

Presentation to Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade

***By Amanda Sussman, Plan Canada
on behalf of the
2010 G8/G20 Civil Society Coordinating Committee***

Good morning. I thank-you for the opportunity to appear here today and I'd like to use it wisely to make the best use of your time.

My name is Amanda Sussman and I'm here on behalf of the Canadian 2010 G8/G20 Civil Society Coordinating Committee, which is an initiative involving more than 100 Canadian organizations, and associations of organizations, who themselves are supported by thousands of Canadians across the country. I am also an advisor to Plan International Canada, one of the world's oldest and largest development agencies, operating in over 66 countries.

Today, I'd like to brief you on a large initiative of the Committee that began last February in preparation for the Canadian presidency of the G8.

Essentially, we began with what worked, and what didn't work in Kananaskis, when Canada last hosted the G8 in 2002. One of the things that became clear was that while there were dozens of organizations engaged in public campaigning using a variety of methods from constructive engagement with government to street action outside the Alternative Summit in Calgary, there was no clearly articulated set of recommendations to government that could communicate both to policy makers and the public what is was the civil society was looking for, and where there was broad consensus upon which political leaders could base their actions.

This time around, organizations are taking quite a different approach. The document we have submitted to you, entitled "An Agenda for Global Development", is the result of an in-depth process whereby broad and diverse groupings of organizations agreed upon three critical and interlocking themes that should be at the centre of the 2010 agenda: combating poverty; transforming the global economic and financial system; and making real progress on climate change. Within those themes, dozens of organizations have produced a clear set of policy recommendations to government that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and actionable, from the government's point of view.

For instance, the recommendations on child and maternal health reflect the collective expertise of Canada's five largest development organizations, working alongside human rights and citizen's groups, who have decades of experience working on these issues first-hand around the world. Similarly, the recommendations on food security, reflect the work of the Food Security Policy Group – an association of 35 agricultural and development organizations from across the country, who work together to share their collective expertise as front-line organizations working on food security both in Canada and abroad. These are just two of the many associations of organizations who worked on the document.

I want to emphasize that these recommendations are not just supported by Canadian organizations alone. Over the past three days in Ottawa, the Committee has hosted a global gathering citizens organizations working on the G8/G20 agendas around the world. From our discussions it became clear that the recommendations outlined in this document reflect a widely supported international consensus will also be communicated to other G8 and G20 world leaders.

On poverty, the Canadian committee began with a very straightforward question: What could the G8 realistically accomplish - given that it is a short-term political body without institutional capacity to implement initiatives in the long-term- to advance this issue in 2010? The recommendations are mainly directly at what Canada can do, as host of the G8, to put the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) back on track. The MDGs are an agreed set of international goals set by world leaders at international summits during the 1990s. There are 8 goals covering the world's most pressing issues – from poverty and hunger to HIV/AIDs and education – with specific targets to be reached by the year 2015.

Clearly, 2010 will be a decisive year for Canada, and for the world. Our decisions on economic reform and climate change will determine the success of world's efforts to reduce poverty and address global warming for the next generation and beyond. As host of the next G8 Summit, Canada can make the difference between two choices: relegating these aspirations to no more than a distant hope; and confirming a serious possibility that achieving these goals can be a reality in our lifetime.

Around the globe, Canadians proudly sport the Canadian flag in traveling as a symbol of Canadian democracy, openness and concern for human rights. Yet our great international achievements of the past are today clouded by concerns about Canada's current role in climate change negotiations, reform of the global economy and addressing global poverty. When world leaders gather for the G8 and G20 meetings in 2010, Canadians will have an unprecedented opportunity to reassert our international reputation as a world leader in promoting these values around the globe.

I also want to emphasize that we have made important progress and in many cases, money has been well spent. Past investments in these issues are producing remarkable results – on HIV and AIDs, education and immunizations, just to mention a few. In Africa alone, citizens have used ODA flows to provide AIDs treatment to nearly 3 million people; dramatically reduce deaths from malaria; and to help put 34 million more children in school.

What is unique about 2010 is that for many of the challenges discussed in this paper, the causes are now well-understood and the solutions well-known. Rather than large elusive goals that remain too difficult to tackle, this paper focuses on realistic steps Canada can take to catalyze progress on many of the world's most pressing concerns and promote a new model of globalization that is socially responsible, economically sustainable and environmentally just.

What we are looking for today is to initiate a constructive and effective dialogue between the Canadian government and it's citizens, based on the best practices of previous summits in the past. It will be essential to have this Committee play an important role as a vehicle for Canadian stakeholders- from many different sectors, including not-for-profit and private- by holding a distinct set of hearings on the G8 and G20 agendas. The process does not have to be too onerous to be effective. For example, four to six hearings with two in Ottawa, and four distributed across the key regions in country, cumulating in a concise report with clear recommendations to government. These hearing could be one of several things that Parliamentarians can do to be engaged with their citizens on these key issues as world leaders come to Canada.

But beyond this Committee, best practices from previous G8 meetings include a wider dialogue between government and civil society globally, known as the "civil/G8". We hope that this Committee will play an active role in facilitating this wider conversation and we look forward to working with you on this important initiative.