

# INTERFAITH SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REFORM COALITION ISARC



NEWSLETTER

November 2008

## We're Not in the Minority

90% of Canadians want politicians to take strong leadership in the elimination of poverty. Many have seen that United Kingdom and Sweden have done it; they want Canada to be a country of positive distinction. This survey is available on the Policy Alternatives website [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)

86% believe that if government takes concrete actions, poverty can be greatly reduced – perhaps more than 25% in 5 years. In fact 81% believe 25 in 5 is realistic. They call for the Prime Min-

ister and premiers to set concrete targets and timelines. This is a change from the neo-conservative rhetoric that governments should “get out of the way” and that politicians are only concerned about themselves. This poll is before the U.S.A. election of Barack Obama as president.

Other results of the poll call for an increase in minimum wage, low cost child care spaces, affordable housing, and skills training for those between jobs.

Why was this poll not

on the front page or first story in the media? Did economic tragedy and gloom sell better?

If you haven't joined “25 in 5”, ISARC encourages you to do so. Go to [www.25in5.ca](http://www.25in5.ca) and register your support – no money requested! Then ask your faith community to join the growing movement to reduce poverty in Ontario.



### Important events:

- Mid December Report
- Pre-Budget Hearings

### Inside this issue:

REPORT IN MID DECEMBER	2
MORE INFORMATION ON POVERTY	2
Religious Leaders' Forum	3
Pre-budget Hearings	4
The Recession	4
Lives Still in the Balance	4

# INTERFAITH SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REFORM COALITION ISARC

---

## Waiting for Mid December



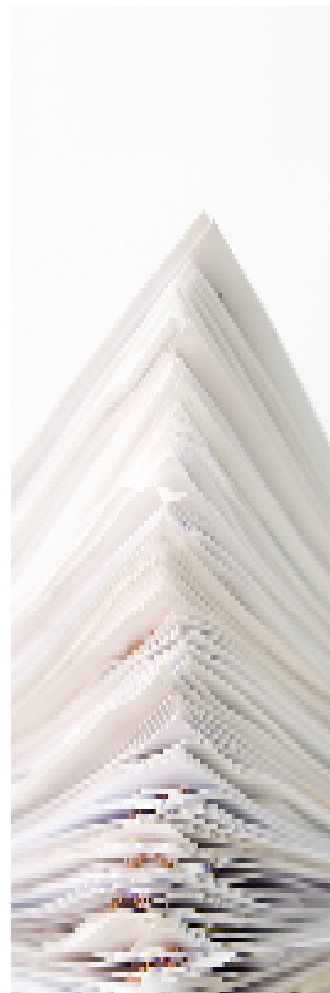
“ISARC  
ALONG WITH  
25 IN 5 IS  
CALLING FOR  
A REVIEW OF  
EMPLOYMENT  
INSURANCE  
(EI)”

Hon. Deb Matthews is chair of the provincial cabinet committee to produce a poverty reduction strategy for Ontario. She assured the ISARC Religious Leaders’ Forum on 5 November ‘08 that the strategy is on schedule. She also thanked the many people who had participated in the hearings from May through July. Others also submitted responses in writing. Watch the media for the report.

Though it will probably be one or two weeks before Christmas when everyone is busy. This

report could promote some serious theological reflection as Jewish and Christian scriptures remember the struggles of God and faithful people in the midst of situations of oppression and economic marginalization.

For critique and responses to the Poverty Reduction Strategy visit web sites such as 25 in 5, Campaign 2000, and [www.povertywatchontario.ca](http://www.povertywatchontario.ca).



## Need More Information about Poverty

ISARC’s Lives Still in the Balance continues to have current information on Ontario’s policies and practices which affect persons and families which are economically

marginalized. As you prepare to talk with your MPP, have your group read and discuss the book. Also be in contact with persons who live in poverty, either low wage work or social assis-

tance. Connecting with the social planning council, labour unions, other faith groups, etc. will help build the movement to eliminate poverty in Ontario.



## Religious Leaders' Forum on 5 November 2008 at Queen's Park

### Religious Leaders' Forum

On November 5<sup>th</sup>, 85 participants and 18 Members of the Provincial Parliament gathered at Queen's Park as Peter Clutterbuck from Social Planning Network of Ontario updated us on the growing movement to reduce poverty in Ontario. He started by reminding the group of the 1986 Social Assistance Review Committee (SARC), which produced Transitions. Peter, Susan Eagle, Brice Balmer and a few others were part of the hearings. ISARC was formed at the request of the SARC to have a faith perspective on welfare reform.

Peter along with Marvyn Novack has visited many Ontario cities over the past two years. Initially many coalitions asked all three provincial political parties to put poverty reduction in their platforms for the 2007 election; this happened. Then Marvyn and Peter visited cities and developed the 25 in 5 platform: one consultation after another constructed the three pronged approach to eliminating poverty. While many felt that poverty was too complex, consultations looked at the essential programs which would directly address the concerns and needs of the most marginalized.

