Dear Mr. Chrétien:

On the eve of a new millennium, our world is on the cusp of a momentous change, a transition invested with a heightened sense of hope and of profound anxiety. For many this crisis is not associated as much with the calendar, but with a deepening sense in recent years of great suffering in the world and a desperate need for a new beginning. Despite humanity’s awesome capacities, we have failed to triumph over poverty and deprivation, nor have we confronted the massive inequalities that prevent us from attaining the vision of global community.

According to the United Nations Development Program report for 1998, the world's 225 richest people have achieved a combined wealth equal to the annual income of the poorest 47 per cent of the world's people - that is 2.5 billion persons. The gap between rich and poor is growing at a dangerous and unprecedented rate.

As the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative, made up of over 30 Churches, ecumenical coalitions and church organizations, we find that the biblical image of Jubilee offers us a vision of the kind of new beginning required to realize true global community. In that light, we are engaged in a broad program of theological reflection, education and advocacy on this theme, strengthening the resolve of our Churches and organizations to work for social justice and ecological integrity.
A key part of this program is our commitment to give leadership to the Canadian face of the global Jubilee 2000 campaign - a campaign whose goal is the cancellation of the debt of the world's most impoverished countries by the year 2000. We believe that meeting this goal would be an important step forward towards addressing the massive inequalities that currently deform our global relationships. We have been greatly encouraged by the response so far from Church members and citizens across this country and around the globe who are signing petitions to present to you and other leaders at the upcoming G-8 Summit in Cologne.

The participation of the Canadian Churches in the Jubilee 2000 campaign reflects the commitment of our global Church leadership. In 1994, Pope John Paul II proposed celebrating the year 2000 by "reducing substantially, if not canceling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations".

In August of 1998, Bishops of the worldwide Anglican Communion gathered at Lambeth said that the "need for debt relief for the poorest nations is urgent" and they called "for negotiations to be speeded up so that the poorest nations may benefit from such cancellation by the birth of the new millennium".

In December of 1998 in Harare, the eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches "appealed to the leaders of the G-8 nations to recognize the urgent need to cancel the debts of the poorest countries to enable them to enter the new millennium with a fresh start".

We urge you and your government to take up this call to Jubilee with decisive steps and bold international leadership reflecting Canada's commitment to ensuring hope for poor countries as we enter the new millennium.

**Bilateral Debt Cancellation**

We are calling for outright cancellation of the outstanding bilateral debt owed to Canada by the 50 poorest, most indebted countries. We believe that the upcoming 1999 federal budget presents an opportunity for your government to take this important step. We have already had a most productive dialogue with Mr. Paul Martin and key Finance Ministry officials regarding our call for debt cancellation, and have shared with him information on the countries that we feel are urgently in need of debt cancellation and how this could be implemented.

We see bilateral debt cancellation as an extraordinary one-time measure (even if achieved over several years) reflecting the need to right the imbalance of global relationships and eliminating the huge debt overhang that continues to undermine progress towards sustainable social development.

**Official Development Assistance**

We are also extremely concerned about the deep cuts to development assistance over the past six years of your government which have reduced our aid from 0.45 per cent of GNP in the early 1990s to just 0.27 per cent in 1997/98. We are committed to seeing increased levels of ODA funding and ask that you establish a clear timetable to move Canada steadily towards the
target of 0.35 per cent of GNP by 2003, beginning with the upcoming federal budget.

Taking these two steps in the 1999 budget would show that Canada was committed to providing leadership on the world stage in addressing the global inequalities which threaten to destroy the kind of hope that the new millennium might offer.

**Leadership towards the Cologne G-8**

The upcoming Cologne G-8 Summit is a key opportunity for Canadian leadership on the Jubilee call for debt cancellation. We recognize that Canada and other creditor countries are already supporting the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative under the auspices of the IMF and World Bank. However, it is our strong contention that this approach to debt relief, with its goal of debt sustainability for poor countries, falls far short of the urgent demands for debt cancellation that Jubilee represents.

We are seeking, as an outcome of this meeting, 100 per cent multilateral debt cancellation for an expanded set of countries beyond those narrowly defined by the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative. Further, debt cancellation must not be linked to implementation of structural adjustment programs as these have placed an unjust burden on the poorest people who have borne the brunt of cutbacks in health, education and social spending and other unjust measures stipulated by these programs. Finally, we are also looking to the Cologne G-8 Summit for new strategies to write down the debt burden of highly indebted middle income countries with large numbers of poor citizens.

As the Cologne meeting approaches, we would welcome opportunities as Church leadership to discuss these issues with you in person.

We recognize the difficult choices that must be made in setting priorities in public policy. But we also believe that the basic needs of the poor must be given priority. As we approach the announcement of the 1999 federal budget, we will look to see if these international commitments - for bilateral debt cancellation and increased aid - are reflected in your government’s choices. This kind of international solidarity is essential to a vision of a just and inclusive Canada - a Canada that can with integrity give bold leadership to the world - at Cologne and beyond - as we turn the corner on this millennium.

With prayers for you a you strive to provide leadership at this critical time,

On behalf of the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative:

Most Reverend J. Barry Curtis  
Archbishop of Calgary and Metropolitan of Rupertsland  
President, Canadian Council of Churches

Most Reverend Michael G. Peers  
Primate, Anglican Church of Canada
Most Reverend François Thibodeau, CJM
Bishop of Edmundston
Chairman, Commission for Social Affairs
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Ray Elgersma
Director, Canadian Ministries Board
Christian Reformed Church in North America

Helmut Harder
General Secretary, Conference of Mennonites in Canada

Rev. Telmor Sartison
Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

The Rev. Dr. William Klempa
Moderator of 124th General Assembly
The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Right Reverend Bill Phipps
Moderator, United Church of Canada

"You shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberation in the land for all its inhabitants. You shall make this your year of Jubilee." Leviticus 25:10

Enclosures:

- A Call to Jubilee petition
- Responding to the Biblical Challenge for Debt Cancellation pamphlet
- The Vision of the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative
- A New Beginning: A Call for Jubilee poster
- Release from Bondage poster

Copies:

- Mr. Preston Manning, Leader of the Reform Party
- Mr. Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
- Mrs. Elsie Wayne, House Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party
- Ms. Alexa McDonough, Leader of the New Democratic Party