

ISARC

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

"Faith Communities In Action Against Poverty"

ISARC e-Newsletter, October 2009

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Emailing, as opposed to mailing, saves us time and resources, and allows you to use the various links we put in the e-newsletter version.

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If you do not have access to email or would prefer to receive a paper version of our e-newsletter, we are happy to continue sending it to you in this way.



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ISARC Multifaith Forum – October 29

Faith Communities and Advocacy with Governments

10:00 - 2:00 on Thursday, October 29, at Wilfred Laurier University
(Paul Martin Centre - www.wlu.ca/maps/martin.php)

Cost is \$25 and includes lunch. You must register before October 22.
Space is limited.



Register by email: www.isarc.ca/multifaithforumOct09.html.

Religious leaders, as part of a circle, will describe and discuss how their faith communities see advocacy with government. They will include: Rabbi Yosil Rosensweig, Beth Jacob Synagogue; Idrisa Pandit, Muslim Service Society; Deba Mitra Bhikku, Buddhist monk; The Rev. Jessica P. Rodela, First Unitarian Church Waterloo; and, The Rev. Dr. David Pfrimmer, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. Other participants will listen. After a break, all will participate in small groups and discuss what they heard and how they see advocacy with governments.

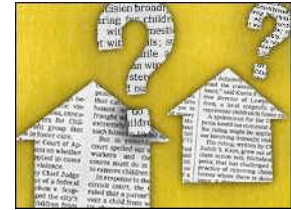
10:00	Welcome and opening prayer(s)
10:30	Religious leaders describe and discuss how their faith communities see advocacy with the government. Other participants will listen.
Noon	Lunch
1:00	All will participate in small groups and discuss what they heard and how they see advocacy with governments.
2:00	Benediction and Closing

ISARC Religious Leaders' Forum – November 5

Affordable Housing

9:30 - 3:00 on Thursday, November 5, at Queen's Park in Toronto –
Rooms 228-230

Cost is \$40 and includes lunch. You must register before October 29.
Space is limited.



Register by email: www.isarc.ca/religiousleadersforumNov09.html.

All Members of the Provincial Parliament (MPP) will also be invited as our guests for lunch. Contact your MPP to say you are attending. Perhaps you can meet him or her at noon?

9:30	Welcome and opening prayer(s)
10:00	Presentation looking at a difficult affordable housing scenario - Brice Balmer, ISARC Panel of tenants – cooperative, multifaith housing, Streets to Homes
Noon	Lunch
1:00	Up-date on Housing Network of Ontario & Resolution to Ontario Government - Brian Eng from the Wellesley Institute and the Affordable Housing Network Becoming visionary as we tackle affordable housing - Harvey Cooper from the Cooperative Housing Association - Sherad Kerur from the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association
3:00	Benediction and Closing

ISARC Social Audit by Alexandra Béasse

Alexandra is a Master's Social Work student from Yeshiva University completing her field placement with ISARC. She will be assisting with the social audit and ensuring the voices of people living in poverty in rural communities are heard. Alex has a passion for working in rural communities, promoting social justice, and increasing community capacity. Her history includes working in the areas of violence prevention, mental health, and advocacy for persons living on the margins of society. Alex resides with her family in Huron County.

How do we measure the effects of poverty? Why is it important to hear from people living in poverty? How do we evaluate the impact of the current Ontario Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy? Why is the progress of our society's response to poverty relevant for our faith communities? These are just some of the questions that ISARC will be seeking to answer as it conducts its social audit across the province in the spring of 2010.



Just as a financial audit is an independent review of the financial statements to determine whether or not those financial statements are relevant, accurate, complete, and fairly presented, a social audit is a process of communicating the social effects of government policies and actions towards a particular group and society as a whole.

ISARC has a strong history of conducting social audits regarding government policies and practices towards people living in poverty in Ontario. These efforts have resulted in four reports: Neighbour to Neighbour (1991), Our Neighbours' Voices: Will We Listen? (1998), Lives in the Balance (2004), and Lives Still in the Balance (2007). These books contained stories of people's lived experiences of poverty, an analysis of the effects of government policy as it relates to poverty, and the need to advocate for the most vulnerable of our neighbours.

In their 2007 election platform, the Ontario Liberals promised a Social Assistance Review and an Ontario Child Poverty Reduction Strategy. While some progress has been made with the introduction of the Ontario Child Benefit, the Ontario Child Poverty Strategy, and the increase in minimum wage, without a social audit there is no way to measure the effectiveness of their impact for people living in poverty. A Social Audit will provide a tangible way of learning directly from those whose lives are affected by poverty: children, parents, persons with disabilities, working poor, new Canadians, and single adults.

Through working together with members from the Social Planning Network of Ontario, ISARC and its faith leaders will have the opportunity to host hearings in their communities and hear first hand from people who are touched by poverty. ISARC will provide leadership, tools, training and other supports to ensure the integrity and consistency of the social audit process across the province.

Using the outcome from this audit, ISARC will further its efforts to advocate for real change that will improve the dignity of people living in poverty. And, in doing so, faith communities will be provided with practical information to assist them in fulfilling their mandates to reach out and empower the most vulnerable in our society. As we look ahead to a provincial election in 2011, the Social Audit will provide a way to increase pressure on MPPS and political candidates to make poverty elimination even more prominent in the current provincial government agenda and to have poverty elimination on the election platform for their parties.

Do the Math. What Kind Of Life Can You Afford On Social Assistance?

Do the Math (<http://dothemath.thestop.org/>) to find out if the rates add up with an interactive budgeting exercise.

Then contact your MPP and encourage him or her to also Do the Math. How much do they think it costs to live? How much do they think social assistance and minimum wage should increase? How would they or their family survive on social assistance?



Poverty Watch Ontario (www.povertywatchontario.ca) reports that,

“More than 1,700 people have completed the survey since it launched in June 2009, and results show that even the most frugal estimates fall far short of what people receive on Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Highlights from the survey:

- The average total amount needed to live each month was estimated at \$1,430 (compared to \$572 current rate for OW recipients),
- 83% of those surveyed believe that a single person in Ontario needs more than \$1,020 to live each month (the current single monthly rate for ODSP),
- Average cost of monthly shelter was estimated at \$624 (compared to the \$349 provided for OW recipients and \$445 for ODSP recipients),
- The average cost of food each month for a single person was estimated at \$260 (compared to the Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket data provided by public health agencies that estimates the average monthly amount needed to purchase healthy food each month is \$209.55),
- 69% of respondents indicated that having Internet access was a necessary expense,
- 57% of respondents earned over \$30,000 per year,
- 14% of respondents are on OW or ODSP.”

Increase social assistance to put food in the budget

In an article in the October 12 edition of the Toronto Star entitled, “Increase social assistance to put food in the budget” (www.thestar.com/comment/article/708337), Nick Saul, Executive Director of The Stop Community Food Centre, and Janet Gasparini, Chair of the Social Planning Network of Ontario, write that, “Thanksgiving marks the beginning of the season of food drives, the perennial call to ‘feed the hungry’ over the winter holiday season. We need something better this year than a good crop of canned tuna and peanut butter”.



Did you pause and imagine this Thanksgiving?

In the October 8 edition of the Toronto Star, a large ad about hunger in Ontario, entitled "This Thanksgiving, pause and imagine" was featured (www.toronto.anglican.ca/images/Poverty_ad_2009.pdf). Written as a letter from Bishop Colin Johnson (Anglican Diocese of Toronto), the ad endorsed the \$100/month Healthy Food Supplement campaign, encouraged readers to contact the Premier in support of this campaign and to "Do the Math".

