

NAPO NEWS!

Speaking from experience

No. 89

June 2005

ISSN 08207364



NAPO Joins International Anti-Poverty Movement

Since November 2004 NAPO has been a partner in the Canadian **Make Poverty History (MPH) Campaign**, which is part of a larger international campaign to end poverty. NAPO contributed significantly to the wording of the demands of the Canadian campaign and our executive director continues to sit on the national steering committee. We are very excited about this international effort and we urge you to join it! It is a tremendous way to show your solidarity around poverty issues while taking part in a worldwide movement to make politicians finally take action that counts.

About the MPH campaign

(The following information is from the MPH web site www.makepovertyhistory.ca.)

Make Poverty History is part of a global call to action against poverty. National campaigns are currently active in more than 50 countries.

Canada's campaign to end poverty, **Make Poverty History**, calls for urgent and meaningful policy

Poverty and Canada's Children

A new report by UNICEF on child poverty in rich OECD countries shows how far Canada has to go to effectively address child and family poverty. In his article on page 3, Dennis Howlett assesses how Canada is dealing with this problem and what efforts are still needed to completely eradicate it. First, here are a few facts from the report.*

- Canada ranks 19th out of 26 countries with its child poverty rate of 14.9%.
- Denmark and Finland have child poverty rates of 2.4% and 2.8% respectively.
- The United States comes in second last with a rate of 21.9%. Only Mexico has a higher percentage of children living in poverty (27.7%).
- Higher government spending on family and social benefits clearly results in lower poverty rates.

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change. The campaign demands can be summed up in 14 words: more and better aid; trade justice; cancel the debt of poor countries; end child poverty in Canada. The symbol of the campaign is a white wristband, which you may have seen people wearing. The wristbands are being worn by people in countries around the world. They are available in Canada and can be ordered through the MPH web site.

Today, 1.2 billion people live in abject poverty, most of them women. More than 800 million people go to bed hungry and 50,000 people die every day from poverty-related causes. It doesn't have to be this way. If we choose – if we have the will to act – we can make poverty history.

Poverty is a violation of human rights on a massive scale. Nearly five years ago, all members of the United Nations committed to “spare no effort” in tackling poverty by adopting the Millennium Declaration. Governments also launched the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to meet minimum targets to reduce poverty, hunger, illiteracy, discrimination against women, and environmental degradation by 2015. But the pace of action is too slow. If we hold the present course, we will fail to meet these targets. And the poor will pay the price.

It's time for real action.

There are many events and activities planned over the next several months so check out the web site www.makepovertyhistory.ca or contact NAPO.

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Acknowledgements

Editor: Sandra Bender
Translation: Traduction Socrate

Graphics & Layout: Phoenix Graphics
Printer: Reportex Copy Centre Inc.

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Get a Band to show
you want to help

Make Poverty History



A simple **White Band** is the symbol of the **Make Poverty History** campaign.
Wear one and be a part of a unique worldwide effort in 2005 to end extreme poverty.
Wearing the **White Band** in 2005 is about sending a message that you want poverty to be stopped.
With any donation of **\$5** or more we will mail you the **Make Poverty History** band.

NAPO! Yes! I want to support NAPO and the **ONAP!** "Make Poverty History" Campaign

Enclosed please find a cheque payable to
the "National anti-Poverty Organization"

Please bill my



Card Number _____ Expiry Date _____

Signature _____

Telephone # _____

Email _____

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Our youth are our future!

Along with our involvement in the Make Poverty History Campaign (MPH), the National Anti-Poverty Organization is developing a Youth Poverty Initiative that seeks to engage youth in doing research, telling their stories through theatre, video and interactive web site, developing popular education and campaign resources and taking action on youth poverty. We want to achieve some meaningful progress on at least two issues that would help to reduce youth poverty such as raising minimum wages, capping and reducing post secondary education tuition and easing young workers' access to Employment Insurance. Our efforts will be linked to the MPH campaign and will involve young people from labour, faith, social justice and community groups as well as high schools and Friendship Centres across the country. We will launch the campaign in the fall of 2005. Below are some of the objectives for which we hope to see progress on.

