

For Immediate Release

Conference highlights links between marriage and decreased poverty

OTTAWA, CANADA, March 12, 2009—How marriage, cohabitation, daycare and lone parenting affect our communities was the topic for discussion at the third annual Institute of Marriage and Family Canada conference on March 12 in Ottawa. 100 delegates from government, think tanks, social agencies and the public gathered at the Sheraton Hotel to discuss how family policy affects social justice.

Keynote speaker, The Right Honourable Iain Duncan Smith discussed the United Kingdom experience over the lunch hour. As founder of the Centre for Social Justice, Mr. Duncan Smith has travelled across his country to learn of the problems people living on the margins face, be that fatherlessness, unemployment, single parenting, drug abuse or the intergenerational transfer of welfare use. He identifies the failure of government to address these problems with any efficiency. "What has happened over the years," he says, "is the failure of successive governments to recognize that poverty isn't just the absence of money."

The afternoon speaker, visiting from New York City where she lives and works, Kay Hymowitz, would agree. She engaged in family research out of her desire to enhance civil rights in the United States. "I've always been interested in racial progress," she says. "It became clear to me that this was largely—not entirely—but largely a cultural problem and that it was intricately connected to the breakdown of the black family."

Whether it be the United Kingdom, the United States or Canada—we all face family breakdown at increasing rates. While claiming family breakdown causes all social breakdown would be absurd, those working on the ground to eradicate homelessness and the effects of unemployment certainly do note that a lack of solid family support plays a role. "Family is the best welfare system we have," says Dave Quist, executive director of the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. "Canada is failing to draw attention to family breakdown as a root cause of inequality and poverty."

This may be because the message is not popular. No one, rightly, wants to put an additional burden on those parenting children alone. Yet Statistics Canada reports that in 2006 32.3 per cent of lone parent families were living in poverty, while only 7.7 per cent of two parent families experienced poverty. "We can't gloss over the statistical evidence saying lone parents are more likely to be poor," says Quist. "Better policy options lie in being able to compassionately discuss the facts."

The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada believes an appropriate policy response involves emphasizing the importance of marriage and increasing, not decreasing the ability of parents to be parents—family income splitting offers every family the opportunity to keep more of their own money to do what they wish. On this front, Dr. Gabor Maté emphasized the importance of the child-parent bond in an important and thoughtful presentation on how to care for our kids well.

John Williamson, former director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation addressed how sound fiscal policy reforms can mesh with good social policy. He also mentioned there are political motivations for why the fiscally-minded should take social policy on. "What is clear," he said, "is that fiscal policy alone, tax cuts or diminishing the size of government, is not enough to win elections," emphasizing that effective social policy ought to be part of any party's election platform.

The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada conducts, compiles and presents family research to ensure that marriage and family-friendly policies are foremost in the minds of Canada's decision makers. "Today's conference is evidence that Canadians are concerned about how we do family and want to learn more about how good family policy can affect our communities and help the poor," said Quist. He continued: "The idea that social justice and the family are linked is new in Canada—and a correct policy response would have lasting positive effects for all Canadians."

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For conference photos visit www.imfcanada.org. To arrange an interview, please contact Dave Quist at 613-565-3832.

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