

The Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0G5

January 10, 2000

Dear Mr. Chrétien:

We write to you as we stand on the threshold of a new millennium. Through the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative, Canadian Churches have used this unique moment as an opportunity to reflect on our past and to look forward with hope toward a new vision for our future. The vision of Jubilee, rooted in the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian scriptures, reminds us of God's recognition of the need to restore relationships broken through injustice and inequality. When that vision has been presented as a challenge applicable in our day to the beginning of a new century, churchgoers have responded affirmatively. The fact that over 630,000 Canadians signed the debt cancellation petition circulated in our churches by the Jubilee Initiative gives us confidence that we are writing to you now on behalf of very many citizens of this country.

As Canadians, we face both challenge and opportunity at the turn of the year 2000. Poverty is a persistent crisis of misery that challenges us all. It is a crisis of the spirit that affects not just the poor but, equally, those who have become indifferent to the needs of their neighbours. Our opportunity is to realize the vision of Jubilee by working to restore a place for those who have been excluded from the bounty of God's creation.

We believe that we have the opportunity now to take decisive actions in the forthcoming federal budget to keep promises that have been made in at least three important areas: addressing the needs of children and families in poverty in Canada, cancelling the debt of poor nations, and increased sharing of resources with poor nations through our aid programmes.

Child Poverty

In 1989, we applauded the unanimous House of Commons resolution with the "goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000." However, we are alarmed that poverty among children and their families, particularly among aboriginal

people, has increased in the past ten years and that the levels of poverty are deeper today than in 1989. While there are those who debate the statistics, none can deny the trend of increasing hardship and suffering. We have been encouraged by some of the preliminary measures taken by your government. We affirm the commitments made in the Speech from the Throne to “extend and make more accessible Employment Insurance benefits for parental leave,” to “make a third significant investment in the National Child Benefit,” and to reach an agreement with the Provinces “on a national action plan ... to increase resources and further strengthen supports for early childhood development.” We support the call by Campaign 2000 for a five-year social investment plan for Canada’s children that would entail redirecting 1.5 percent of our GDP (\$3 billion in new investments in each of the next five years) toward federal investments in children and families.

International Debt

In advance of the Köln Summit, we welcomed the leadership taken by Canada ahead of the other G7 countries to cancel 100 percent of bilateral debts owed to Canada by the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) classified as among the least developed. Since Köln, we have noted that President Clinton has offered to write-off bilateral debts for all qualifying HIPCs, not just the least developed. However, we believe Canada should reassume its leadership by cancelling 100 percent of bilateral debts owed by the 50 poorest countries as was recently done in the case of Bangladesh. Since existing loan loss provisions can cover most of the cost of such cancellation, the cost in terms of new expenditures would be much smaller than the face value of these loans. We therefore urge you to establish a new Jubilee provision of about \$300 million to cover the cost of “topping up” Canadian bilateral debt remission to 100 percent for all 50 countries.

We also encourage you to support 100 percent cancellation of these countries’ multilateral debts without compelling them to adhere to structural adjustment programmes. Consistently over the past several years, our partners in economically distressed countries have been telling us, with urgency, that structural adjustment programmes have functioned to make health, schooling and other essential goods increasingly unavailable to struggling people who need them desperately.

Overseas Development Assistance

Providing resources to address basic needs for health care, education, safe water, and sanitation is an essential part of enabling poor nations to safeguard the well being of their most vulnerable citizens. We are disturbed that Canada’s official Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) has declined more than 40 percent since 1991 to 0.27 percent of Canada’s Gross National Product, far short of the 0.7 percent goal that the government of Canada has set for itself. We support the recommendation of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation that the government of Canada commit itself to a timetable to rebuild Canadian Overseas Development Assistance to at least 0.35 percent of GNP by 2005/06. We believe that our ODA should be more effectively targeted towards poverty reduction. Promoting Canadian commercial interests in the guise of poverty reduction conflicts with that objective and therefore we believe that the government needs to

deliberately increase Canada's untied aid commitment to poor nations to allow our aid to have the greatest impact on poverty.

We understand that there are many competing pressures in the forthcoming budget. But in a nation blessed with such abundance, we believe that the priority must be upon the needs of those suffering in poverty both in Canada and in the world. We recall the words of Jesus, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." (Luke 12:48) We believe Canada can do more and should do more. It is our hope and prayer that the first budget of the third millennium will be a Jubilee budget that sets us upon a new course for our future.

We remain,

Archdeacon Jim Boyles
General Secretary
The Anglican Church of Canada

Archbishop Hovnan. Derderian
Primate
Canadian Diocese of the Armenian Orthodox Church

Rev. Dr. Kenneth Bellous
Executive Minister
Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec

Rt. Rev. Dr. Douglas
General Superintendent
British Methodist Episcopal Church

Gerald Wiesner, OMI
Bishop of Prince George
President
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Gordon G. McClure
Clerk
Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Ray Elgersma
Canadian Ministries Director
The Christian Reformed Church of North America

The Rev. Messale Engeda
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Bishop Telmor Sartison
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

The Very Rev. Anthony Nikolic
Polish National Catholic Church of Canada

The Rev. Arthur Van Seters, B.A., B.D., Th.M., Th.D.
Moderator of the 125th General Assembly
Presbyterian Church in Canada

Rev. Jim Moerman
Executive Secretary, Regional Synod of Canada
Reformed Church in America

Metropolitan Archbishop Wasyly (Fedak)
Primate
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

Virginia Coleman
General Secretary
United Church of Canada

Cc: The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Honourable Paul Martin, Minister of Finance