

# Interfaith Social Assistance Reform coalition (ISARC)

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## May 2008 Newsletter

### **Poverty Reduction in Quebec & Now Ontario**

At ISARC's Religious Leaders' Forum at Queen's Park, Ian Renaud-Lauze inspired the 110 participants through his reflections on the struggle of Collectif pour un Quebec sans Pauvrete to eliminate poverty in Quebec. Minister Deb Matthews' comments after lunch provided ample evidence that the struggle to reduce poverty in Ontario will be difficult. Minister Matthews used the same speech for ISARC as she did for "25 in 5" two days earlier. Her solutions, based on reducing child poverty by teaching children to read, made some ISARC participants angry; there was no acknowledgement of individual adults in poverty, nor the lack of money and resources coming from the province to help regions. Matthews is the Minister for Children and Youth and is chairperson and minister appointed to bring an Ontario poverty reduction strategy to cabinet by the end of 2008.

Questions from forum participants about the government's allocating of the federal affordable housing dollars was later debated during Question Period.

Collectif was a movement to put the elimination of poverty on the public agenda, and the government passed the law to eliminate poverty. Today, Collectif leaders are working hard to keep the Quebec government moving forward under Premier Jean Charest. Panellists in the afternoon were from Hamilton, Kingston, Niagara, Peel, and Waterloo. Regions are working on poverty reduction through regional social services, advocacy coalitions, and groups of individuals on OW and ODSP.

Rabbi Shalom Schachter's theological reflection inspired participants not to accept a partial solution to poverty reduction. The faith communities have a moral and ethical ground on which they must stand as they are compassionate but call for justice. Schachter's reflection will be on the ISARC web site. [www.isarc.ca](http://www.isarc.ca)

Our Fall Religious Leaders' Forum is being planned for the first week of November – two weeks before the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy goes to cabinet. In addition to reports on the work of communities to advocate for the elimination of poverty, the forum will focus on the needs and rights of persons with disabilities.

## **“25 in 5” – An important call**

Coalitions and organizations throughout the province are joining the “25 in 5” to build a public consensus and a movement that calls for the elimination of poverty. “25 in 5” means a **25% reduction in poverty within 5 years**. ISARC has joined 25 in 5 along with Campaign 2000, Income Security Alliance, Daily Bread Food Bank, City of Toronto, Ontario Coalition for Social Justice, affordable housing coalitions, Ontario Federation of Labour, nurses, teachers, and others. 25 in 5 is asking that the province name indicators, such as

- 25% reduction in the tenants who pay more than 50% of their income in rent,
- A 25% increase in income for recipients of OW and ODSP,
- Increase in income for workers on low wages, so they can support themselves & family
- 25% more children in registered child care spaces.

Governments and non-profit organizations already collect data for these indicators and can report whether goals have been reached.

The primary areas needing to be affected by the poverty reduction strategy are: Employment, income security, and community services which includes affordable housing and child care.

Check the “25 in 5” web site for details. [www.25in5.ca](http://www.25in5.ca)

## **Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) in Ottawa**

Marvyn Novick and Peter Clutterbuck of SPNP have conducted consultations throughout Ontario to obtain a consensus on the means to reduce poverty. A consultation with other advocacy coalitions was held in Ottawa on 7 & 8 May 2008. Minister Matthews attended on Thursday afternoon. The strategy & background are at [www.povertywatchontario.ca](http://www.povertywatchontario.ca)

ISARC supports this strategy which calls for

- 1). Appropriate labour standards and increased enforcement especially for contract, temporary, and part time work as well as regulations & supervision of temporary employment agencies;
- 2). Increased social assistance for OW and ODSP; since 1995, OW recipients have 43% less purchasing power; ODSP 18% less. Full time workers should be able to support themselves, having enough for rent, food, and other essentials for the family
- 3) Increased community infra-structure, particularly affordable housing and child care.

The consultation with Minister Matthews went very well and was encouraging to the participants. She understood the components of the SPNO poverty reduction strategy and asked questions to gain a deeper understanding.

## **Your Voice and Work Are Needed!**

**First:** Throughout May and June 2008, Minister Deb Matthews will be conducting consultations with groups throughout the province. These hearings have not been announced in advance and are by invitation. Local MPPs decide with the minister's office who is invited. If a consultation is to be conducted in your city, contact your local Liberal MPP and ask to be included. Then check the web site below to think about the 6 questions. The questions relate primarily to child poverty ignoring many adults who receive OW or ODSP. All children have parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents and other adults in their lives. How might this poverty reduction strategy create better villages where all can raise the children in a healthy and wholesome manner?

Government Poverty Reduction Strategy is [www.growingstronger.ca/en/tackle\\_poverty.html](http://www.growingstronger.ca/en/tackle_poverty.html)

**Second:** Each Member of the Provincial Parliament (MPP) is to hold a consultation on poverty reduction in their riding. Attendance will be important, so MPPs can see the ground swell on this issue. Speakers hopefully can address the important issues: employment and labour standards, income security, housing & child care.

Call your MPP and ask when the riding consultation will be held. If no date has been set, you may ask whether coalitions or organizations in your area can assist in planning and facilitation. MPPs need to listen and reflect; another person should be facilitator; also ask people to take minutes which you can submit to the province. Then work with many groups to set a date which is suitable for the MPP and send out the message to people, organizations and media. Invite community leaders to come together before the consultation to review the Social Planning Network of Ontario and "25 in 5" statements and agree who can speak to specific issues. Are there some individuals who speak out of the experience of poverty? Public consultations need to be open to all residents. If there is more than one consultation in your riding, it shows how important poverty reduction has become.

**Third:** Coalitions working with "25 in 5" are concerned that cabinet ministers and other prominent MPPs hear how important poverty reduction is to residents of their riding. If you live in one of these ridings, it will be important that you, your congregation, and coalitions demonstrate the high priority of poverty reduction.

**Fourth:** Your faith community can have a hearing and assist members to write letters to the MPPs and Premier Dalton McGuinty. Use information in this newsletter, the web sites, and

ISARC's book Lives Still in the Balance. Your congregation may wish use the book as an adult study, since poverty reduction should be a major issue in the next federal election.

As we move into a recession, many feel poverty reduction will move to a secondary priority. Affordable housing, increases to OW and ODSP, child care, and increases for low wage workers fight recession because the money remains in the local economy, which means that dollars circulate. For example, a dollar spent on savings or investment does not circulate as many times as a dollar spent on groceries, clothing, furniture, housing, child care or transportation. Individuals and families spend dollars locally increasing the local economy and decreasing recession.

### ***It's time to build a Movement!***

Rabbi Schachter pushed ISARC to continue to speak to the moral and ethical issues that arise ISARC's constituents are compassionate and do not want marginalized people to suffer, so we have supported food banks, soup kitchens and emergency shelter. Unfortunately these temporary measures have not broken the cycle of poverty and have diminished individual's dignity. Therefore, we continue to cry for JUSTICE.

A province and government are not judged by how they appease the affluent. They are judged by how the care for the marginalized. Ontario desperately needs a well-funded poverty reduction strategy this year!

### **ISARC increasing as a multifaith coalition**

Several new faith groups are joining ISARC; more are interested. This fall ISARC is planning a forum to discuss social justice and systemic poverty from perspectives and theologies of different religions. Watch our web site for more information [www.isarc.ca](http://www.isarc.ca)

### **Contact ISARC**

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***A society (and government) is judged not by how it treats the rich and powerful,  
But by how it treats the marginalized and the poor!***