

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

JUSTICE MINISTRIES

KAIROS UPDATE

This supplementary report is an update to Justice Ministries' report on pages 436-37 that addresses the November 30, 2009 decision by the Hon. Bev Oda, Minister of International Co-operation, not to fund KAIROS' overseas program proposal for the period 2009-2013. Minister Oda has not reversed her decision.

Church leaders wrote to Prime Minister Harper on January 21, 2010, requesting a meeting to clarify the government's position following the confusion created by two senior Cabinet ministers who had stated two different reasons why KAIROS' proposal was not approved.¹ As this supplementary was being prepared, the Prime Minister's Office had not responded to the letter from the church leaders.

KAIROS submitted a program proposal to CIDA for 2009-2013 in March 2009. This was a \$9.2 million program (over four years). CIDA's contribution was \$7 million (over four years). The CIDA grant would be in addition to the funding provided by KAIROS' members. KAIROS, and the ecumenical coalitions that preceded KAIROS, have been in partnership with CIDA for 35 years. Information on how KAIROS has spent CIDA funds is on KAIROS' website (kairoscanada.org). KAIROS has spent these funds in compliance with the contractual agreement it had with CIDA.

In February 2009, KAIROS received an excellent evaluation by CIDA.

After KAIROS' proposal was submitted to CIDA in March 2009, there was consultation with CIDA officials regarding the proposal. During this period, there was no indication from CIDA officials that the proposal did not meet CIDA priorities. In July 2009, KAIROS was informed that the proposal had been submitted to the Minister, the Hon. Bev Oda.

Minister Oda Announced New Priorities in May 2009

In a speech delivered at the Munk Centre for International Relations, University of Toronto in May 2009, Minister Oda announced new priorities for CIDA. These new priorities were: food security, children and youth, and economic development. In her speech, Minister Oda also stated that the bilateral (government to government) and thematic priorities could not be effectively implemented "while ignoring governance, the environment and equality between men and women. And of course, we will also continue our work to promote freedom, human rights and the rule of law."² The new priorities are laudable priorities. It is regrettable that it was not made clear that these new priorities would affect both government-based bilateral funding programs and proposals from the voluntary sector (such as KAIROS' proposal). CIDA personnel did not communicate to KAIROS that the new priorities would affect KAIROS' proposal even when the proposal was approved by CIDA personnel and then submitted to Minister Oda in July 2009.

KAIROS' former program ended in September 2009. KAIROS received \$99,000 in bridge funding from CIDA in September 2009, as the Minister had not made a decision on the 2009-2013 proposal. The additional funding expired on November 30th. On November 30th, Mary Corkery, KAIROS' executive director, received a phone call from a senior official at CIDA stating that CIDA would not fund the KAIROS 2009-2013 program proposal. The official stated that KAIROS' proposal did not fit CIDA's program priorities.

Minister Kenney's Speech on Anti-Semitism

The Hon. Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, delivered a speech at the Global Forum to Combat Anti-Semitism in Jerusalem on December 16th.³ He stated that KAIROS had been "de-funded" because of the leadership KAIROS was providing in Canada on the boycott against the State of Israel. This is not KAIROS' position. KAIROS wrote to Minister Kenney demanding a retraction and an apology. KAIROS' policy is very clear on this matter and the policy is on the public record.

In response to an editorial in the Toronto Star, Minister Kenney wrote a letter to the editor of the Toronto Star,⁴ in which he stated that the decision not to fund KAIROS' proposal was made by Bev Oda, Minister for CIDA "because it did not meet CIDA's current priorities, such as increased food aid". He continued to assert that KAIROS "has taken a leadership role in the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel". Once again, this is erroneous. KAIROS has not done anything like this.

In 2008 KAIROS' board of directors approved a policy document called *Economic Advocacy Measures – Options for KAIROS Members for the Promotion of Peace in Palestine and Israel*.⁵ This document includes the following recommendation: "That KAIROS not support any general boycott of Israeli products." The document is a public document and it is on KAIROS' web site and was brought to the attention of the 133rd General Assembly (2008).

In his speech on combating anti-Semitism, Minister Kenney does not accuse KAIROS (or its members) of being anti-Semitic. But in a speech on anti-Semitism delivered at an international conference to tackle anti-Semitism, a reader might conclude otherwise.

Denominations, including The Presbyterian Church in Canada, have acknowledged their own past history of anti-Semitism. Furthermore, churches have worked very hard for many years at building a strong relationship with the Jewish community in Canada.

In communities across Canada there are examples of practical co-operation between the Christian and Jewish faith communities. An example of co-operation on an international issue was the collaboration between KAIROS, the Canadian Jewish Congress and other organizations on issues related to Darfur (Sudan). Not only have the Christian and Jewish faith communities worked together but friendships have flowered.

Mr. Kenney's comments regrettably fail to acknowledge and take into account the collaboration on international and local issues and the positive relationships between the Christian and Jewish communities in Canada.

Impact on KAIROS' Partners

The decision by Minister Oda to not fund KAIROS' proposal for 2009 to 2013 is having an impact on KAIROS' overseas partners. If the program is not funded by CIDA, then the grants from members, including PWS&D (which maintained its full grant to KAIROS), to the Global Partnership Program will not benefit from the CIDA match and there will be fewer funds to support KAIROS' partners.

