

11 April 2011

Dear Members of the Interfaith Partnership,

I write to you as the Chair of the Interfaith Partnership, that body in which you are an active participant and which in recent years has brought us together to focus on addressing poverty, caring for the Earth, and investing in peace.

Today we are facing a federal election in Canada. As faith leaders our first responsibility is to call those communities whom we represent to join us in prayer for the nation and the welfare of all people who live here.

Specifically, we pray for those who offer themselves for public office that they may hear and respond to the real issues on the hearts and minds of all Canadians. Chief among these issues are poverty and climate change.

Many of us are awakening to the unacceptable levels of poverty in this land –

- 4.3 million Canadians live in poverty
- 1 in 7 children grow up in poverty, and in First Nations communities, 1 in 4
- 150,000 people are homeless
- the number of working poor is increasing
- in the last two years, food bank dependency has increased by 10%; almost 900,000 Canadians rely on them for sustenance.

In November 2010, an all parties House of Commons Committee produced a report entitled, “Federal Poverty Reduction Plan Working in Partnership Towards Reducing Poverty in Canada,” known as the HUMA report. HUMA is an abbreviation for the Human Resources committee of the House of Commons.

The HUMA report contains recommendations including a Poverty Reduction Fund, a plan for comprehensive long-term housing strategy, social security initiatives, increased child tax credits, and partnering with provincial and territorial initiatives.

This report represents great hope for many who live with the burden of poverty. We take our stand with them and encourage all Canadians to engage political candidates in conversation about their intentions and commitments with respect to public policies and programs that champion dignity for all.

Many Canadians are also deeply concerned about climate change. A number of faith communities have taken a public stance on the care of creation and called for the Government of Canada to adopt a comprehensive climate action plan with firm targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions of 25% - 40% by 2020. The World Religious Leaders' Summit held on the eve of the G-8 and G-20 meetings in Canada called on world leaders to prioritize long-term environmental stability and implement concrete plans to ensure global temperatures do not exceed a 2° centigrade increase. We believe Canada could have a leading role in meeting this challenge.

They are but two issues facing Canadians. They both represent our care for one another and our care for the world we inhabit. Both express concern for those who walk this earth with us, and for those who come after us.

We encourage all Canadians to engage their hearts and minds in this federal election, and then to exercise their democratic right to vote. It is a freedom and a right we cherish in this country -- to be embraced with care and responsibility.

The times in which we live call for inspired leadership that is committed to bold action, contributes to our true growth and well-being as a nation, and to our place among the nations in building a just, healthy and peaceful world. To this we aspire and for this we pray.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen Hamilton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton
Chair, Interfaith Partnership
General Secretary, The Canadian Council of Churches