

## **Speaking Points: National Hunger Awareness Day**

### **Food Banks Canada: June 02, 2009**

- Good Morning Everyone --- I am truly humbled and grateful to be invited to be here with you this morning
- Humbled but also troubled.....actually really frustrated that today in this time in this great country, as a country as extraordinary and as generously endowed as Canada, we are coming together you talk about and bring profile to the issue of hunger....its really hard to fathom
- Hunger, poverty and isolation persisting and in so many ways deepening in Canada...
- How has this... and more importantly.... why have we allowed this issue to grow? WHY? Or do we feel powerless against the weight of this issue?
- Have we given up? Have we truly become complacent? Accepting?
- Have we decided that it is okay for children in Canada to go to school without breakfast, to hide during lunch so that no one will see they have nothing to eat? To go home at the end of the day uncertain as to whether there will be a meal for them?
- That after years of raising their families, working and contributing to their communities their country that it is okay for seniors to go without? To make choices between paying rent, heating or groceries....where is the dignity in that?

- That our shared Aboriginal heritage is not something to celebrate --- that the reality for so many their heritage is a life sentence to live in catastrophic poverty, conditions that rival developing countries ---- isolation, discrimination and hunger are simply regarded as a fault ---- not a symptom of discrimination --- when we all intuitively know it is infact discriminatory
- That after fleeing persecution, war, torture and coming to Canada that going hungry is just part of settling into Canadian Society?
- Is this what we're saying?? Is this our Canada??
- Many Canadians today are experiencing the impact of financial and environmental systems that have failed to recognize their limitations – and their responsibilities – and now we are all now paying the price.
- But let me be clear, well before the economy turned sour, generations of Canadians have been experiencing these systemic shortcomings, we all understand that what is happening today is very different --- but for those who are vulnerable today's conditions simply serve to compound
- Today, Far more Canadians than ever are faced with the hard and humiliating reality that they need a hand up, a buffer and that the systems that they believed were going to catch them when they fall are witnessing firsthand the system can feel like a maze, fraught with many traps that seem designed to keep them from prospering and getting to the other side --- and these are the program we've all been paying for ----the myths, the programs that we hold up as part of Canadian fabric --- universal health care the rich quilt of social programs

- A quilt??
- Now listen, I am not remotely crafty, can barely sew a button, but I know what a quilt looks like and I understand that its sole purpose is to comfort, shelter, stand the tests of life ---be handed down to other generations so that they have it in times when they need comfort
- Yes indeed Canadian myths --- our social systems have shifted into a worst case scenario structure --- health care, corrections, justice have become the catch all instead of the exception
- But there are beacons of hope....
- AND this is where the important role of the 450 Food Banks across Canada come in ---they are often the one place that they can count on---no hoops, barriers, mazes, or judgment ---they emerged over 26 years ago --- a temporary measure at an extraordinary time of need --- never meant to address in inadequacies of Canada's social infrastructure
- In the din of daily media reports, it would be easy to buy into the message that it's time to hunker down, ask for less, and expect less. That now is the worst time to invest in the necessary infrastructure to build health thriving communities --- that this is simply about systems and not people --- the system is lead by people for people ---- its all about people
- The this is just a blip --- or a recession --- an economic cycles --- ride it out we'll be on the upside by the fall --- if we buy this, we are falling into the trap---losing sight that in this crisis there is an opportunity---the possibility of a fundamental rethink

- AND the evidence is clear: economic prosperity and social development are inextricably connected. Without social development, economic development creates a recession of another kind – a social recession that is far harder to overcome because it compounds economic hardships, delays prosperity, and ultimately tears apart communities.
- Now as I reflect on what I've said so far this morning --- and I do appreciate your listening --- I recognize that I have been venting and thanks for that, I feel so much better
- I have to say that despite my negative rant, I am an optimist, I've always believed in the art of the possible, that in coming together as communities we can build boundless change --- create positive ripples in our world
- So much of this is reflected in the great work of Food Banks across Canada --- They emerged at a time of unprecedented need ----recognized of a troubling social trend --- created a clear mission----acting/delivering/building capacity in partnership----not buying into siloed structures---being a buffer when all else fails---and advocacy that if successful takes puts them out of business
- Now that's leadership ---- that's the kind of leadership we need, let's face it, random acts of kindness, philanthropy or linear government funding ----while critical in building needed capacity will not bring about the sustained scale of change that is required in this time ---
- We must accept and acknowledge and act on our shared obligations as members of our community

- I am calling for profound change --- a critical rethink --- moving back to the fundamentals of community --- walking across the street to check on an elderly neighbor who you know is struggling over a long cold winter and doing what you can to give a hand up ---- recognizing that people should never go hungry --- and they are not only hungry during the holidays
- What I am calling for is a long vision ---- the promise of Canada
- I believe opportunities are boundless when the systems, structures and processes are buttressed by community action --- where we push back against counter intuitive policies and processes --- where we own our part in success and in failure and we act --- that we throw out the myths and demand better
- Imagine what we could do if we all looked at our individual success as something that must be shared in order to have real value. We must stop talking to ourselves --- and bring our message out to the broader communities --- demand better ---
- Imagine if we pushed for thoughtful meaningful dialogue about the future of this great country. A long vision, a hopeful vision
- Imagine, if we ceased and took control of our shared power for positive change?
- Let's imagine, believe and act again for the public good....