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Press Release

December 9, 2008

" It's time for Universal Human Rights "

Every human has rights!

*On the 60th anniversary of the United Nations
Adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),*

**The OCSJ and LIFT will host a press conference
on December 10th, 1:30 p.m.
at Queens Park Media Studio**

Our world and North America are in crisis and the need and potential for change has never been greater. Therefore, the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice (OCSJ) and Low Income Families Together (LIFT), in solidarity with Dignity International, will publicly call for U.S. President-Elect Barack Obama, Canadian Federal political leaders, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, and Mayor David Miller to make a personal pledge to respect and uphold the UDHR initiated by the Elders Council campaign "*Every Human Has Rights*". The Elders Council includes world figures like Nelson Mandela, Gro Bruntland, Aung San Suu Kyi, Jimmy Carter, and Muhammad Yunis,

In 1993 Canada and the United States both signed a UN declaration stating, "Realizing and defending universal and indivisible human rights is the first duty of governments". Society and individuals are also responsible to promote and protect our human rights. As the economic meltdown drives more people into deeper poverty and climate change crisis threatens the future of our children, it is critical need to act to ensure governments and communities cooperate to find solutions to secure a sustainable future. We believe that the governments of Canada and the United States must act now to ensure accountability to universal human rights obligations. Our governments have signed these covenants in our name, now they must use them to protect our dignity, security and environment.

Josephine Grey, Co-Chair, OCSJ, **Jamil Jivani**, youth member, LIFT,
and **Joe Mihevc**, Toronto City Councillor, Ward 21

We have examined how **Ontario's poverty reduction strategy** measures up or not to Ontario's human rights obligations. These include the right to basic needs such as safe housing, healthy food, decent wages, income security and higher education. In our view the Poverty Reduction Strategy, though it has some good features, does not adequately respect economic and social human rights.

“It is a good foundation to build on and could help make a difference moving forward, but we do need to take socio-economic human rights into account to ensure people’s basic needs are met,” said Joe Mihevic.

“Poverty is a human rights issue and the urgent need to act on poverty is growing daily as we slip into a global recession. On this day, we want the Ontario government to think again about waiting for “a growing economy” to finally fulfill the basic human rights of all those who are suffering the effects of economic chaos,” says Josephine Grey.

We are asking that leaders use Universal Human Rights law as a strategy to address economic crisis, climate change, the re-negotiation of NAFTA and other critical issues affecting Ontario that require urgent action.

In 2006 the UN committee on Economic Social Cultural Rights noted “the absence of any factors or difficulties preventing the effective implementation of the Covenant in the State party.” In other words there is no good reason we can’t fulfill these rights. They also pointed out “the insufficiency of minimum wage and social assistance to ensure the realization of the right to an adequate standard of living for all.” If Ontario were accountable to human rights, welfare rates and minimum wage would be sufficient to meet basic needs.

Jamil Jivani said, “The future youth face today, in light of environmental degradation and increasing student debt, is very insecure. Youth need to learn about and claim Universal Human Rights if we are to have a role in building a better world. The multicultural fabric of our society is dependent upon a respect for and commitment to human rights.”

We are challenging all political leaders and every person who cares about the future, especially young people, to sign the pledge at “everyhumanhasrights.org” and join a growing global movement to promote Universal Human Rights as a foundation for a more democratic, secure and sustainable world. We encourage people to challenge their elected representatives to respect human rights and ask them if they will make a pledge.

For more info, contact:

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Or visit www.lift.to