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Press Release: CANADIAN CIVIL RIGHTS PIONEERS CELEBRATE
FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRESIDENT



Canadian Unitarians have special reasons to celebrate Barack Obama's inauguration as President of the United States. Although many people of faith marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Selma, Alabama in 1965, there were more Unitarians involved than any other religion outside the Southern Christian Leadership

Conference. And a surprising number of those Unitarians either hailed from Canada or subsequently went on to make Canada their home.

Among the Canadians who were there are Arthur Hughes of Vancouver, Reverends Felix Lion (emeritus Victoria First Unitarian) and J. McRee Elrod of Victoria, Rev. Fred Cappuccino of Ottawa, and Rev. John Hanly Morgan (then minister at Toronto First Unitarian) of Toronto. "A carload went from First Congregation in Toronto," said Jeannette Morgan, the minister's wife.

Unitarian Arthur Hughes told the Vancouver Courier what it felt like to be among 25,000 marchers supporting the last leg of Dr. King's march to Selma. "If you can visualize standing at Granville and 16th, looking north down Granville Street, seeing the road jammed with people carrying banners eight abreast as far as the eye can see, you'll have a good picture of the march," said Hughes.

Historically, many Unitarians and Universalists were outspoken abolitionists from the mid-1700s onwards, including such luminaries as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Julia Ward Howe and Louisa May Alcott. Unitarians actively participated in the Underground Railroad. In Boston, the Rev. Theodore Parker kept a pistol in his desk to protect the escaped slaves in his congregation.

But Unitarians also had a very contemporary reason to support Dr. King at Selma: two Unitarians had died violently at the hands of Alabama racists. Rev. James Reeb died after he and two other ministers were beaten with baseball bats shortly after their arrival

in Selma. And lay woman Viola Liuzzo was shot and killed while she was driving African-American volunteers to Dr. King's march. In response, the Unitarian-Universalist Association called all its clergy to join Dr. King in a giant protest march. Led by UUA President Dana Greeley, over half of all active UU clergy responded and joined on the march at the Raymond Petis Bridge.

Among the clergy who answered that call were ministers in Canadian congregations, who were still part of the Unitarian-Universalist Association at that time. (The Canadian Unitarian Council became an independent organization in 2003.) And most of the ministers from Canada arrived in cars full of their congregation members.

So when Barack Obama takes the oath of office on January 20, many Canadian Unitarians will be overjoyed at the fulfillment of the dream that they helped escort to the Alabama seat of power, more than forty years ago.

The Canadian Unitarian Council/Conseil unitarien du Canada (CUC), is an association of forty-nine congregations located across Canada with 5,100 individual members. Arising out of the work of outspoken reformers and dissenters within the Christian tradition five centuries ago, the Unitarian movement today includes Universalists and flows in a broad religious stream augmented by Humanist, earth-centred, Buddhist and other progressive beliefs.

For more information, contact:

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(Figure 1: Barack Obama taking the Oath: www.cbc.ca 09.01.21.)

LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER REGARDING ISRAEL AND GAZA

January 21, 2009

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister,

As President of the Canadian Unitarian Council, I must urge you to maintain an even and balanced approach in dealing with the situation in the Middle East. The tragedy that is unfolding in Gaza is totally unacceptable, and the death and suffering endured there must be on the conscience of every human being.

The CUC's policy on peace and global security has, as its overarching goals, the prevention of wars and violent conflict, and the promotion of respect for international law and the use of dialogue, negotiation, mediation, co-operation and compromise as the principal tools for resolving conflict.

The CUC represents fifty congregations across Canada and supports the work of the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office in New York.

The CUC is concerned about the position of our minority government that clearly favours one side over the other. In so doing, the opportunity for Canada to mediate effectively in this conflict is severely compromised. To be a valuable and respected player, Canada needs to return to its principled and fair-minded approach to situations such as this one.

We urge the Canadian government to do everything in its power to put into effect an immediate ceasefire in Israel and Gaza. With every minute that goes by, more innocent civilians are killed and injured, the basic infrastructure for daily living is destroyed, and hostilities between Israel and Gaza increase. Until a ceasefire can be established, we urge you to pressure all parties involved to protect innocent civilians and respect international law. Under your leadership, may Canada lead the way in using dialogue, negotiation, mediation, cooperation and compromise as the principal tools for resolving this conflict.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Pfleiderer
President, Canadian Unitarian Council

Rev. Carole Martignacco
President, Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada

cc: Michael Ignatieff, House of Commons, Ottawa ON K1A 0A2
Jack Layton, House of Commons, Ottawa ON K1A 0A2
Gilles Duceppe, House of Commons, Ottawa ON K1A 0A2
Bruce Knotts, Executive Director, UU-UNO

**LETTER TO THE VATICAN IN RESPONSE TO THE POPE'S
CHRISTMAS MESSAGE**

January 2, 2009

The Curia
Vatican City
Vatican

Sirs:

News reports have interpreted the Pope's Christmas message to mean that it is more important to save the world from homosexuality than from the destruction of rain forests. If this is a misinterpretation, clarification is very much needed, since this is how most received the message.

