

## Concept Note

## Policy Roundtable

**Reclaiming the Commons:  
Promoting a North/South Agenda for Environmental Justice**

January 14, 2009

Ottawa, Canada: 435 Albert St.

The Albert at Bay Suite Hotel

**Summary**

A one-day policy roundtable will be organized in mid-January in Ottawa for CCIC members and key allies to discuss and profile key issues in environmental justice and international co-operation. The roundtable will feature Southern speakers as well as CCIC members in panel presentations and plenary discussions. The day is intended to be a learning opportunity for the membership and CCIC to better understand Southern perspectives on environmental justice, a chance for members to share their work and perspectives on this theme, and a means for CCIC to further develop its policy agenda and build a public narrative for environmental justice through its existing policy streams.

**Purpose**

1. To engage CCIC members in discussion of important environmental dimensions of our policy agenda to reduce poverty, and promote human rights and global justice.
2. To understand Southern perspectives and priorities on environmental justice, and have these inform CCIC policies for global economic justice, peacebuilding and Canadian international assistance.
3. To contribute to the elaboration of CCIC's policy agenda and public narrative on environmental justice issues.
4. To generate momentum in our sector for an agenda for environmental justice.

**Background and Rationale**

CCIC has recently launched its new *Canadian 10 Point Agenda for Global Action to End Poverty and Injustice*. The Agenda reflects current trends and challenges in global issues and the sector's vision for how Canada can play a role in policy and practice in ten key areas for global justice. The Agenda's ten points are grounded in the universal human struggle to promote and claim human rights, in particular the rights of women and girls, which are at the core of struggles against poverty and injustice worldwide. *Point 7 of the Agenda, "Promote Global Environmental Justice"* identifies the need for a holistic environmental justice perspective in our work. The *Agenda's* recommendations for government and civil society organizations are a starting point upon which to elaborate a common agenda and capture the breadth of member work on the issues. The January Policy Roundtable will help CCIC identify, with members and Southern partners, how we

can best respond to environmental injustice in the context of the current priorities of the membership and in the different policy areas to which CCIC relates.

Environmental injustices occur when vulnerable or marginalized people and groups suffer disproportionately from human rights violations or are denied access to benefits, resources, decision-making or justice as a result of environmental factors. Diverted water resources, food shortages and rising prices, sinking small islands, threatened Arctic lifestyles, small farmer vulnerability, infrastructure woes in poverty stricken areas least responsible for climate change, among others, all pose a profound threat to development and the fulfillment of basic human rights. Yet rarely have environmental or development policies paid attention to these unequal impacts on the poor where they live.

An environmental justice perspective encompasses democratic development, sustainable agricultural practices, holistic approaches to healthy environments, and effective community development strategies in ways that deal with the full range of vulnerabilities facing poor and marginalized people.

The urgency of this issue is gathering momentum. Environmental justice advocates, social movements, development organizations, environmental groups, government, international agencies and UN fora, among others, are vying to influence public policy directions on the environment, which has become a key issue on the minds of Canadians today. Many of those calling for environmental justice argue that industrialized countries owe a debt to the countries and people of the South for decades of resource plundering, destroyed biodiversity, waste dumping and actions that promoted climate change. They demand those responsible for environmental damage repay their ecological debt.

The year 2008 saw the emergence of a new food crisis and growing attention being paid to the interface between sustainable agriculture, land and water rights, food systems, and climate change. Mining corporations continue to exploit natural resources in developing countries with little regulation, reaping benefits while local communities are left to face the consequences of environmental degradation. Social inequalities and gender disparity exacerbate the effects of natural disaster, raising the importance of the need for more complex assessments of vulnerability in the context of the environmental concerns and their implication for humanitarian response. The year 2008 also saw Resolutions passed on Human Rights and Climate Change at the UN Human Rights Council and at the regional Organization of American States, which speak to the overwhelming urgency of the issue of climate change impacts on human rights and the undeniable need to reach an ambitious, just and globally equitable post-2012 agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Canadian CSO community must be engaged and increasingly able to offer credible comment on the environmental implications on issues important to the struggle for global justice. More specifically, as development organizations, CCIC members must be prepared to clarify, showcase and respond to Southern CSO perspectives on environmentally sustainable and just approaches to ending poverty. As a sector, we must seek out opportunities to discuss the “justice agenda” in relation to the environment, such

as upcoming meetings of the UNFCCC in Poland in December, and in Copenhagen in 2009.

These are some of the issues that will be explored further in the one day Roundtable.

### **Inputs**

Briefing papers of approximately 4 -5 pages each will be developed and finalized by the CCIC Policy Team by mid October on three themes:

- The UNFCCC and North-South Funding issues (including a focus on Adaptation funding)
- Environmental Justice, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance
- Environmental Justice and the Corporate Growth Model (with illustrations from the extractives experience and/or the food crisis)

The papers will serve as a resource and background information for the Roundtable, an orientation to the emerging environmental justice agenda for CCIC, and for discussion and debate at the Roundtable.