



Media Release

November 21, 2008

NO OLYMPIC MEDAL FOR BC'S LEAD IN CHILD POVERTY RATE

Vancouver - The Olympics are nearly here and British Columbia is still trailing all other provinces with the worst child poverty rate, according to the latest Statistics Canada figures in the new BC Campaign 2000 Child Poverty Report Card. This shameful distinction has been held by BC for five consecutive years.

The BC child poverty rate was 21.9 percent in 2006 – up from 20.9 percent in 2005 and well above the national child poverty rate of 15.8 percent. The depth of family poverty is staggering: average incomes for families with children living in poverty were more than \$11,000 below the poverty line. Over half of BC's poor children lived in families where the adults worked the equivalent of a full-time full-year job or more.

“The 2010 Olympics is only 14 months away. Unless the government acts now, the fulfillment of the promise to make BC the healthiest jurisdiction to ever host the Olympics is in serious doubt,” said First Call Provincial Chairperson Julie Norton.

Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec have already put poverty reduction plans in place. Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have the wheels in motion to create their own poverty reduction plans.

“The BC government has invested a lot of money in facilities as an Olympic legacy for this province,” Ms. Norton said. “The best legacy would be putting an end to child poverty in BC and we need a firm commitment from all our political leaders to do that now.”

Comprehensive data on BC's children at school entry shows a disturbing increase in vulnerability for many communities between 2004 and 2007, despite this being a period of strong growth for the provincial economy.

“Research shows that growing up in poverty puts children at greater risk for poor health and other life-long vulnerabilities,” said Lynell Anderson of UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership.

BC Campaign 2000 believes that governments should commit themselves to reducing child poverty in Canada and BC by 25 percent by 2012 and cutting child poverty in half by 2017.

Work on the 2008 Child Poverty Report Card was done by First Call and coalition partner SPARC BC (Social Planning and Research Council). First Call is a coalition of 85 provincial and regional organizations, local groups and individuals who believe children and youth should have “first call” on the resources of government and a member of Campaign 2000, the national coalition devoted to ending child poverty in Canada.

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First Call has prepared an updated series of fact sheets on child poverty in British Columbia. They are available from the First Call office in Vancouver and can also be downloaded from the group’s web site at www.firstcallbc.org as of Friday, November 21, 2008.

Join us for a press conference on Friday, November 21 at 9:30 AM at SFU Harbour Centre, 515 West Hastings St. in Vancouver. Premier Gordon Campbell and Opposition Leader Carole James have received the Child Poverty Report Card and have been invited to respond to our recommendations.

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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