HST Neutral for the Poor

As many social advocates reviewed the 2009 Ontario Government budget with the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) in March, there was great fear that families with lower incomes would face additional taxes on fuel oil, gas, utilities, and other necessities. Analysis is now revealing that the HST will have little effect on people with the lowest incomes and they may in fact have a slight increase in income. Watch the media as various groups analyze the HST! It will probably be a significant issue in the 2011 Provincial Election.

Adult Dental Plan through Community Health Centres

Rumours last month indicated the Provincial Government was not funding the \$45 million adult dental program promised last year. Instead some money would be going to children and youth. After discussions with provincial government officials, we have learned that all the monies will flow through Community Health Centres and most will be used for adults. The government is planning to combine several children's dental programs with this new money into one ministry with the rationale that it would be less complicated for patients and children. Watch for announcements and dental programs coming into your community.

Child Care and Kindergarten

Many municipalities are facing a cutback in subsidized childcare unless funded locally, which means more burden on the property tax. Subsidized childcare has been precarious since Prime Minister Harper cancelled the federal childcare program launched by Prime Minister Paul Martin. The Conservative Government's alternative was \$100 per month per child, which was a fraction of the cost of quality childcare. There was no attempt to regulate childcare so that children were well prepared for kindergarten and elementary school.

ISARC supported Charles Pascal's early learning report, *With Our Best Future in Mind*, (www.ontario.ca/en/initiatives/early_learning/ONT06_018865) now being discussed by the Ontario Liberal Government to have junior and senior kindergarten all day with a solid early childhood education component. This would have teachers working with early childhood educators. Some childcare advocates are concerned whether Pascal's proposal will be approved and whether it will be phased in with the least possible harm to day care centres.

Removing 4 year olds from day care changes the staffing patterns, leaving younger children with a higher ratio of adults to children. How much will rates rise? Will some day care centres be financially impossible to operate? Announcements are expected soon on the Pascal report and how it will be phased in.

Why don't we want the poor to own anything?

On Wednesday, October 21st, 2009 at 1 p.m. at St. Christopher House in Toronto, Metcalf Innovation Fellow John Stapleton will be launching a new report entitled: *Why don't we want the poor to own anything? Our relentless social policy journey toward destitution for the 900,000 poorest people in Ontario*. Go to www.metcalffoundation.com for more information.

Campaign 2000 – November 24 day of action

What are you doing to mark November 24, 2009?

It's been two decades since the House of Commons unanimously resolved to end child and family poverty in Canada in 1989.

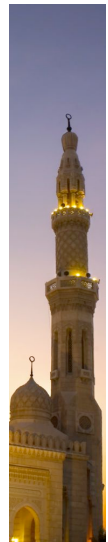


Join Campaign 2000 for a day of action on November 24th:

- To show public support to eradicate child and family poverty;
- To get media attention to the problem of family poverty, especially in these tough economic times, and the actions needed from our government leaders to move toward a poverty-free Canada

Go to Campaign 2000 (www.oasw.org/en/membersite/pdfs/Campaign2000-Nov24-SuggestedCommunityActions.pdf) for suggestions for community action and mobilization.

Our diverse religious traditions have different approaches to how we pray for our politicians and government. This new series explores the question from the perspective of our various religious communities. This response is from a Muslim perspective.



How Do We Pray For Our Politicians and Government? – A Muslim Perspective

By Imam Shafiq Hudda of the Islamic Humanitarian Service (www.al-haqq.com)

"O our Lord and Master. Grant our leaders the wisdom to serve the community (Ummah) to the best of their ability, wholeheartedly and sincerely. Let them have the foresight to make decisions without selfish motive, the end of which will be the benefit of the entire society. Let them be just and honest in all their dealings."

We pray for our political leaders because they have the responsibility to serve the community. They were elected/selected to this position and have to regard it as a trust from the Almighty Creator. Imam Ali, the cousin of Prophet Muhammad, wrote a beautiful treatise in which he elaborates upon this responsibility. He instructs his Governors on how to behave, how to treat their fellow human beings, how each level of the government should function, and what should be the qualities of individuals appointed to the various ministries.

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