

March 24, 2005

The Right Honourable Paul Martin  
Prime Minister  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
OTTAWA, Ontario  
K1A 0A2

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Re: Foreign Aid/Debt Relief

The December 26, 2004 tsunami in South East Asia saw an outpouring of help from people around the world.

Like many other organizations, CUPE members responded to the crisis. Our national union donated \$100,000, and more than double this amount was raised by our locals and provincial divisions.

While this governmental, organizational and industrial support is laudable, and provided significant and needed emergency relief, the amounts pledged are but a fraction of the amounts needed in the affected countries. The countries affected by the tsunami have external debt obligations totaling \$350 billion. Their financial burdens pose an almost insurmountable barrier.

It seems that in times of visible and well-covered disasters the world's wealthier nations can and do respond. But when the vast issue of global debt in the Third World is raised, the response from many developed countries is muted.

Our world is full of examples of horrific pain and suffering which equal or exceed that experienced by the tsunami victims. In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, 130,00 people succumb weekly to preventable diseases, over seven million people per year – four million of them children.

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In Niger, the infant mortality rate is the highest in the world yet the country spends less on health care than on debt servicing.

There is also the question of dubious loans by Western leaders and loans to corrupt regimes for pursuits which do not in any way meet the test of the public good. Profit is the driving force and countless people suffer without life's basic necessities.

In 1970, former Prime Minister Lester Pearson led an international commission that challenged the world to commit 0.7 per cent of GDP to international assistance. Canada agreed and by the 1980s, we reached 0.5%. Since then, our support has retracted to less than 0.3% (as measured by the OECD). Canada is therefore much closer to U.S. levels of support than countries such as Norway and Sweden who contribute in excess of 0.7%

As Canadians we can, and must, do more. We seem able to approve multi-year plans for tax reductions but not for foreign aid. It is not a question of our ability to increase foreign aid, it's a question of the choices we make.

On behalf of CUPE's 540,000 members, we call upon your government to outline concrete steps towards Canada's compliance with the UN's millennium goal of 0.7% of national GDP for foreign aid.

We further call upon Canada to increase efforts to convince the international community to provide comprehensive debt relief to Third World nations.

Trusting you will find the above to be in order, I remain,

Yours truly,

PAUL MOIST  
National President

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c.c. Members, National Executive Board