

An open letter to Canada's federal political party leaders

Hunger an unacceptable and solvable problem

In the run-up to the October 14 federal election, there has been little mention of one of Canada's most unacceptable problems – hunger. Though the economy is near the top of the list of issues Canadians care about, no party leader has addressed the fact that more than 720,000 Canadians are assisted by food banks every month, or that 2.7 million Canadians live in households where hunger is a daily and distressing reality.

A recent CBC/Environics survey found that 37% of Canadians are worried about being able to make ends meet. They have good reason to worry. Downturns in Canada's manufacturing and forestry sectors have kept food banks busy, particularly in hard-hit areas like Windsor, Thunder Bay, northern Quebec and western Alberta. According to recently-released Statistics Canada data, 247,000 manufacturing jobs were lost between 2004 and 2007. In the past year alone, employment in the forestry sector has plummeted by 15%. We are hearing that many former manufacturing and forestry workers are making do with part-time, temporary or seasonal employment, and find themselves unable to access Employment Insurance when they can't find work – and thus look to food banks to help put food on their tables.

Hunger is not limited to households in regions that have seen economic downturns. Though we hear about the thriving energy and resource development sectors in our western provinces, many in the west are being left behind. Economic growth has brought with it rising costs of housing, gas, heating oil and food. It is too often the case that those who have moved west to find prosperity quickly discover that their most pressing need is to find a food bank.

After several years of economic growth, it is now crystal clear that a rising tide does not lift all boats. On a daily basis, Canadians struggle with hunger. This problem has been plaguing our country for almost three decades. To properly address it, we need federal party leaders to provide visionary leadership,

focused into a realistic and actionable national poverty reduction strategy. Though it touches many, hunger is too often a problem that goes unvoiced. Our leaders must face up to the problem and join the search for solutions.

For more information, please contact:

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The Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) is a national charitable organization representing the food bank community across Canada. Over 720,000 people access food banks each month - 39% are children. CAFB conducts research, engages in public education and advocates for public policy change to eliminate the causes of hunger in Canada. In 2007, the CAFB acquired and shared 8 million pounds of food industry donations through its National Food Sharing System for hungry Canadians.