

June 9, 2014

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Canadian Union of Public Employees to encourage your government to take meaningful steps to cut carbon emissions in Canada. President Barack Obama recently announced plans to cut coal emissions by 30 per cent by 2030 from 2005 levels. Your federal Conservative government has said for years that it would harmonize its actions on climate change with the Americans. President Obama has stepped up; it's now time the Conservative government of Canada does the same.

With 627,000 members, CUPE represents a vast and diverse range of Canadians. Our union knows that Canadians everywhere care about climate change and want action taken to bring Canada on the right side of this critical environmental issue.

Part of what motivated President Obama to act is his understanding that climate change is having devastating effects on the American people, the economy and the environment in the form of more wild fires, droughts, severe storms and other expensive disasters. Canada, too, is seeing a greater incidence of powerful storms linked to the effects of climate change, such as last June's Alberta floods that caused in excess of \$1.7 billion in infrastructure damages. CUPE members were on the front line in Alberta responding to and cleaning up after that flood, much like our electrical workers help to restore power whenever it is lost due to damaging storms.

However, on our current course, we are heading toward impacts from disasters that will debilitate our economy. In April 2014, a TD Economics special report estimated disasters will cost Canadians on average \$5 billion per year by 2020, rising to \$21-\$43 billion per year by 2050. Internationally, the escalating carnage linked to climate disasters continues to worsen, via front page events like Typhoon Haiyan, or the less dramatic but equally harrowing impacts of sea level rise that threatens an influx of environmental refugees fleeing overwhelmed small island states.

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By taking a leadership role on climate change, President Obama's plan will spur the continued growth of renewable forms of energy. CUPE advocates strongly for public renewable energy as a means to cut greenhouse gas emissions, while promoting public sector solutions to environmental problems. As well, President Obama has sent a clear signal to the international community that his country is taking climate change seriously and expects other nations to follow suit. This is an opportunity for your government to fulfil its vow to do as our southern neighbour is doing and take major steps to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The European Union recently reported to the United Nations that its emissions have fallen to 19.2 per cent below 1990 levels. Canada, all the while, lags behind, with our emissions continuing to rise nationally, largely driven by an ever-increasing reliance on reckless oil sands expansion.

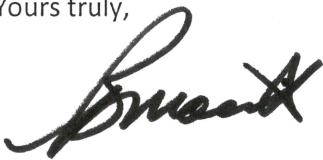
Our standing on environmental issues is shameful. The Germanwatch Climate Change Index for 2014 ranks Canada in 58th place of 61 nations assessed for their climate change performance, with only Iran, Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia performing worse than Canada. Surely we can do more. Taking bold steps similar to those taken by President Obama would be a welcome change of direction for your government.

CUPE calls on your government to reduce greenhouse gases to ease the impacts of climate change, while promoting adaptation measures and a move to a green and sustainable economy, by, for example, fostering the expansion of public renewable energy and curbing shale gas fracking, which is linked to a host of deleterious environmental effects and only increases our reliance on fossil fuels.

All Canadians and international citizens deserve a stable climate and the economic comfort it supports. Canada must step up its efforts to meet its global obligations and do its part to slow climate change. Harmonizing our policies and practices with the Americans – who have now taken a strong step to significantly cut greenhouse gases – would show leadership.

I look forward to your response.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Moist', with a stylized flourish at the end.

PAUL MOIST
National President

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cc: C. Fleury; T. Mulcair; M. Leslie; CUPE National Executive Board; CUPE Environment Committee