That interpretation of the Pope's message is not in harmony with the message of the Prophets, Jesus, and Paul.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God ... Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us."

~1 John 4:7, 11-12~

We believe that love is more important than bigotry; that kindness is more important than hatred; that a society that supports its people is more important than one that plays favorites and divides them. As Canadian Unitarians, we believe the world's religious leaders must now speak about uniting the planet to save it from itself, rather than divide it and allow privilege and selfishness to fester.

That two people love, whether they be man and man, woman and man, or woman and woman, offers more to the world than those who condemn love. Please promote love, compassion, and tolerance. With war in Iraq and Afghanistan, with the poor of Africa forgotten, with genocide an all too common occurrence around the world, we must work for peace and justice now. We must not hate. We must work together with love to save the planet.

Sincerely,

Jean Pfleiderer
President, Canadian Unitarian Council

UPDATING THE CUC 1999 ENVIRONMENT RESOLUTION

The CUC Environmental Principles were first adopted at the Canadian Unitarian Council Annual Meeting on May 23, 1999. It's been 10 years since adoption of these Environmental Principles and since then the CUC has endorsed the Earth Charter, submitted letters to our Federal Government leaders requesting action on meeting our Kyoto Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emission targets and issued a statement regarding genetic engineering of food. Many congregations across Canada have incorporated environmental education into their religious education curriculum, formed environmental justice committees and several congregations have received or are working toward Green Sanctuary Accreditation through the UU Ministry for Earth. This is still just a start.

At the CUC Annual Meeting in May 2008, a resolution was passed that the CUC Environmental Principles should be revisited and revised to address the continuing pressures on our environment. These pressures continue to have devastating effects not only on our natural world but also cultures and communities most unable to protect themselves from the effects to our environment brought on by consumerism and subsequent high energy demands.

Since May 2008, the Environmental Monitoring Committee has reviewed the original Environmental Principles. We feel they still reflect the concern UU's have for the environment. We also feel they still lend guidance for our daily lives. What mattered to us was that our statement reflects the concerns and language of today to ensure that the diversity of beliefs and attitudes that enrich our Unitarian Universalism was expressed. With this in mind, we made minor changes and have submitted the following revised version for feedback and comments.

An updated version as detailed below is proposed for adoption. (19 Jan 09 Version)

CUC STATEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Canadian Unitarian Universalists recognize that the ecological support systems upon which all life depends are threatened. A growing world population and the failure of our institutions to manage economic growth have created an environmental crisis. This is a profoundly moral issue; as a religious community, it is incumbent upon us to foster the ethics and values that will ensure the continued existence of a world as beautiful and productive as that which we know as our home.

Therefore:

We affirm the ethics implicit in the document Environmental Principles and Values of Canadian Unitarian Universalists.

We mandate our denomination at the national, regional and congregational levels to provide leadership through collective and individual actions, and to be a strong voice and presence in confronting environmental issues.

Adopted by the Canadian Unitarian Council Annual Meeting, May XX, 2009

ENVIRONMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND VALUES OF CANADIAN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS

1. **Interdependence:** As Unitarian Universalists, we covenant to affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The values of individual responsibility, personal growth, democracy, and social justice that we also affirm are essential elements in the development of a sustainable relationship with nature.

2. **Inherent worth:** We acknowledge that we are but one species of many on earth; each has its own value that cannot be measured by its service to humankind.

Viewing the earth merely as a resource for the satisfaction of human needs and desires has been destructive and imperiled our future.

3. **Sustainability:** Ensuring sustainability of the earth and all life upon it is our first responsibility to future generations and to all the species with which we share the planet.

In a sustainable world, healthy human societies will live in harmony with the natural environment.

4. **Religious Commitment:** Since the environmental crisis is a result of human alienation from nature, we seek guidance from spiritual and/or humanist teachings, from which we draw inspiration to re-establish relationship with the earth.

5. **Ethical Action:** We must adopt practices not only appropriate to our time and place but also that address needs of the future. We must embrace a view that sees ourselves not as master of the land, but rather as an integral part of the earth's ecosystem where all life forms are both independent and yet dependant on one another.

6. **Biodiversity:** The health and quality of life on earth depends upon the preservation and restoration of biodiversity. Species are disappearing from the earth at a cataclysmic rate, weakening some ecosystems and causing the collapse of others. By fragmenting Earth's landscapes, we are creating conditions for even greater losses.

7. **Precautionary principle:** We can never be certain of the impact of our actions on nature; where knowledge is incomplete and irreversible harm is possible, we must err on the side of caution.

Every decision is a choice about the future; application of the precautionary principle will reduce the possibility of undesirable consequence.

8. **Natural Capital:** The ecological support systems of planet earth are finite, imposing limits on the growth of populations and economies.

Since the economy is totally dependent upon the environment, it cannot be allowed to undermine the integrity of ecological processes. A sustainable economy must limit consumption to the "interest" produced by the natural capital upon which it depends.

Adopted by the Canadian Unitarian Council Annual Meeting, May XX, 2009