
National Housing and Homelessness Network

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Sent via fax to: 613-941-6900

Rt. Hon. Paul Martin,
Prime Minister of Canada

Prime Minister:

RE: Urgent request to take direct action to create more affordable homes

I am writing on behalf of the National Housing and Homelessness Network to urge you as Prime Minister to take direct action to create more affordable homes for the millions of Canadians who are suffering under the nation-wide affordable housing crisis and homelessness disaster. In 1990, as Liberal housing critic, you wrote: "Leadership [in solving the housing crisis] must come from one source; and a national vision requires some national direction." We are asking you to:

1. **break the logjam** and deliver on your government's promise of \$1 billion over five years for new housing;
2. **meet the goal of the One Percent Solution** (\$2 billion annually for new housing) by ramping up housing spending in the March 23 federal budget; and,
3. **call an emergency national housing summit** of federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers, municipal leaders, Aboriginal organizations and community representatives.

Now is the time for you to take action. TD Economics released a report in June 2003 that concluded: "Housing is a necessity of life. Yet, after ten years of economic expansion, one in five households in Canada is still unable to afford acceptable shelter – a strikingly high number. . . What's more, the lack of affordable housing is a problem confronting communities right across the nation – from large urban centres to smaller, less-populated areas. As such, it is steadily gaining recognition as one of Canada's most pressing public-policy issues."

The federal government has promised to spend \$1 billion over five years on new housing (\$680 million under the Affordable Housing Framework Agreement in 2001 and \$320 million in the 2003 federal budget). However, as former federal junior housing minister Steve Mahoney noted in a letter to our network in December of 2003, your government has only committed \$88.48 million to date – less than 9% of what you promised.

Your government has an important lever to get this money flowing: the accountability framework in the bilateral housing deals you signed with every province and territory. This

framework requires your government to release an annual report on new funding and new units. If a provincial or territorial government fails to meet the standards in the agreement, then your government can withhold future payments or take back money that has already been paid. To date, there have been no annual reports by your government, even though the original framework agreement was signed more than two years ago. Our network has released regular report cards that show senior levels of government have failed to meet the goals for new housing that you set.

Our first request of you: Direct federal officials to release financial statements and performance reports, as required under the accountability framework. If a province or territory is found to be unable or unwilling to meet their housing commitments, then bypass them and deal directly with willing municipalities or social housing providers.

When your Affordable Housing Program was announced in November of 2001, the then-federal housing minister, Alfonso Gagliano, called it a first step. All major national housing groups (Federation of Canadian Municipalities National Housing Policy Options Team, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, National Housing and Homelessness Network) are calling for a multi-year, fully-funded and comprehensive national housing strategy.

Our second request of you: Ensure that the March 23 federal budget contains new funding for housing, in addition to the current promises, to meet the goal of the One Percent Solution (\$2 billion annually for new social housing).

As you are aware, the affordable housing crisis and homelessness disaster is a major concern for Canadians, not just in urban areas, but also in smaller communities, remote, rural and northern areas. National leadership is required, as you said in 1990, to deal with this national disgrace.

Federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers have been meeting for national summits since the federal government re-joined the forum at a meeting in Fredericton in the year 2000. The meetings are supposed to take place annually, but the next F/P/T housing summit may not be held until the fall of 2004 (the most recent meeting was in April of 2003 in Winnipeg, and that had been postponed for at least six months).

Our third request of you: Call an emergency national housing summit to include federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers, along with municipal and Aboriginal housing leaders, plus community representatives.

Thank you for your immediate reply and prompt attention to these requests.

Sincerely,



Michael Shapcott, Co-Chair, National Housing and Homelessness Network

cc. Hon. David Anderson, Minister Responsible for CMHC
Hon. Andy Scott, Minister of State