

## Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change

Taking the *Call* to the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP17

28 November - 6 December, 2011 – by Joy Kennedy & Peter Noteboom

### What happened? What did we achieve? Was it worth it?

#### The Plan

The plan was to create an opportunity for our diverse faiths to speak with one strong voice on the crucial issue of climate change to Canadian leaders and negotiators, and to all participating in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC-COP17)

There have been attempts in the past to bring a uniquely Canadian faith perspective into UN meetings, such as the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, and the Montreal COP11/MOP1, 2005, but this was the most broadly-based, collectively written statement focussed on climate change that we have yet been able to achieve from the perspectives of Canadian faith communities. The process alone was an important stage on our common journey of developing interfaith relationships and shared understandings and positions. What we were able to produce together was a fine example of the articulation of a growing moral and spiritual imperative for climate justice that resonates with increasing numbers of people in Canada and around the world.

#### The Interfaith Call

After its successful and high profile launch at the Interfaith Forum on Faith and Climate on Parliament Hill, the *Call* was broadly circulated and even printed in whole in *Embassy Magazine*. Remarks from Senator Grant Mitchell that applauded the Canadian interfaith call were entered into Hansard: *Honourable senators, I applaud the Canadian Interfaith Forum on Faith & Climate for its work to change the debate in Canada around climate change from one of division to one of action based on consensus. May we all heed its wisdom that ecological issues are moral, ethical and faith issues; and may we have the courage to address climate change as the universal moral challenge that it is.*

It was included in the World Council of Churches Climate Change Newsletter #53, which went to thousands around the world in anticipation of COP17, along with other international faith statements such as "Climate Justice for Sustainable Peace in Africa". Certainly it was much appreciated and well-received by faith partners who gathered together at briefings and workshops daily at the COP. It was included in the United Nations Environment Programme newsletter which has a very wide circulation.

In November 2011 a second, expanded endorsements version of the Call eventually included 56 signatures of leaders of faith communities and faith-based organizations in Canada representing all the major faith communities in Canada.

In addition, many faith communities covered and published the Interfaith Call in their own publications. We were not successful in reaching wide circulation in the mainstream media, though we did intervene on the National Post's disparaging description of Bishop Desmond Tutu's comments about the Canadian oil/tar sands as they were printed in the South African media.

## **Results**

The long-term results will emerge over time, as we see how well it was picked up by the members of our own communities and referred to by decision-makers. But in the short term it should be reported that at least the Minister of the Environment, Peter Kent, and his senior staff had read it and responded positively in a face to face meeting with Canadian faith delegates at the COP. In fact, Minister Kent said that he basically was in agreement with most of what it said and could find no fault with the framing of the issues as moral and ethical ones.

The United Church of Canada Moderator, Mardi Tindal, Mennonite Church Canada General Secretary, Willard Metzger, and The Canadian Council of Churches Commission on Justice and Peace Chair, Joy Kennedy, had the opportunity to meet for about 45 minutes with the Minister and his senior staff, including the Deputy Minister, as well as members of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, and Natural Resources staff, to discuss the concerns and ideas raised in the *Call*. Of particular concern was the position that Canada was holding to about not proceeding with the Kyoto Protocol, nor of taking on any new commitments until a new binding agreement is negotiated sometime in the future. There was a respectful hearing of the points that the delegation raised if not complete agreement, and an expressed interest in continuing the conversation in a meeting back home in Ottawa.

The Minister's subsequent announcement after the COP that Canada would pull out of Kyoto was a disappointment to be sure. But there are still many commitments that Canada has through the Copenhagen Accord, and through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change instruments that we should ensure are implemented. Climate Finance for mitigation and adaptation through contributions to the Green Fund is extremely important to many of our partners in vulnerable countries who must adapt now even before binding agreements are reached. So Canada's announcement of contributions to this fund is a welcome one.

Several important meetings in faith communities have held events where the topic of climate justice has come on the agenda and no doubt additional efforts will be made. We have also seen documentation arising from those deliberations. Check out, for example, the attached newsletter from the Bahà'ì Community of Canada, or this link to a recent report on climate and creation stewardship of the Christian Reformed Church here:

[http://www.crcna.org/site\\_uploads/uploads/resources/synodical/CreationStewardship.pdf](http://www.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/resources/synodical/CreationStewardship.pdf).

## **The Petition**

While in South Africa we were aware of our campaign, coordinated by Citizens for Public Justice, of tabling many petitions in the House of Commons to create a continuous profile of the demands of

ordinary Canadians of faith throughout the period of the COP and beyond. This kept it in the eye of parliamentarians and hopefully will have a longer effect in the months ahead.

### **What Now?**

We seem to have just begun the dialogue with the current federal government and potentially have an entrée to at least one Minister to continue to ensure that the voices of faithful people are heard expressing the urgent need for action on this most important issue of our times.

Looking ahead, initiatives are under way to organize that follow-up meeting with the Minister of the Environment, the Honourable Peter Kent, in the Spring. Preparing to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Earth Summit in Rio and participate in the June United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, plans are under way to craft a brief updated letter or statement building on the interfaith call.

### **What about you?**

We would like to hear from you about what other initiatives you have taken. What other correspondence have you sent or what other meetings have you organized with your political representatives? What other articles have been published, petitions sent in, or reports made to your own decision-making bodies? We would like to hear from you what you have learned so far, what results you've had, and what activities you are supporting now.

Let us take up the opportunity to make a difference for the sustainability of life on the planet, for our children's children, and the whole Earth Community.

Mardi Tindal's United Church of Canada blog

<http://www.wondercafe.ca/blogs/moderator-mardi/>

Willard Metzger's Mennonite Church Canada blog

<http://willardmetzger.blogspot.com/>

Peter Vander Meulen's Christian Reformed Church blog

<http://justiceseekers.ning.com/profiles/blog/list?user=vanderm>

Kaitlin Bardswich, United Church of Canada Youth at COP: blog

<http://kaitlinindurban.wordpress.com/>

WCC News - <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news.html>

Durban Outcome is Not Enough, says WCC

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/wcc-presses-call-for-imme.html?print=1%2522onfocus%253D%2522blurLink%28this%29%253B%2522onfocus%253D%2522blurLink%28this%29print%3D1%2522onfocus%253D%2522blurLink%28this%29%253B%2522onfocus%253D%2522blurLink%28this%29&cHash=758d71bfa76c9b51b2605ff5e3930e44>