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September 27, 2002

**To: The Right Honourable Jean Chretien
Prime Minister of Canada**

Dear Prime Minister:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), a non-profit organization that represents many of the staff working in public health units across Ontario. Our members include the physicians, environmental health managers, epidemiologists, nurses, toxicologists, researchers, and policy analysts responsible for maintaining public health in their communities. As such, our members are deeply concerned about global climate change and the impacts that it may have on the health of the communities they are duty-bound to protect.

We were very pleased by the announcement you made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg on the Kyoto Accord. We believe that global climate change is one of the most pressing environmental issues of our time, and that it is being caused, in large part, by human activities. In its third assessment report released in 2001, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that:

"Emissions of carbon dioxide due to fossil fuel burning are virtually certain to be the dominant influence on the trends in atmospheric CO₂ concentrations during the 21st century".

The IPCC conclusion has been supported by the U.S. National Research Council that was asked by the White House to examine the science on climate change:

"The IPCC's conclusion that most of the observed warming of the last 50 years is likely to have been due to the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations accurately reflects the thinking of the scientific community on this issue".

We believe that the ecological, human health and economic impacts that may accompany global climate change could be profound. In Canada, we understand the climate change could: increase the frequency and severity of heat waves; increase the number and severity of forest fires; decrease water levels in the Great Lakes; increase droughts in the prairies; affect the abundance of fish species; and melt permafrost in the far north. We expect human health to be

negatively impacted in direct ways by increases in heat waves, air pollution and extreme weather events. While these direct health impacts could be significant, it is the indirect health impacts, that are more difficult to predict, which could have the most dramatic impact on human health in nations around the world. The indirect health impacts include those associated with drought, crop failures, changes in fish populations, shifts in water supplies, and the spread of insect-borne and infectious diseases.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, Canada is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 6% below 1990 levels by 2008 to 2012. This represents a small percentage of the reductions that will ultimately be needed if we are to retard climate change. In the 2001 IPCC report, it is concluded that carbon dioxide emissions may have to be reduced to a small fraction of their current levels in order to stabilize carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere and retard climate change. That means that carbon dioxide emissions may need to be cut by 80% or more by the middle of this century.

While some argue that ratifying the protocol and adopting this goal will slow short-term economic growth, we believe that the costs associated with inaction are too great to contemplate. We believe that the ratification and implementation of the Kyoto Accord is an essential first step in the international process that will be required to retard global climate change. We also believe that the Kyoto Protocol, if embraced, could present economic opportunities for Canada as a nation, and set us on the path to environmental and economic sustainability required for the sake of future generations. We encourage you to move forward with a vision for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Connie Uetrecht
President, OPHA

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