KAIROS managers and staff had decided to take a 10% cut in time (and therefore salary) so that there would be some funding support to partners. In February 2010, KAIROS received an additional \$100,000 grant from the United Church of Canada. This gift from the United Church of Canada meant that KAIROS staff and managers would not have to take a 10% salary cut. KAIROS' overseas partners are receiving program grants which represent about 16% of what they would receive if the program is funded by CIDA.

Support to KAIROS

The Presidents of the Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada co-signed a letter to the Hon. Bev Oda in support of KAIROS.⁶ Project Ploughshares wrote two letters to Minister Oda in support of KAIROS.⁷

KAIROS is receiving support from the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC). Over 90 development and relief organizations belong to CCIC.

The opposition parties have publicly supported KAIROS.

The response by the constituency amongst KAIROS' members is heartening. In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, there have been initiatives in 25 presbyteries involving individuals, sessions, congregations and presbyteries. The initiatives include writing to a Member of Parliament, signing petitions, writing to the Hon. Bev Oda, Minister of International Co-operation (CIDA), to Prime Minister Harper and to the leaders of the opposition parties. Presbyterians have met with MPs on their own or as part of a Presbyterian or an ecumenical delegation. These conversations, including the difficult ones, have been valuable learning experiences. The letters and the meetings have heightened KAIROS' profile with Members of Parliament. Since December 2009, Justice Ministries has sent out regular updates to Presbyterians across the country.

KAIROS Submitted a New Proposal to CIDA

In April 2010, KAIROS submitted a new proposal to CIDA in line with two of the three new priorities announced by Minister Bev Oda: 1) Promoting food security; 2) Securing the future for children and youth. As this supplementary was being written, a decision had not been made by Minister Oda on the proposal.

Conclusion

What is troubling is that the decision not to fund the original KAIROS proposal was not based on the merits of the proposal. It was reviewed and approved by CIDA personnel before it was submitted to Minister Oda. KAIROS was never informed that the proposal did not fit CIDA's priorities. The proposal is consistent with the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) Accountability Act, federal legislation that applies to all aid programs. It is consistent with KAIROS and its members' missiology and understanding of partnership.

The conclusion that must be drawn is that the decision to not fund the proposal was a political decision.

Public Witness

KAIROS brings policy issues to the attention of the public it serves and to Canadian policy makers and decision-makers. The issues that KAIROS brings forward come out of the lived experiences of vulnerable human beings. The issues may be controversial and challenge conventional discourse. But carefully researched issues inspired by the gospel's call to care for the widow, the orphan, the outsider and informed by the experiences of church partners, reflect KAIROS and its members' commitment to justice and are intended to contribute to public life in Canada. To do otherwise is to become indifferent to the world around us and to commit "acedia".

"Acedia" is from an ancient Greek word describing a state of listlessness or torpor, of not caring, of spiritual or mental indifference. It is this state during which there is an absolute indifference to prayer and fasting. It is not difficult in our society to slip into indifference of the world around us. This is not what the church's ministry is about. The church is called to witness, to name the suffering in the world, to be in places that are uncomfortable (not just physical places), to challenge systems and structures that oppress human beings and harm our fragile ecosystem. We are called to imagine a different world, a new heaven and a new earth. We are called to practice this ministry with integrity, humility and always with love.

The churches have a rich history of engaging governments and powerful institutions in Canada. This reflects over thirty years of ecumenical co-operation on social justice issues in Canada. Recall that the churches were among the first bodies in Canada to draw the Canadian public's attention to the apartheid system in South Africa. The pain and suffering felt by the majority of South Africans was communicated to the churches in Canada by church partners in South Africa. When Canadian churches spoke out against apartheid and the Canadian connections to the apartheid system, the churches were criticized.

Are we now at a moment in our country's history when critical commentary on public policy puts an ecumenical agency or a non-profit organization at risk of losing public funding, not because the program is weak and poorly developed, but because this commentary runs contrary to the policies of the government of the day?

Offering critical commentary or proposing alternative policies on public issues are intended to contribute to public life and to the common good. This is part and parcel of the democratic fabric in our country.

It is within Minister Oda's purview to reject a proposal from KAIROS (or any other agency) because she and the federal government disagree with the policy options KAIROS might be proposing. However the church would urge the Government of Canada to be transparent and publically state the rationale for this decision.

Recommendation No. 29 (adopted, p. 39)

That the 136th General Assembly communicates its disappointment to the Prime Minister of Canada for the manner in which KAIROS and its member denominations and religious communities have been treated regarding KAIROS' 2009 to 2013 submission to the Canadian International Development Agency.

End Notes:

1. Letter to Prime Minister Harper, January 21, 2010.
2. "A New Effective Approach To Canadian Aid", speech by the Hon. Beverley J. Oda, Minister of International Co-operation at the Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, May 20, 2009.
3. Speech by the Hon. Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism at the Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism, Jerusalem, December 16, 2009.
4. Letter to the Editor, *Toronto Star*, the Hon. Jason Kenney, December 24, 2009.
5. *Economic Advocacy Measures – Options for KAIROS Members for the Promotion of Peace in Palestine and Israel*, Toronto, January 7, 2008.
6. Letter to the Hon. Bev Oda, from the Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, March 30, 2010.
7. Letters to the Hon. Bev Oda from Project Ploughshares, December 8 and 22, 2009.