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Statement on Climate Change, International Development & Equity

We wish to congratulate Canada for ratifying the Kyoto Protocol and commend Canada for its leadership in encouraging Russian ratification of this important global agreement. We are concerned, however, that Canada is compromising the Protocol's integrity and the ultimate objective of the convention which is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prevent dangerous climate change.

Climate change is inherently inequitable. The crisis was largely created by industrialized countries, like Canada, and the impacts in terms of increased losses due to rising sea levels, increased storm surges, increased severity of extreme weather events including droughts and floods will be disproportionately felt in developing countries.

As representatives of faith, environmental, labour and international development communities, we are compelled to express our concern that Canada is advocating weak rules for forestry projects in the Clean Development Mechanism.

The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) was established to enable countries in the developed world to get credit towards their Kyoto target by investing in projects in developing countries that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainable development. If Canada is successful, forestry projects in developing countries could undermine efforts to protect the climate, and damage the environment and livelihoods of local people. Weak rules will enable Canada and Canadian companies to buy cheap carbon credits from questionable projects overseas, allowing the largest emitters of greenhouse gas emissions to avoid reducing greenhouse gases at home.

Such projects do not have the co-benefit of improving air quality and public health, or encouraging a technological transition towards clean, efficient and renewable energy systems in Canada or developing countries.

While rules for energy-related CDM projects have been established, forestry carbon sinks were considered more complex and rules will be finalized this December at the next UN Climate Negotiations in Milan.

Because forests can absorb carbon out of the atmosphere, enhancing forestry "sinks" are considered a legitimate way of getting credit towards our Kyoto target. Forestry projects, however, are very different

from renewable energy projects and have unique considerations.

Ill-conceived forestry sinks projects can take up large tracts of land with fast-growing, alien species that require large volumes of water and intensive chemical use, compromising local water safety and availability. These large monoculture plantations can displace local people and original mixed forest, reducing biodiversity. Canada is opposing the inclusion of international socio-economic and environmental assessments that would protect local people.

Carbon stored in forests can also suddenly return to the atmosphere through fire, insect infestation or clearcutting. Canada is opposing a practical approach of temporary carbon credits that would remain valid as long as the carbon is permanently stored.

There are numerous forestry projects around the world that see the CDM as a new subsidy for "business as usual" projects. It is essential to ensure that only new (additional) projects put in place to protect the climate are being supported under the CDM, not projects that would happen anyway.

Establishing effective rules is only fulfilling agreements made under previous UN climate negotiations and is consistent with Canada's other international commitments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Millennium Development Goals.

If weak rules are adopted, investors will support unsustainable projects, minimizing investment in more meaningful forestry projects that restore native forests and complement local agriculture.

The opportunity for marginally more expensive rural wind or solar projects will also be compromised. Such projects clearly reduce greenhouse gases, transfer technology and can improve air quality and public health by reducing dependence on coal and diesel.

Weak rules on sinks in the CDM can worsen the impacts of climate change in developing countries, compromise the livelihoods and environments of local people, and undermine a more sustainable future in the 21st Century.

Canada must actively support high international standards for sinks projects under the CDM by supporting environmental and socio-economic impact assessments and guarantees for the permanence and additionality of forestry sinks projects.