

Montreal, October 30, 2012

His Excellency Richard Smith  
President  
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB)  
2500 Promenade Don Reid  
Ottawa, (Ontario) k1H 2J2

Dear Bishop,

We have been dismayed in recent months by some of the decisions taken by the CCCB or by the silence that the CCCB has chosen in face of certain issues. Beyond that, the way some members of the leadership have acted disturbs us profoundly.

Ultimately, the principles of ecclesiology inspired by the Second Vatican Council seem to us to be imperilled by the current orientation of the CCCB. Concretely, this is happening through serious steps backward with regard to the rich tradition of the Church's social teaching and by a political conservatism that has nothing to do with the Gospel. This new orientation also shows a loss of willingness within the Canadian episcopacy to exercise its responsibility to denounce the political choices that harm the dignity and rights of people. There is also a loss of will to bring about a more just society in solidarity -- whatever the political party in power. Finally, these actions reveal an official Church that is less and less interested in working together with organizations and social movements concerned about social justice.

And so we take note that no letter denouncing the many policies of the current government that attack human dignity and social justice has been made public for quite a long time, whether through your Justice and Peace Commission or through your executive. Nevertheless, there is no lack of issues! You have, instead, preferred to denounce the policies of foreign governments. While that is certainly justified, it puts the spotlight even more on your silence with regard to Canadian policies.

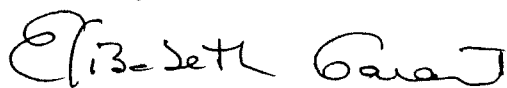
Even more, for some time now we note the repeated absence of the CCCB as signatory to important collective texts that were submitted to you (the appeal on climate change, the intervention by the Canadian Council of Churches on the major cuts among prison chaplains, and so on). Still, other Christian Churches or other religious leaders did participate.

This refusal to denounce the current political authorities has even led the executive of the CCCB to short-circuit the democratic process of Development and Peace, which is a beacon institution of the Catholic Church in Canada. By reorienting the Fall campaign and by unilaterally suppressing the action (the postcards) proposed to faithful citizens by which they would challenge the federal government on the new and unacceptable orientations of Canadian international aid, you seem to put the preservation of your "good relations" with the Conservative government above any other consideration.

It is perhaps this attitude that explains your highly questionable choice to welcome Minister Jason Kenney to a closed-door meeting during the recent plenary assembly of the bishops. We have already sent you a letter expressing our disagreement with this decision and with the culture of secrecy that surrounds it. (We have not, by the way, received any recognition of that letter.) So it is that we continue to note that your positions with regard to Canadian policies on immigration do not always seem to be clear and transparent. During this same period, the Harper government continues to contribute to the weakening of the status of the most vulnerable immigrants. The most recent announcement in that list is the introduction of permanent temporary residence. This is a move that will have serious consequences, especially for the more disadvantaged women.

Finally, we have just learned, to our stupefaction, that the position of principal advisor on questions of social justice has been abolished. As you know, this principal advisor was precisely the person who allowed the bishops to be well-informed regarding issues related to justice, solidarity and peace. He represented the bishops at gatherings of other Churches and organizations with regard to dossiers that made it possible to keep the social commitment of the Church up to date and incarnated. He was also the person who undertook the research and writing necessary for your public positions on matters of a social character. The elimination of this position has been justified for economic considerations. It is nevertheless difficult for us to not see, in this decision, an additional proof of the regrettable orientations that we deplore in this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elisabeth Garant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Élisabeth Garant  
Executive Director

CC:

Bishop Paul-André Durocher, Archbishop of Gatineau and Vice-President of the CCCB.  
Members of the Justice and Peace Commission: Bishop François Lapierre, Bishop Noël Simard, Bishop Donald Bolen, Bishop Anthony Mancini.  
Mgr. Patrick Powers, Secretary General of the CCCB.