

Faith leaders speak out for fairness and decent work

As religious and spiritual leaders, we have a history of pursuing fairness, justice, and compassion in our communities. We know that decent working conditions are essential to strong and prosperous communities, and are distressed that Ontario’s current labour laws do not protect workers from poverty. We believe that change is urgently needed, and call on the Ontario Government – which is currently reviewing the Employment Standards Act and Labour Relations Act – to increase the minimum wage and improve working conditions across Ontario.

As it stands, there are many gaps in basic employment standards that make workers vulnerable to exploitation and unfair working conditions, leaving many people in our faith communities unable to support themselves and their families. Many – including first and second-generation citizens, immigrants and refugees – are working precarious jobs that lack benefits and do not pay a decent wage, leaving them below the poverty line. In a wealthy country like Canada, no person should be living in poverty. Decent work must be a core aspect of Ontario’s anti-poverty agenda, along with other measures to ensure that all of us live in dignity.

Under current laws, employers can schedule or cancel shifts at the last minute, putting great financial and emotional stress on families. Additionally, employers are in many cases not required to provide paid sick days. Our multiple traditions affirm the principle of *treating others as one would like others to treat oneself*, and for this reason we share a moral conviction that employers owe workers the dignity of fair scheduling and paid sick days.

In many cases where workers have made hard-earned gains in securing decent work conditions,

employers have eliminated them by downloading responsibilities to temporary agencies, or engaging in the practice of “contract flipping” – awarding contracts to new service providers every few years. As faith leaders, we believe that workers should always have hope for fairer work conditions, and we call for an end to practices and loopholes that exempt employers from basic employment standards.

An effective way to assist the working poor is to give them the tools to improve their own compensation and working conditions. An accepted tool is access to unionization and collective bargaining. However, the law still gives more weight to employer interests in avoiding unionization than to workers wishing to have workplace representation. The *Labour Relations Act* should be amended to make the rules fair for workers to unionize and to achieve a collective agreement.

Finally, the law does little to prevent harassment and bullying in the workplace. And because the current law does not require employers to demonstrate a reason for dismissing workers or reducing their hours, it is difficult for workers to assert their employment rights collectively or as individuals.

Rights are hollow if workers cannot assert them without being punished or fired. An injury to one is an injury to all of us, and we need a change.

It is time that Ontario’s policies change to support decent working conditions for all Ontario’s workers.

Read and sign the demands →

We, Ontario's faith leaders, call on the Ontario Government to change the Employment Standards Act and the Ontario Labour Relations Act to accomplish the following:

1. Ensure that part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same hourly pay and benefits as their full-time, permanent counterparts;
2. Promote full-time, permanent work with adequate hours for all those who choose it;
3. Offer fair scheduling with proper advance notice;
4. Provide a minimum of one (1) hour paid sick time for every 35 hours worked. For a full-time worker this would mean seven (7) paid sick days per year;
5. Prevent employers from delegating their responsibilities for maintaining minimum standards onto temporary agencies, sub-contractors or workers themselves;
6. End the practice of contract flipping, support wage protection and job security for workers when companies change ownership or contracts expire;
7. Extend minimum protections to all workers by closing loopholes to the laws;
8. Protect workers who stand up for their rights;
9. Offer proactive enforcement of the laws through adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the laws;
10. Remove the many arbitrary and steep barriers that stand in the way of workers who want to join unions; and
11. Ensure all workers are paid at least \$15 an hour, regardless of their age, student status, job or area of employment.

Full Name _____
Honorific

Faith Community _____
City

YES Please contact me with further information.

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Email address

To submit signed copies:

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Signatories

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- Pandit Roopnauth Sharma
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- Reverend Dr. Bhante Saranapala,
The Urban Buddhist Monk, Deputy Abbot, West End Buddhist Temple and Meditation Centre
- Rev. Dr. Michael J. Pryse
Bishop, Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
- Imam Dr. Abdul Hai Patel
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- Sr. Pauline Lally
Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul
- imam El-Farouk Khaki
El-Tawhid Juma Circle/Toronto Unity Mosque
- The Most Rev. Colin R. Johnson
D.D., Archbishop of Toronto and Metropolitan of Ontario, Diocese of Toronto, Anglican Church of Canada
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- Fr. Paul E. Hansen
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Rabbi Emeritus, Solel Congregation of Mississauga
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- Rev. Jeffrey Brown
Multifaith Centre, University of Toronto
- Rabbi Elizabeth Bolton
Or Haneshamah: Ottawa's Reconstructionist Community