

# Canadian initiative to improve the health of women and children

28 April 2010

February 2, 2010

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

Re: Canadian initiative to improve the health of women and children

Dear Prime Minister,

In June 2010, in addition to having the privilege of being the president of the G-8, Canada will have the honour of serving as the host of the G-20 Toronto Summit. This event will provide Canada with the opportunity to show its strength as world leader and to forward attainable short-term goals as well as long-term projects.

The Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) would like to commend you for your decision to promote the health of women and children worldwide. The needs of the poor are at the heart of the Catholic Church's social teaching, which upholds the right of women to receive health care that respects their dignity as human persons. COLF enthusiastically supports your goal of providing all women and children with clean water, inoculations and proper nutrition in addition to training health workers to care for families around the world.

However, a misguided trend has developed among Western nations to include abortion among the means of attaining maternal health. This damaging opinion is fueled by the belief that the only way to lower maternal and infant mortality is to lower the number of infants who are born. COLF is adamantly opposed to this strategy, and would like to draw your attention to the reality of the relationship between abortion and maternal health.

The 2009 report of the World Economic Forum (WEF), Measuring the Global Gender Gap, shows that Ireland, the country with the most restrictive abortion laws among Western nations, has the lowest maternal mortality rate in the world with only 1 death per 100,000 live births. In contrast, Canada and the United States, countries which place no legal restrictions on abortion, have relatively high rates of maternal mortality with 7 and 11 deaths per 100,000 live births respectively. This pattern is seen around the world with countries with restrictive abortion laws, such as Mauritius, Chile and Sri Lanka, displaying significantly lower rates of maternal mortality than their neighbours.

Although the WEF numbers do not prove that restrictive abortion laws result in lower maternal mortality rates, they do reveal that abortion is not the answer to the appalling state of maternal health in developing nations. Rather, women in these countries require a safe environment in which to give birth, proper obstetric care during childbirth, and access to post-natal resources if they are to have any hope of survival for themselves and their children.

COLF supports the laudable goal of improving the health of women and children of every nationality and is confident that Canada is capable of leading the world in this task. Together, the members of the G-20 can insure that more children reach their fifth birthdays with their mothers by their sides.

Sincerely,

&dagger;Bishop Gerald Wiesner, O.M.I.  
Chairman of the Board  
Bishop of Prince George