus on vulnerable individuals, families and communities.

Children's poverty is family poverty. And some families are more vulnerable than others. Poverty rates are disproportionately high for children in mother-led families, racialized families, recent immigrant families and children with disabilities. Poverty rates are a formidable barrier in Aboriginal communities. Almost one in every two (49%) Aboriginal children under the age of six (not living in First Nations communities) lives in low income family. At least 80 First Nations' communities do not have enough school space to meet the needs of their children. Aboriginal children are drastically over-represented in the child welfare system, with one in ten children in First Nations communities versus one in 200 non-Aboriginal children who are in care. This overrepresentation is fuelled by neglect associated with poverty and poor housing.

The gap between the rich and the poor in Canada has grown more than in any other OECD country during the last decade, with the exception of Germany, and it continues to widen. By 2006, the richest 10% of families earned 71 times more than the poorest 10% - almost two and a half times the ratio in 1976.

These are troubling statistics, and call into question the image of Canada as a fair and equitable society that most of us hold dear. In recessions, it is well documented that inequalities deepen, unless specific measures are undertaken to ensure this does not happen.



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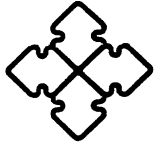
However, in contrast to the previous recession, we enter into this recession less prepared, with our social safety net full of holes. Eligibility for EI is drastically low, with the majority of Canadians unable to qualify for benefits (in some places, less than 30% of those who pay into it). Social assistance, which is meant to be a last resort, is characterized by low rates, low eligibility, and punitive rules in most jurisdictions. Many Canadians fall through the cracks. In addition, Canadians have less savings and more debt than ever before. The average savings rate has fallen from \$7,300 per year in 1990 to \$1,000 in 2006 while the average household debt has risen from 70 cents on every dollar of income in 1984 to \$1.27 on every dollar of income in 2007. And 39% of Canadians say they are one or two paycheques away from being poor.

Taking action to reduce poverty makes social and economic sense and will benefit us all. Recent estimates put the cost of poverty at \$38 billion due to loss of income tax revenue and value of lost output due to high unemployment, increased costs of health and social services, policing and criminal justice systems is taken into account.

And in a time of recession, poverty reduction is smart stimulus spending because it generates significant returns. Public investment that goes into the pockets of low and modest-income families is a counter-cyclical measure because that money is spent in local communities to pay rent, buy food and purchase other necessities. In contrast, higher-income families usually spend or invest funds outside of Canada, or put the money into savings.

Poverty reduction is not a lofty, unachievable goal. European countries are successfully cutting their child poverty rates by implementing coordinated action plans. From 1999 to 2004, the UK succeeded in removing 600,000 children from living in poverty. Quebec, Newfoundland & Labrador, Ontario and Nova Scotia are actively pursuing poverty reduction while New Brunswick's is in the planning stages. An effective provincial poverty reduction strategy would not be "one size fits all" but must ensure: sustaining employment; livable incomes including for those unable to work; and strong community supports such as affordable housing; early learning and child care services and well-resourced public education and training programs. As part of this broad poverty reduction strategy, specific policies and investments that address systemic barriers are required that create equity measures to address the concentration of poverty in racialized communities, Aboriginal communities and amongst immigrants and refugees.

Robust public policies, as well as targets and timelines are needed to help prevent families from falling into poverty, and to help those that are in it get out. Timely, well-crafted attention to poverty reduction will bolster a sustainable society and contribute to prosperity for all Canadians. Poverty Reduction is both the best form of economic stimulus and the right thing to do for Canada's children and families living in poverty, who would otherwise be left out in the cold in the current climate of economic turmoil.



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The council of the federation was created to show leadership on issues important to Canadians. Poverty reduction is clearly one of those issues. At their meeting on August 5-7, our leaders should not pass up this chance to agree to implement poverty reduction strategies in every province, and push the federal government to adopt a national one. They must help ensure that Canada's double-digit poverty rates are a thing of the past and that we emerge from this recession a stronger, more sustainable and equitable society. The Canada we are proud of . . . .

You could include the address of your premier and/or finance minister if people want to send a letter or e-mail to express support for a poverty reduction strategy.



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