

Poverty Olympics Torch Relay Launch Emphasizes Struggles Around the Province



Vancouver, BC, Canada: On January 17, a group of advocates and activists launched a Poverty Olympics Torch Relay at the Vancouver Art Gallery which will visit 18 communities around the province, mirroring the route of the official torch relay, until it reaches Vancouver on February 7 and makes its way to the opening ceremonies of the Poverty Olympics.

At the press conference, attendees displayed signs showing the rates of low-income in participating communities around BC, which reach as high as 25.3% in 100 Mile House and 26.6% in the City of

Vancouver. The mascots of the Poverty Olympics, Chewy the Rat, Itchy the Bedbug and Creepy the Cockroach also had a presence as they skated around the press conference.

During the Torch Relay, farmers will serve home-grown soup and perform skits in 100 Mile House, the Troubled Times Troubadours will play and sing their woes in Sechelt on the Sunshine Coast, and the Poverty Olympics mascots will ski down the slopes in Whistler, where homeless people are allegedly already being displaced to Squamish.

Why are British Columbians around the province coming together to be a part of this Torch Relay? Because people are struggling with poverty and homelessness throughout the province.

There are somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 homeless people in BC. 643,000 British Columbians were living in poverty in 2007, the latest data available. That was during the economic boom, before the recession hit, and the government responded by slashing funding across the board - education, the arts, libraries, health care, social services, seniors care, legal aid. Poverty rates are going to rise as a result. Through it all, the government has continued to fund the Olympics, which has now reached a cost of over 6 billion dollars.

In the build-up to Olympic Games, people often wonder whose going to go home with the most medals. Well, BC's already ahead of the pack in Gold Medal wins. This province has the highest average wealth in Canada and more millionaires per capita than any other province. It also has the worst poverty rate in Canada, the lowest minimum wage, and the highest child poverty rate for the sixth year in a row. BC is the epitome of the phrase "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." Clearly, it's only "The Best Place on Earth" for a few, while many more live in grinding poverty, desperately trying to get by from one day to the next.

But people aren't just living in poverty, they're dying in poverty. Poor people have a shorter life expectancy than those with high incomes. A homeless person dies every 12 days in BC.

This province is in a state of emergency. And we need bold actions to get us out of it. But we can get out of it; there is nothing inevitable about poverty and homelessness. Other countries and provinces are committing to the reduction of poverty and seeing results. During the Poverty Olympics Torch Relay, Torchbearers will be calling on our governments to put the same energy and public spending into ending poverty and homelessness as they have into holding the Olympics.

Media coverage from Poverty Olympics torch relay launch:

[Homeless stage an Olympic torch relay to raise awareness of plight](#)

People's Daily Online/Xinhua News Agency, January 18

[Anti-poverty activists launch Olympic-style torch relay to highlight concerns](#)

The Canadian Press, January 17

(Featured in the *Kamloops Daily News*, *Coast Reporter [Sunshine Coast, BC]*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, *Guelph Mercury*, *The Moose Jaw Times Herald*, *Metro News Halifax*, *Macleans.ca*, *NewsTalk 1010*, *canadaeast.com* and more!)

[Housing advocates unimpressed by VANOC charity](#)

CTV News, January 17

[Call for Homes not Ads](#)

24 Hours, January 18

[Poverty Olympics torch relay begins](#)

News 1130, January 17

[Poverty Olympics Torch Relay begins](#)

CKNW, January 18 (Featured also in Manitoba CJOB 68)

[The 2010 "Poverty Olympics" Coming](#)

Vancouver Sun Community of Interest, January 19

[2010 Poverty Olympics Torch Relay underway](#)

canadianimmigrant.ca

[Poverty Olympics torch relay protest arrives in Chilliwack on Monday](#)

Chilliwack Progress, January 29 (Featured also in Abbotsford News)



For more information about the Poverty Olympics and the Torch Relay visit www.povertyolympics.ca.