



10 April 2014

Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80- Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

Fax: 1 613 941 6900
Email: pm@pm.gc.ca

Re: Definition of Charitable Activities

Dear Prime Minister Stephen Harper:

Many members of Canada's Christian churches provide generous support for charities across the country and the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) appreciates the increased recognition of such donations through the tax system. At the same time, questions have been raised regarding the policy framework used to regulate the charitable sector. In particular church members are concerned about the increasingly narrow interpretation of charitable activity that can exclude organizations who speak up for justice and care for creation.

The Canadian Council of Churches is the largest ecumenical body in Canada, now representing 25 churches of Anglican, Eastern and Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Free Church, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, and Historic Protestant traditions; this is 85% of Christians in Canada who profess adherence to a church.

As you know so well mercy and justice go hand in hand in the Scriptures. Direct assistance for persons living in poverty, for example, is incomplete without also advocating for changes that remove barriers to their full participation in society. Care for creation, a Biblical calling for all humans, requires that persons of faith speak up for systemic changes in public policies that damage the creation as well as supporting non-profit conservation or recycling programs. Both are integral parts of exercising responsibility as a Christian citizen. Donations for both deserve equal recognition as contributions to the public good that warrant eligibility for a charitable tax receipt.

News that environmental organizations and other advocacy groups are being subjected to intrusive, expensive audits by government officials, not because of concerns about fraud or illegal activities, but because they speak out about policies that damage the creation, gives rise to this request for a review of how your government defines charitable activity. Canada needs more public discussion about how we can improve our care for creation rather than the chilling effect of threats to revoke the charitable status of organizations that draw attention to policies that harm our world.

In light of the important role that charitable organizations play in Canada, what leadership role will you take to review the current definitions of charitable activity used by Revenue Canada to ensure that donors and organizations who exercise their calling to care for creation and their neighbors through advocacy for more just policies are not treated differently than those who provide direct services?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Please be assured of our continued prayers for you and for the Government of Canada as you carry out your responsibilities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen Hamilton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Karen" being more prominent than the last name "Hamilton".

The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton
General Secretary

Cc: The Honourable Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay, Minister of National Revenue
Thomas Mulcair, Leader of the Official Opposition, New Democratic Party of Canada
Justin Trudeau, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
Daniel Paillé, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada
Major Jim Champ, President, The Canadian Council of Churches

The Canadian Council of Churches is the largest ecumenical body in Canada, now representing 25 churches of Anglican, Eastern and Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Free Church, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, and Historic Protestant traditions. We are one of the few ecumenical bodies in the world that includes such a range of Christian churches. The Canadian Council of Churches was founded in 1944.