

2010 POVERTY OLYMPICS TORCH RELAY TO SHINE THE SPOTLIGHT ON POVERTY IN BC

Jan. 17, 2010 Vancouver, Coast Salish Territories – During the 2010 Poverty Olympics Torch Relay, Torchbearers across the province will emphasize the devastating reality of poverty and homelessness in their local communities.

“BC wins Gold for having the worst poverty rate in the country, the lowest minimum wage, and the highest child poverty rate for the sixth year in a row,” declares organizer, Trish Garner. “It is inexcusable that the government refuses to take action.”

Preceding the “official” Olympic torch relay by a few days, the Poverty Olympics Torch Relay will counter the corporate event with the message that people throughout the province are struggling with poverty.

643,000 British Columbians were living in poverty during the economic boom in 2007. Now there are undoubtedly many more people suffering due to the recession and the government’s response, which has been to cut education, social services, health care, legal aid, arts funding, and more, while continuing to fund Olympic-related projects.

Wendy Pedersen of the Carnegie Community Action Project states: “Money spent on the Olympics could have gone a long way toward ending homelessness and poverty in our province. Instead it has contributed to increasing the gap between rich and poor.”

“If we have enough in the federal budget for an economic stimulus package that builds a costly new roof over Canada Place, and enough in the provincial budget to build a costly new roof over BC Place, then surely we must have enough money to build new roofs for people in our communities who desperately need affordable housing,” says Sechelt’s Torch Relay organizer.

Kicking off in Golden today, the Poverty Olympics Torch Relay will feature Vernon, Kamloops, 100 Mile House, Quesnel, Greenville, Sechelt, Whistler, Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Langley, Surrey, New Westminster, Richmond, West Vancouver, North Vancouver, Coquitlam, and Burnaby. Concluding the province-wide journey, the final leg of the Torch Relay will end at the third annual Poverty Olympics in Vancouver on February 7, 2010.

The Poverty Olympics is an annual event held in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. It involves skits loosely based on Olympic events and features its own Poverty Anthem and official mascots – Itchy the Bedbug, Creepy the Cockroach, and Chewy the Rat. The purpose of the Poverty Olympics is to advocate for poverty reduction in BC, an aim captured in the slogan “*End Poverty. It’s Not a Game.*”

Poverty and homelessness are not inevitable. Many other jurisdictions have been successful in reducing poverty. Torchbearers across the province call on our governments to put the same energy and public spending into ending poverty and homelessness as they are into holding the Olympics.

Find out more about the 2010 Poverty Olympics and the Torch Relay at www.povertyolympics.ca.