

Canadian Food Security Policy Group

21 April 2009

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON
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*c/o Canadian
Foodgrains Bank, P.O.
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*Canadian Catholic
Organization for
Development and
Peace*

*Canadian Council for
International Co-
operation*

*Canadian Foodgrains
Bank*

CARE Canada

*CHF – partners in
rural development*

ETC Group

*Farm Radio
International*

Food Secure Canada

Inter Pares

*Mennonite Central
Committee Canada*

*National Farmers
Union*

Oxfam Canada

Plan Canada

*United Church of
Canada*

*UPA Développement
international*

USC Canada

World Vision Canada

Dear Prime Minister,

The Food Security Policy Group would like to reiterate our congratulations to the Canadian government for its swift response toward meeting the immediate needs of those most affected by the global food price crisis. The April 2008 announcement of an additional \$50 million for food assistance and the untying of all future food aid were very positive steps in addressing the immediate needs of those affected by the food crisis in the short-term.

Recent events, however, including the rapid onset of the global economic crisis, underscore the urgent need for the Government of Canada to build on its good work in this area to address the fundamental causes of the global food crisis in a more comprehensive way. We therefore urge your government to fulfill its promise to deliver a whole-of-government strategy to address the global food crisis in the medium- to long-term, based on the fundamental principle that access to adequate and nutritious food is a basic human right for all men, women, and children.

The Food Security Policy Group is a coalition of Canadian development organizations and farmers' groups promoting approaches to development and international trade that protect and enhance livelihoods and food/nutrition security for poor men, women and children in developing countries. We believe that Canada has an obligation to support the progressive realization of the right to food, both at home and abroad. We also believe many Canadians are deeply concerned about food insecurity and poverty in the world.

In 2008, the rapid rise in food prices led to significant hardship and social unrest in dozens of countries across the world. In addition to the food crisis, developing countries are now suffering enormously from the global economic crisis. Slowdowns in the economy of wealthy nations have rapidly led to reduced demand for manufactured products (many from factories in the South) and shrinking remittances (from Southerners working in Northern countries). A recent report from the World Bank (*Swimming Against the Tide*, March 8th 2009) stressed that "Falling real wages and employment impede households' ability to provide adequate food and necessities particularly given their already stretched coping mechanisms from the 2008 food and fuel crises". Estimates are that an additional 46 million people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty in 2009 alone.

The Food Security Policy Group is a coalition of Canadian international development and civil society organizations seeking to promote policies and actions that protect and enhance food security in developing countries, based on decades of working in these sectors with partners in developing countries.

In 2008, the government demonstrated a commitment to reducing global food insecurity through your call for an Interdepartmental Task Force to chart Canada's way forward on this issue. The Minister of International Cooperation also committed to "...working with the international donor community to find a longer-term approach to food aid, including the question of food security." (April 2008). Internationally, at the 2008 G8 Summit, the Canadian government signed on to a Statement on Global Food Security which expressed a deep concern over the steep rise in global food prices and committed signatories to support food aid, nutrition interventions, social protection activities, and measures to increase agriculture output.

These commitments by the government built upon momentum created in 2007 by an all-party resolution of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. The resolution recommended that "... the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) establish agriculture as a priority sector using the strategies and policies developed in the CIDA policy document entitled 'Promoting Sustainable Rural Development' focusing on sustainability and the reduction of poverty and hunger." In addition, the Overseas Development Assistance Accountability Act, passed by Parliament in 2008, further obligates the government to make poverty reduction, consistent with international human rights standards, a focus of its overseas development programmes.

To follow-up on these commitments, the Food Security Policy Group asks the government of Canada to urgently complete the work of the Interdepartmental Task Force and deliver a comprehensive whole-of-government strategy on food security. Given the complex nature of the solutions required, the strategy should include an important role for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), but not be limited to that department alone.

Specifically, the Food Security Policy Group asks that such a strategy:

1. Designate agriculture and rural development as a priority sector for CIDA.
2. Strengthen the resilience of those hardest hit by the combined effects of the economic, climate and food crises to successfully adapt to current volatility. In particular, CIDA's new priority should focus on providing support to rural men and women to sustainably strengthen their livelihoods; improve food and nutrition security; and build their capacity to adapt to climate change.
3. Strengthen the rights and participation of rural women in all interventions supported.
4. Ensure that Canada continues to meet its obligations under the Food Aid Convention.
5. Continue Canada's political commitment to reform of the Multilateral Food/Agriculture Institutions [United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nation World Food Programme(WFP), International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD), Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)] in order to improve their relevance to small holder agriculture and rural development. Specific measures would include support for an enlarged UN/FAO Committee on World Food Security to harmonize the work of those institutions.
6. Promote international trade rules and loan conditions that allow developing countries' governments to support sustainable local food production and protect small-holder producers and consumers from price volatility and unfair trade.

We urge the government of Canada to play a leading role on these issues at upcoming opportunities such as: the G8 meeting of Agricultural Ministers, the G8 meeting of Development Ministers, and the G8 Leader's Summit at La Maddalena 2009. This would set the stage for Canada to make food security, rural development, and the international realization of the human right to food, a priority for 2010, when Canadian will host the next G8 Summit in Huntsville, ON.

We look forward to further collaboration and dialogue on these issues.

Sincerely,

Paul Hagerman, Chair of the Food Security Policy Group, on behalf of the following organizations:

Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace

Canadian Council for International Cooperation

Canadian Foodgrains Bank

CARE Canada

CHF – partners in rural development

ETC Group

Farm Radio International

Food Secure Canada

Inter Pares

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Plan Canada

United Church of Canada

UPA Développement international

USC Canada

World Vision Canada

CC: Honourable Bev Oda, Minister of International Cooperation

Honourable Gerry Ritz, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food

Honourable Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance

Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade