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INTERRELIGIOUS WORKING GROUP  
ON DOMESTIC HUMAN NEEDS

December 18, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama  
The Office of the President-Elect

Dear President-Elect Obama:

As members of the Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs, we approach the beginning of your administration with eagerness to collaborate and capitalize on the opportunities before us, but also with sober recognition of the challenges we face as a nation. Evidence is mounting that poverty and inequality are rising in this country. Now more than ever federal policies, including our federal budget, must aim to achieve long term economic security and address the poverty, hunger, health care, unemployment, and affordable housing crises that our nation faces. While we recognize that these are long-term problems that call for long-term solutions, there are a number of important steps that you can take as soon as you take office in January.

Today, we call upon your administration to take the following immediate and critical steps toward reducing poverty and working for the common good of all:

- **Federal Budget:** The federal budget must reflect a commitment to the common good by ensuring that the basic needs of all members of society are met. When you release your budget proposal for FY 2010, we urge you to include a domestic discretionary number that addresses the grossly inadequate funding that critical programs and services have received for years as well as the growing need resulting from the current recession. According to the Congressional Budget Office, it would take an increase of 6.08 percent from FY 2008 levels just to keep pace with inflation in FY 2010. As such, just to undo prior year cuts, it would take an increase in spending by more than 6.08 percent.
- **Health Care:** On August 17, 2007, the Centers Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a Directive that effectively sets a new income limit for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) at 250 percent of poverty. This policy will likely increase the number of uninsured children and will limit the ability of states to expand their SCHIP programs. We urge you to repeal this directive quickly.
- **Hunger:** Access to adequate and nutritious food is necessary for all people to reach their God-given potential, yet millions in the United States go hungry every day. We urge you to include an increase of \$20 billion above baseline over five years in your budget, in order to adequately reauthorize the Child Nutrition programs.
- **Labor Justice:** Studies indicate that more than two million people are not paid the minimum wage and three million are misclassified as independent contractors instead of as employees. We urge you to issue an administrative directive to substantially increase staff and resources for the Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor, in order for the Division to be more adequately equipped to combat the crisis of wage theft and to enforce other labor laws and protections.

All of our faiths instruct us to care for the most vulnerable among us and to work for the common good. We look forward to working with you to make that commitment a reality.

Respectfully,

The Episcopal Church  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
The Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA  
National Council of Jewish Women

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office  
Union for Reform Judaism  
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries  
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church & Society