What can be done about youth poverty?

- Raise the minimum wage across the country to at least \$10 an hour and reinstitute the federal minimum wage.
- Ease restrictions on access to EI, including number of hours required to qualify.
- End discriminatory social assistance policies and raise social assistance rates to at least the poverty line.

- Lower tuition fees and reinstitute a grants program to replace or augment the current student loan program.
- Develop a national job strategy that includes youth and creates full time, stable and adequately paid jobs.
- End the claw back of the National Child Benefit Supplement for young families receiving social assistance benefits.
- Implement and adequately fund programs that help immigrant, visible minority, Aboriginal and disabled youth access adequate employment.

You can contact the NAPO office (613 789-0096 or 1 800 810-1076) for more information on the initiative. If you are between the ages of 15-24, why not join the campaign and make your voice heard!

Did you know...

- In 1980, close to 31% of all households where the head of the household was under the age of 25 were living in poverty. This number increased to 43% by 2002.
- 44% of poor families in 2001 had at least one family member who worked 910 hours in the year.

from The Current State of Canadian Family Finances – 2004 Report by the Vanier Institute of the Family and The Economy by the Canadian Labour Congress,

We Can Make Child Poverty History in Canada

By Dennis Howlett

On November 24, 1989, Canada's House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution stating that: "This House seeks to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000." More than fifteen years later, and five years after the deadline of 2000, what has happened?



- One in six Canadian children remain poor.
- Canada's child poverty rate of 15 percent is three times as high as the rates of Sweden, Norway or Finland.
- Every month, 770,000 people in Canada use food banks. Forty percent of those relying on food banks are children.

These statistics point to a betrayal of Canada's children. What makes the persistence of child poverty all the more disturbing is that Canada is a rich country, a country that ranked fourth in the world on the 2004 UN Human Development Index.

In the midst of wealth, almost 5 million Canadians live in poverty. Poverty is *increasing* for youth, workers, young families and immigrant and visible minority groups. Poverty among Aboriginal groups remains appallingly high both on and off reserve. In fact, if the statistics for Canadian Aboriginal people were viewed separately from those of the rest of the country, Canada's Aboriginal people would slip to 78th on the UN Human Development Index – the ranking currently held by Kazakhstan.

Canada needs to support the objective of the Millennium Development Goals for global poverty reduction, but if we are to have any integrity we also need to work at achieving poverty reduction at home. The national platform of the Make Poverty History campaign in Canada puts forward achievable demands that would make a significant contribution to "making poverty history" – globally and in Canada.

What needs to be done

We can achieve the elimination of child poverty in Canada within five years if we:

- 1) expand affordable housing;
- 2) build a universally accessible child care system;
- 3) raise minimum wages and increase the availability of good jobs and living wages; and
- 4) increase the Child Tax Benefit to \$4,900 per child, per year and ensure that all low-income children receive the full benefit of this program.

There are encouraging developments on the first three measures, however, to achieve an end to child poverty in Canada, we also need action on the fourth key measure – the Child Tax Benefit. That is why the **Make Poverty History** campaign in Canada included this as one of its demands. The federal government has committed to gradually increasing the Child Tax Benefit to \$3,240 by 2007.

While the current program has made a positive difference in the depth of poverty of working poor families, benefit levels are not sufficient to help children and families *escape* poverty. The benefit is also denied to children and families who receive social assistance in most provinces, as the Child Tax Benefit amount is "clawed back" in the form of lower social assistance benefits. We need to end the clawback that effectively denies this important benefit to children whose families receive social assistance.

Raising the level of the Child Tax Benefit to \$4,900 per child per year would likely cost \$7 or \$8 billion when fully implemented. It would be a vital investment in Canada's future.

Ending child and family poverty is an important first step. But ultimately we need to find a way to ensure that no one is poor. Eliminating poverty in Canada is an achievable goal. We can all make it happen. This is the year to take action.

