We are Ontario - Ontario Day of Action - Demand Prosperity, Not Austerity

April 21st, 2012 3:00 pm. - 5:00 pm., Queen’s Park Legislature, Toronto Ontario

Invited Remarks by Gary Pieters, President, Urban Alliance on Race Relations

urbanalliance.ca

\*Check against delivery\*

Good afternoon everyone,

I am Gary Pieters.

As president of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, I would like to thank the Ontario Federation of Labour, the organizers and supporters of the Ontario Day of Action for inviting me to address this massive audience of Ontario’s students, digital citizens/social techtivists, young people, and people of all diversities at this gathering at the Queen’s Park Legislature.

This is a historic moment!

Ontarians of all diversities are attentive and have leveraged our collective voices - We are Ontario (and) Demand Prosperity, Not Austerity!

The current state of things, begs the question - **What is at stake for Toronto, Ontario and Canada, whose economic model has and continue to show indicators of**

* **High spending cuts**
* **Austerity measures**
* **Deficit reduction**
* **Income insecurity**
* **Social inequality (race and class inequality)**
* **Colour-coded or racialized disparities/gap**
* **Income inequality**
* **Economic exclusion**
* **Marginalization of those already lacking in resources**
* **Racialization of poverty**
* **Job Cuts (Lay-off notices, retrenchment, reduction in jobs etc…)?**

I believe that it is important that the Ontario of the 21st Century must be a leader in **accelerating prosperity**. As one of Canada’s most populous province, Ontario’s role in leveraging cultural, linguistic, racial, social, ecological, socio-economic and all other forms of diversity allows for innovation, creativity, access to global markets, diversity of ideas, social cohesion, and livable cities.

Yes, economic and social justice is built on a strong foundation of a great education system, strong and sustainable social programs and excellent public services, safe and affordable housing, access to good jobs, public safety and environmental protection!

Unfortunately, during budget cuts, social capital is the first of many items targeted!

The social and economic impacts of the recession were felt by many, particularly racialized Canadians (who are defined by statistics Canada as Visible Minorities). You see, the economic recession that widened disparities, created hardships for families, affected people’s livelihood, and their ability to provide for their family.

The gap between those who have and those that do not, grew wider, with high level of unemployment, cutbacks (jobs, community-based social programs and social services) racialization of poverty, colour-coded inequality where racialized communities disproportionately lost ground and were left with limited resources!

Even during periods of economic expansion, this demographic has historically benefitted less from the outcomes of prosperity than their non-racialized counterparts. The shackles of poverty, income disparity, denied opportunity and racial profiling eclipse economic upswings.

The income gap between the rich and the working poor is at a record high and reflect the growing inequality gap in Ontario.

In economic crisis, we have to end the cycle of targeting the poor to save the wealthy!

Looking at recent events in Greece, France, Italy, Spain, Argentina, Britain and other parts of the world, the lessons from these societies can inform and serve as a cautionary tale for the type of social upheavals that can also occur elsewhere as a reaction to growing economic and political polarization and breakdown of social cohesion.

Jane Jacobs, Dudley Laws, Rosa Parks, Viola Desmond, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, and many other leaders engaged in peaceful advocacy in the interest of social progress in their communities. While their methods and areas of advocacy varied, what’s lasting are their legacies of small and large victories that have made our society a better place for people of all diversities in Canada and around the world to live successfully in diverse urban pluralistic societies.  

We urge action now to expand the window of opportunity and accelerate economic, social, and ecological prosperity so that Ontario can continue to be one the best places in Canada and the world to live, work, study and prosper!

Thank You.

Gary Pieters, M.Ed