



Let Us Look After Each Other

Aroha tētahi ki tētahi

New Zealand Council Of Christian Social Services

The Facts About Poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand

An Open Letter to Political Candidates

To All Political Candidates,

As the official commencement of this year's election campaign draws nearer the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) calls on all politicians, both those who are electorate candidates and those who are on party lists, to front up to the issue of reducing persistent levels of poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand.

NZCCSS is concerned that the affects of poverty should not be ignored or minimised as an election year issue. At the beginning of this year we called for all politicians to take a stand on the growth in the gap between the rich and the poor yet NZCCSS is concerned that political parties have not done enough to spell out policies that could lead to better ways to utilise our nation's prosperity to reduce poverty. At minimum we seek – on behalf of those who may struggle to be heard - a basic assurance that the impact of all policy making decisions be measured in terms of the quality of life of those who are the most vulnerable and who are most affected by poverty in our society.

There is, we believe, a consistent and compelling case that a consensus approach needs to be taken to reducing the affects of poverty on our future generations. Already this year there have been compelling evidence-based reports published that call for specific actions on poverty from the Child Poverty Action Group, from Caritas the social justice agency of the Catholic Church, and most recently a report titled "A Fair Go for All Children", from the Office of the Children's Commissioner and Barnardos. The Ministry of Social Development's own report "Pockets of Significant Hardship and Poverty" (released under the Official Information Act) adds to the overwhelming evidence that more action is needed to address the issue of a persistent, damaging poverty that hurts us all.

In this open letter we are therefore calling on all politicians to "own" this issue, and we are calling on you to demonstrate that there are actions your party will take that will speak louder than words.

We ask you to take the time to look at the "Facts About Poverty" information sheets recently published by NZCCSS and available on our website at www.justiceandcompassion.org.nz We challenge you to be prepared to respond to this information with words that move beyond convenient one-liners about solutions based on 'growing the economic cake', or that seem to make a political and social choice that it's OK for people to live in high levels of poverty in this country.

Particularly on behalf of the children of sole parents and beneficiaries on base levels of benefit that have forced them far below the unofficial 'poverty line', we ask: What will you do? When the hard questions are asked, how just and compassionate will your answers be?

From the NZ Council of Christian Social Services – 8 September 2008

Ross Kendrew, President – Salvation Army
Shaun Robinson, Vice President – CEO, Presbyterian Support East Coast
Eric Allan – Director, Catholic Family & Community Services
Ruby Duncan – CEO, Iosis Family Solutions
Michael Greer – Superintendent, Christchurch Methodist Mission
David Hanna – Director, Wesley Community Action
Joan Hardiman – Dominican Sister, Catholic Church
Nettie Holm – Minister & Consultant, NZ Baptist Social Services
Ian Hutson (Major) – Salvation Army National Community Ministries
Duncan MacDonald – CEO, Selwyn Foundation
Vaughan Milner – CEO, Presbyterian Support Upper South Island
Karen Morrison-Hume – Director, Anglican Action
Judith Petersen – Director, South Centre, Anglican Care
Trevor McGlinchey, NZCCSS Executive Officer