

Environmental Harmonization Working Group

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## **Environmental Organizations Call on Prime Minister to Turn Down 'Harmonization' Accord**

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### **For Immediate Release**

In a letter delivered to the Prime Minister's Office last Friday, more than 50 of Canada's leading environmental, health, labour and aboriginal organizations called upon Prime Minister Chretien to turn down a proposed Agreement that would devolve the environmental functions of the federal government to the provinces.

The Accord, which is scheduled to be signed by the federal and provincial environment ministers at a meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland, on January 29 and 30, would hand over to the provinces federal responsibilities in such key areas as setting national environmental standards, environmental assessment, and environmental law enforcement.

The proposed 'harmonization' accord was heavily criticized in a report tabled by the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development in early December. Members of all five parties represented on the Committee recommended that the federal government not proceed with the Agreement.

In its report, the Committee stated that it could find no evidence of the 'duplication and overlap' in federal and provincial environmental programs that the proposed Accord is supposed to eliminate. The Committee also concluded that the devolution of federal responsibilities through the proposed Agreement poses "the potential risk of injury to the quality of the Canadian environment."

The government has yet to respond to the Committee's report, as it is required to do so under House of Commons rules.

The letter to the Prime Minister reads in part:

"The Standing Committee's findings regarding the initiative confirm the conclusions reached by members of the environmental, aboriginal, health, labour and academic communities through their own research and analysis...

...the proposed Accord fails to establish a workable framework for dealing with the real environmental challenges which Canadians face. Rather, the Accord and Sub-Agreements would significantly constrain the ability of the federal government to fulfil its moral and legal mandates, affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in its recent Hydro Quebec decision, to address these pressing threats to the well-being of present and future generations of Canadians."

"Given these serious deficiencies, we feel compelled to ask that the federal government not proceed with the signing of the proposed National Accord on Environmental Harmonization and its accompanying Sub-Agreements..."

"This is the most important environmental decision which the Prime Minister has faced since his election in 1993. Proceeding with the Accord will make it virtually impossible for the federal government to deal with the major environmental challenges facing Canada at the end of the Millenium, including the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change," concluded Dr. Martha Kostuch, Vice-President of the Alberta-based Friends of the Oldman River Society, and Chair of the Environmental Harmonization Working Group of the Canadian Environmental Network.

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