



October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Dear Members of Parliament and All Candidates in the 2008 Federal Election:

Today is **World Habitat Day**. It is designated by the United Nations as a day to reflect on the state of housing in our communities and to be reminded of our collective responsibility for the human habitat.

Habitat for Humanity Canada and our 72 affiliates across the country believe that access to adequate housing is a basic human right and as a result we are taking action every day to build and renovate homes for families in need of simple, decent and affordable housing.

I invite you to join us in this effort by making affordable housing a key issue in the final days of this election campaign and more importantly in future policies of the next government.

Canada was once a leader and innovator in the provision of affordable housing. Unfortunately this is no longer the case today as over 4 million Canadians live in housing that is either unaffordable, overcrowded, substandard or all three. Housing affordability, according to a recent study, is at its worst level since 1990 and the United Nations reports that Canada is experiencing a housing "crisis" that is having a devastating impact on the lives of our families and especially our children.

It is now clear that the central issue of this election is the economy and the need to protect the financial security of Canadians. Ensuring that every Canadian has an appropriate place to call "home" must be at the centre of this discussion. We know that there is an important ripple effect associated with housing – or the lack of it – that means an investment in new affordable housing is also an investment in a stronger economy, better health and education for our families, and a better standard of living for all Canadians.

Attached to this message is an open letter I have issued to the Future Prime Minister of Canada and their party – whoever that may be – with a call to action to present a clear and comprehensive housing strategy that will drive new investment and new energy into needed affordable housing initiatives. While each of the major parties have presented plans that either restate previously-made commitments or provide band-aid solutions – none have demonstrated that they are taking this issue seriously enough.

Leadership is about doing what is right, and in the case of government, doing so in ways that serve constituents and fosters a society that is vibrant, viable and sustainable. It is this kind of leadership that is needed today as a growing number of Canadians are forced to make unreasonable and unjust choices between a place to live and life's other basic necessities.

We urge you as a candidate in this election to recognize the importance not only of affordable housing, but more specifically the long-term efficacy of homeownership solutions that are so often a neglected part of the "affordable housing continuum."

*Building Homes. Building Hope.*

*L'espoir, ça se construit.*

Investments in affordable homeownership, such as those made available through Habitat for Humanity's programs, do more than increase the stock of affordable housing – they enable low-income families to acquire assets that can eliminate their dependency on government subsidies, allows them to break free from the vicious cycle of poverty, and gives them a “hand up, not a hand out” which restores in them a sense of pride and dignity that should be possible for all Canadians. A one-time investment that increases affordability and makes it possible for a family to purchase their own home is a much less expensive solution than many other alternatives.

While our organization is best known for providing tangible, grass-roots housing solutions, we increasingly see the need to shine a light on the true state of housing in this country. Our credibility and expertise comes from the field where more than 35,000 staff and volunteers are working alongside low-income families across Canada. Our work is also informed by our partnerships with a growing number of community leaders, academics and activists working in the areas of housing and poverty reduction.

You can join us in taking real action on this critical issue by adopting the following positions:

- **Recognize** the important role of affordable homeownership as a key element of affordable housing and poverty reduction strategies;
- **Dedicate** a portion of federal funding on a per unit basis to significantly improve the level of affordability for home ownership;
- **Implement** a tax credit program that creates incentives for corporations and individuals to support affordable housing initiatives;
- **Develop** a National Housing Strategy with home ownership as a the central focus of that strategy

With this kind of support Habitat for Humanity and other non-profit housing providers can have an even greater impact. Families can plant roots and become proud, connected and contributing members of a community. New Canadians can pursue the brighter future that first led them to this nation.

On behalf of the thousands of Habitat for Humanity volunteers, supporters and families working to make the dream of homeownership a reality – and the 4 million Canadians looking for our leadership – we ask you the question: **“What will you do to make the dream of homeownership more attainable for low income Canadians?”**

I welcome the opportunity to speak with you about these issues and encourage you to contact your nearest Habitat for Humanity affiliate to find out more about what we are doing in your community.

Please visit [www.habitat.ca](http://www.habitat.ca) and click on **“Find a Local Affiliate”** to obtain the contact information for our local representatives and click on **“Advocate”** to learn more about our work and our issues.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Hughes', written over a horizontal line.

David Hughes  
President & CEO  
Habitat for Humanity Canada