



Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

"Faith Communities In Action Against Poverty"

News Release – June 7, 2010

Resolution to Eliminate Poverty in Ontario

Since February 2010, faith and civic leaders have been listening to the voices of people with low incomes in 25 community hearings on poverty across Ontario. This dynamic grassroots process – called the Social Audit – allowed the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) to assess how programs to relieve poverty are impacting people with low incomes as well as municipal governments and non-profit community organizations.

A full day forum on June 2, 2010, brought together faith leaders and social audit participants to compare notes from the local audits. During the forum the 130 participants unanimously approved a *Resolution to Eliminate Poverty in Ontario*. It can be found at:

<http://isarc.ca/archives/ResolutionJune2.pdf>.

Poverty persists in Ontario and is very destructive to individuals and families. Youth who would like to finish high school and go to university or college are hampered when they or their parents need to pay fees for chemistry, physics, physical education, and other classes. One example is a youth who made the high school basketball team and his mother who then had to cut back on the food budget to pay for the \$60 uniform. There is little communication at the schools about grants that can cover these fees. Parents are worried about their children who feel stigmatized when they cannot go on school trips, participate in school activities, and have access to computers like children from affluent families. How does one pay school fees when there is insufficient money for housing and nutritious food?

The June 2 forum participants heard from a Member of the Provincial Parliament from each of the three parties. All indicated how they worked to relieve or eliminate poverty. While appreciating the work of the provincial politicians, much more needs to be done and the elimination of poverty needed to be a higher priority for governments.

Today “new poor” who have lost jobs in the recession have had to use up all their assets before receiving Ontario Works. “I never thought my family would need welfare.” Another said, “I gave to the food bank. I didn’t think that I would need a hamper or soup kitchen.” If they are now 45 years old and without any assets, will they not be poor for the rest of their lives?

Dental care has long been an issue for adults with low incomes. In one community, a participant reported that his dentures came from a person who died. He is not alone. Others have found this way of obtaining teeth.

In one local audit, several women reported they went downtown and felt that they were back in the third world country they came from when they saw the homeless. “Why should there be people homeless in a rich country like Canada?” they asked.

ISARC is compiling the reports from the local audits into a provincial social audit book called Persistent Poverty: Dispatches from the Margins, which will be published by Between the Lines in October 2010. It will be a resource as faith communities, social justice organizations, and communities work to eliminate poverty and prepare for up-coming provincial and federal elections.

Why is there such poverty in a province as wealthy as Ontario?

ISARC has provided a religious voice for Ontario’s marginalized people for 24 years.

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To read about ISARC’s 2010 Social Audit go to:

<http://isarc.ca/socialaudit2010.html>.

To read about The Social Audit in the Media go to:

<http://www.isarc.ca/socialaudit2010.html#media>.

