

## **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS PETITION FOR THE YOUTH VOLUNTEER COALITION**

### **1. What is the Youth Volunteer Coalition?**

*Answer:* The Youth Volunteer Coalition is a group of organizations offering volunteer programs to young people. It is an ad hoc coalition aiming to carry out a project to raise public awareness of the importance of supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) sending volunteers to serve communities in Canada and abroad.

### **2. Who belongs to the Youth Volunteer Coalition?**

*Answer:* The coalition is made up of Canada World Youth, Katimavik, Oxfam-Québec, Club 2/3, Mer et Monde, Development and Peace/Développement et Paix, Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec (FCABQ), Alternatives, AQOCI, Clowns Without Borders, Youth Challenge International, VSO Canada and Coady International Institute.

### **3. Why is the Coalition launching this petition campaign now? What is the urgency?**

*Answer:* Organizations that offer youth volunteer programs have trouble obtaining the resources needed to satisfy the demand of thousands of young people who would like to participate in our programs. Despite the budget surpluses of the Canadian government, the needs of young people do not seem to be a federal priority. The Canadian government has the means, so why not act now? Since Parliament starts its next session at the end of September, autumn is the ideal time to spark a debate about youth volunteerism in the House of Commons and the Senate.

### **4. Why launch a petition campaign rather than try to lobby the government? Is this really a good way to exert pressure on the government?**

*Answer:* Sending thousands of petitions to the government is a concrete action that can't be ignored. It will prove that the Canadian people overwhelmingly support our campaign and the youth volunteer programs. The government will be more likely to respond to such massive support. In addition, our message is positive. Youth volunteer programs provide a valuable service to the Canadian people. Young people benefit as much as the communities. They gain experience, and their volunteer work has a positive impact on communities.

### **5. Why not organize an e-mail petition instead of a paper petition? It would be more ecological, would be easier to manage, and could be sent to more people.**

*Answer:* To be valid, petitions must be sent to Parliament in paper format. Moreover, having petitions signed requires personal contact. It is the best way to communicate the Coalition's message to the Canadian people.

### **6. Do you really think Canadians are concerned about youth volunteerism? Is this a national priority?**

*Answer:* Our coalition is drawing attention to a little-known fact. Very few Canadians realize that youth volunteer organizations must turn away the vast majority of young people interested in devoting several months of their life to volunteer work. They are denied this opportunity because the experienced non-governmental organizations that run these youth volunteer programs do not receive the necessary funding.

### **7. Are there really that many young people who are denied the opportunity to participate in youth volunteer programs?**

*Answer:* Yes, tens of thousands every year. At Canada World Youth, for example, more than 5,000 young Canadians registered as potential candidates in the core program for 2005-2006, but there is only room in the program for about 600 of them.

### **8. Why do we need a youth policy to allow young people to do volunteer work in Canada?**

*Answer:* A coherent youth policy would make it possible to coordinate the efforts of the various NGOs involved in sending young volunteers to other parts of Canada and abroad. The clear,

long-term commitment of the government is needed to remedy this situation and meet the needs of young people and organizations. Canada is one of the few countries among the thirty members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that have no youth policy. Moreover, some fifty countries around the world offer young people the opportunity to participate in volunteer service programs – countries more disadvantaged than Canada, such as Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, Algeria, Gambia, and Ethiopia.

**9. Volunteerism is for older people with lots of time on their hands. Young people need to devote their time to their studies and think of their future rather than volunteering.**

*Answer:* Volunteering allows young people to acquire valuable skills that complement their studies. Volunteer experiences have an educational value. These experiences allow them to learn about other cultures, to become open to other realities, and to become more aware of various social issues. Young volunteers gain practical experience while contributing to the well-being of communities. Society as a whole has everything to gain from helping young people become more engaged citizens.

**10. Why ask the government for more funding? Why not turn to the private sector for support?**

*Answer:* The private sector can certainly contribute to the implementation of certain programs, and it already does that, but significant, on-going support is required to meet the growing needs of young Canadians. One of the options supported by Canada World Youth is the creation of a Council for Youth Volunteers, which would be directly accountable to Parliament and receive a global budget to be distributed to NGOs based on their needs.

**11. Canada World Youth already receives millions of dollars from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Why not try to get more funding from that government agency?**

*Answer:* CIDA funding is neither guaranteed nor on-going. CWY signed an agreement that will end in four years. It is vital that we diversify our funding sources.

**12. Why is it necessary to sign two petitions?**

*Answer:* It is necessary to sign two petitions because they will be sent to both the House of Commons and the Senate. The MPs and senators are obliged to accept and table the petitions they receive. By raising the awareness of the greatest possible number of them, we will increase our chances that the question of youth volunteerism will be the subject of vigorous debate in the House of Commons and the Senate.

**13. Why count on taxpayers to fund volunteer programs?**

*Answer:* Volunteerism has great educational and cultural value and, in many cases, contributes to the objectives of the Canadian government in terms of international development. These three areas – education, culture, and international development – depend almost exclusively on government funding. As a result, the survival of youth volunteerism is closely linked to government funding.

**14. What is your plan of action? What will happen once the petitions are signed?**

*Answer:* Over the next few weeks, the Coalition will determine the procedure for having the petitions delivered to the government. There are several possibilities. Our efforts will generate debates about youth volunteerism in the House of Commons and the Senate. We could then promote and facilitate the adoption of a bill targeting the creation of a Council for Youth Volunteers or the establishment of a national youth policy. Please take note that, since 1986, the House rules stipulate that the government must answer all petitions it receives within 45 days. The procedure is essentially the same for the Senate.