



## NEWS RELEASE

# Time For A Fair Deal

*Task Force Addresses Urgent Need to Reform Income Security Policies with Unveiling of Report*

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TORONTO, ON – (May 15, 2006) - Today in Toronto an unprecedented coalition of business, labour, academic, non-profit, and think tank leaders released their report “Time for a Fair Deal” calling for fundamental reform of Canada’s income security programs for working-age adults.

Declaring the current system in need of a thorough overhaul, The Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults (MISWAA) identified three key issues plaguing low-income Canadians:

- Many working people cannot earn enough to make ends meet even when working full-time for a full year – at least 30% of low-wage workers fall into this group
- Employment Insurance (EI) no longer covers the majority of the temporarily unemployed – in Ontario only 27% receive EI benefits, and only 22% receive EI benefits in Toronto
- Existing social assistance programs are punitive, make it difficult to escape poverty, and create a “welfare trap” for many

The Task Force calls these issues a “smoldering crisis” for Toronto, Ontario, as well as all of Canada. It is both a social and economic imperative to fix the system given the country’s aging population and the need to ensure that all working-age adults who can work are able to do so.

“We cannot achieve a just society nor a fully productive economy if we do not do a better job of supporting the needs of low-income adults and families as they struggle to lift themselves out of poverty,” said business leader David Pecaut, Co-Chair of the Task Force.

The Task Force also recognized that there is a special urgency to fix the system in our cities, like Toronto, where the costs of living for low-income adults and families are highest. The report notes that, if the economy were to slip into recession, cities would feel the brunt of the current system’s failings as rapidly increasing unemployment and homelessness place skyrocketing demands on municipal and provincial social services.

“Income security programs for working-age adults have not fundamentally changed in forty years,” said Task Force Co-Chair Susan Piggott. “This remarkable coalition of business and non-profit leaders has developed a roadmap to achieve meaningful reforms that will improve the lives of our low-income citizens – not only in our cities but throughout the country.”

The Task Force’s recommendations are aimed at the federal government, the provincial government, municipal governments, and other parts of civil society that all must be part of the solution.

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Key recommendations to the federal government include:

- Reforming Employment Insurance to address the significant decline in coverage
- Introducing through the tax system a new national refundable tax credit and working income supplement to support low-income Canadians
- Providing a national disability income support program for persons whose disabilities are so substantial they cannot enter the paid labour force

Key recommendations to the Ontario Government include:

- Establishing an independent body, with representation from employers and labour, to recommend periodic increases to the minimum wage
- Implementing a seamless and integrated child benefit platform for low-income parents with children that pays child benefits to all low-income parents, including those receiving social assistance
- Reducing the impediments to leaving social assistance by providing prescription drug and dental benefits to low-income workers
- Strengthening the enforcement of employment standards to protect the rights of workers under the law
- Restoring the asset limits for those receiving social assistance to levels that allow savings for contingencies and help support the transition to work
- Improving training and employment supports for social assistance recipients and low-income workers
- Introducing reforms to the Ontario Disability Support Program, including returning benefit levels to those received by senior citizens who have no other source of income
- Uploading social assistance benefit costs from municipalities to the province

The Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults was formed in the fall of 2004 by the Toronto City Summit Alliance, a broad-based coalition of civic leaders in the Toronto region, and by St. Christopher House, a multi-service neighbourhood centre that works with low-income people in Toronto. The Task Force is made up of representatives from major employers, labour unions, policy institutes, academia, community organizations, advocacy groups, foundations, ex-officio government representatives, and individuals with first-hand experience of income security programs.

The full MISSWA report is available on the web at [www.torontoalliance.ca](http://www.torontoalliance.ca). Please see the attached for full listing of the MISWAA Task Force and Working Group.

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## **MISWAA Task Force and Working Group**

While the views expressed in the report of the MISWAA Task Force are not necessarily identical with those of each member or organization listed, all signatories have a common determination to address the challenges the report describes.

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