

17 October 2012

The Honourable Vic Toews, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Public Safety
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Re: Prison Chaplains

Dear Minister,

The undersigned represent groups that are concerned about the decision to end a program of funding part-time prison chaplains drawn from a variety of religious communities. Our experience over the years, as we have come together for discussion and dialogue through the *2010 Interfaith Partnership* and the subsequent *Canadian interfaith conversation*, suggests the fruitfulness of acknowledging rather than diminishing the diversity of religious expression in Canada. Among our achievements was the successful organization of the *2010 World Religions Summit: Interfaith Leaders in the G8 Nations* attended by your colleague, Minister of State for Democracy, Steven Fletcher. By working together, we are contributing to Canada's well-being and social cohesion, demonstrating the value of religious communities as contributors to the good of all Canadians.

We are writing to seek clarification of the reasons for ending part-time chaplain contracts. The personnel resources to meet the broad diversity of spiritual and religious needs of inmates, which reflect the religious diversity of Canada, is severely limited. We can't help but believe that the rehabilitation of prison inmates needs to involve access to appropriate spiritual and religious counselling – a service provided by the existing chaplaincy program. As Canada's prison inmates are broadly reflective of the diversity of Canadian society, you surely appreciate the importance of meeting the spiritual needs of inmates of different religions. What conclusions has the Department drawn from the research on the impact on recidivism, and therefore lower financial costs over the longer term, when appropriate spiritual and moral counselling is provided federal prison inmates?

With the decision to stop funding part-time chaplains and to require full-time chaplains, largely Christian, to minister to inmates of all faiths, we ask what steps you will now take to ensure that the rehabilitation of prisoners of other faiths is not neglected. While chaplains respond to the broad spiritual needs of all inmates (and Corrections Canada staff) regardless of their faith community, they cannot meet the particular sacramental needs or the deeper cultural aspects of spiritual practice for every faith community. We also wonder whether your department has considered the possibility of seeking the cooperative support of Canada's smaller faith communities to meet gaps that will inevitably appear.

We were also surprised to learn of your Department's decision given Canada's commitment to religious pluralism and your Government's proposed Office of Religious Freedom. We would also like to ask why the Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy in the Correctional Service of Canada was not consulted and included in the decision-making process. We ask what consideration was given to the coherence of this decision with principles of respecting diversity and promoting social cohesion in Canada, long cherished by all our federal political parties as part of our Canadian way of life?

We would be pleased to discuss these matters further with your office.

Sincerely yours,



The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton
General Secretary
The Canadian Council of Churches



Mobeenuddin H. Khaja, O. Ont.
President
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Catherine Starr
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Rev. Tim McCoy
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The Rev. Susan C. Johnson
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