In November and December 2008, Marvyn and Peter will

be travelling to over 20 cities to present the 25 in 5 Blueprint, asking for local feedback as well as stimulating local groups to keep building the movement and contacting their MPPs.

The work will not be done with the release of the release of the strategy. The SARC recommendations in 1988 did not happen, partly because community groups and coalitions relaxed and thought the work was done. They expected that the Liberal and then the NDP would follow through. It wasn't a high priority issue! And then Ontario went into a recession.

So the work will continue after the report is released.

Michael Shapcott presented an overview of the affordable housing programs. There is again much work and advocacy to do at both the federal and provincial levels. Thankfully, the Conservative government agreed to continue affordable housing programs after 31 March 2009, but some homeless programs have been cut by half. The provincial government is talking about establishing an affordable housing strategy, which is much needed and will add rather than distract from the poverty reduction strategy.

Cathy Sage, Unitarian minister from Kingston, provided an overview of Unitarian and Universalist theology as issues of social justice are addressed.

Noon hour was most lively as MPPs joined the forum participants for conversation. Because of other meetings, Hon. Deb Matthews spoke after lunch had begun. Michael Prue MPP then spoke for the NDP. Conservative, Liberal, and NDP politicians and staff spoke with constituents and other forum participants. Discussions were lively in Rooms 228 & 230. Since some MPPs did not have any lunch, they were present because poverty reduction has become a lively topic at Queen's Park. The NDP had asked about the strategy during Question Period in the morning.

ISARC will hold its next Religious Leaders' Forum in the Spring 2009 – probably shortly after Easter and Passover. While this newsletter will contain resources to understand and critique the strategy and the budget, the next forum will help us keep the political momentum growing, so that fewer people are economically marginalized, even in the midst of this recession.



The Abrahamic faiths reach out in compassion through offerings, gifts of food and other necessities, volunteerism, and actions for justice.



# INTERFAITH SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REFORM COALITION (ISARC)



NOVEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER

## Web Site for Ontario Interfaith

Scarboro Missions has an excellent e-newsletter of interfaith events in Ontario. You may subscribe by e-mailing [info@interfaithunity.ca](mailto:info@interfaithunity.ca) or visit [www.interfaithunity.ca](http://www.interfaithunity.ca) Editor Terry Weller covers a wide variety of

**Contact for ISARC:**  
Brice Balmer, Secretary

ISARC,  
P.O. Box 43011, 120  
Ottawa Street North,  
Kitchener N2H 6S9  
[isarc@gto.net](mailto:isarc@gto.net)  
(519) 744-5868

## Pre-budget Hearings Coming for Ontario

One important way for your voice to be heard in Ontario is the pre-budget process. Last year provincial finance minister Hon. Dwight Duncan visited a number of cities and held an open forum on issues that were important to On-

tario leaders. Invitations were extended through the offices of the local Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP).

The legislative committee on finance and economic affairs will hold hearings throughout the delegations

as well as written submissions. You may check with your MPP about the hearings and ask to be informed when the committee starts accepting requests for appointments. The report of the committee is tabled before the pro-

## The Recession: No Excuse for Inaction

John Stapleton, a former Ministry of Community and Social Services policy analyst, is now working with 25 in 5 and assisting various groups working to eliminate poverty.

His research shows that important social legislation is often adopted during a recession. The Great De-

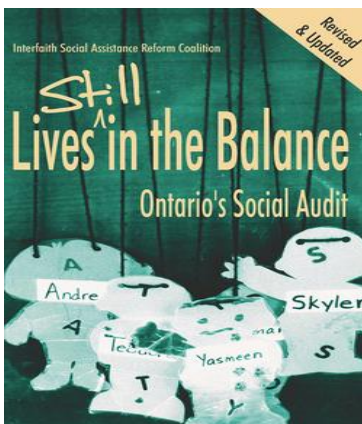
pression is a good example as employment programs, construction of public facilities, and better social assistance were funded. As lower income persons and families have more money, they spend it locally which then benefits local business. Merchants then spend more money to buy products and/or hire staff.

More money circulates in the economy.

Affordable housing has been used as much to stimulate the economy and provide jobs as it has to provide these desperately needed apartments and town houses. Construction provides jobs; workers spend money in the local

## Lives Still in the Balance is a key

Get the background you need to meet with your MPP, speak to an all candidates meeting, or have conversations with others about poverty. Lives Still in the Balance from ISARC is still up-to-date and gives background information on many issues: housing, social assistance, disability, low wage work, children in poverty, health care, etc. At the end of the book are the proposals which would most effectively help those who live with the lowest incomes in Ontario. If you want to begin to understand poverty in Ontario, read and discuss Lives Still in the Bal-



Prim  
You  
You  
You