For more information and to sign on to the **Make Poverty History** campaign, go to: www.makepovertyhistory.ca

Poverty and Canada's Children continued from page 1

- OECD countries devoting 10 percent or more of GDP to social transfers (such as unemployment insurance, social assistance) have child poverty rates of less than 10%. Countries devoting less than 5% of GDP to these transfers have child poverty rates greater than 15%.
- Many OECD countries including Canada have the potential to reduce child poverty without significant increases in spending because child poverty rates partially depend on how funds are allocated.

*The full report *Child Poverty in Rich Countries 2005* (Report Card No. 6) written by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre can be found at the UNICEF web site www.unicef.org/irc

So much for those welfare-to-work “reforms”

Welfare reforms have made no substantial difference to the development of Canadian pre-school children living in poverty, according to a new University of Alberta study by Dr. Deanna Williamson, professor of human ecology.

The study also showed that the school readiness of pre-school children living in poverty did not improve at all after the introduction of welfare reforms in the mid-1990s. According to Dr. Williamson this “suggests that mandatory welfare-to-work initiatives that were implemented are not sufficient to improve the development of these children. Poverty itself matters at least as much as the parents’ source of income.”

Williamson’s study, based on data collected in 1994/95 and 1998/99 as part of Statistics Canada’s

National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, showed that both before and after mandatory welfare-to-work programs were introduced in Canada in the mid-1990s, pre-school children in poverty, regardless of their parents’ income source, had lower school-readiness scores than peers who lived above the poverty line.

Williamson says government social policies have to focus on more than getting people off welfare. “There is a lot of room for improvement in other factors that contribute to poverty, such as very low social assistance incomes and inadequate minimum wages. Until social policies lead to significant reductions in family poverty, it is unlikely that lives of Canadian children in poverty will improve.”

from DAWN Ontario: DisAbled Women’s Network web site

Resources

There’s help for women navigating the BC welfare system...



The Vancouver Status of Women’s **Welfare Resource Guide for Women** (2nd Edition) provides updated general information to women about British Columbia’s welfare system or Employment and Assistance Regulations within a feminist framework. It is meant to help women apply for welfare, disability, and child benefits, and offers guidance in application or appeal processes. The Guide focuses on the needs of single mothers.

For low-income women there is no charge for the Guide. For community organizations, the Guide is available for \$5-\$14 per guide based on a sliding scale plus shipping. To order a copy contact Julie Ham via email: womencentre@vsw.ca or by phone: 604-255-6554.

...and for seniors grappling with federal benefits programs...

If you are a senior, you might be eligible for financial benefits from the Government of Canada. You, or someone you know, may qualify for:

- **The Canada Pension Plan (CPP) retirement pension.** The CPP retirement pension is a monthly benefit paid to people who have contributed to the Canada Pension Plan.
- **The Old Age Security (OAS) pension.** This benefit is available to almost every senior in

Canada who is 65 or older and meets the residence requirements. Generally, to receive an OAS pension in Canada, a minimum of 10 years residence in Canada after the age of 18 is required.

- **The Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS).** Pensioners who have little income other than the OAS pension may be eligible to receive this additional tax-free benefit.
- **The Allowance.** If you are a low-income spouse/common-law partner of a GIS recipient, are between the ages of 60 and 64, and meet the residence requirements, you may qualify for this tax-free benefit.
- **The Allowance for the survivor.** If you are a low-income widowed spouse/common-law partner between the ages of 60 and 64, and meet the residence requirements, you may qualify for this tax-free benefit.

The amount of GIS, the Allowance, and the Allowance for the survivor is based on income and marital status. If you did not qualify in the past, you could be eligible now if your income has dropped.

You must apply to receive these benefits.

To find out more about Old Age Security programs and the Canada Pension Plan, visit www.sdc.gc.ca or call Social Development Canada free of charge:

1 800 277-9914 English

1 800 277-9915 French

 TTY: 1 800 255-4786