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September 29, 2008

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Parliament Buildings
Ottawa KIA 0A6

Dear Prime Minister:

**Re: The Conservative Party's unfulfilled commitments
to reform the Access to Information Act**

We are writing to you as three organizations who share the Conservative Party's stated belief in the ideals of transparent government, an informed electorate, and enhanced government accountability through access to information.

We are concerned that your government's actions since it assumed power in 2006 have not matched the commitments you made as leader of the Conservative Party during the 2006 election campaign – specifically, your commitment to open up the inner workings of government to scrutiny by reforming Canada's *Access to Information Act*.

The eight specific pledges made by the Conservative Party are set out below. There could be no better time than the current election campaign to ask why these pledges were not fulfilled during your first term of office, and whether or not your party intends to fulfill them if re-elected.

The Conservative Party's eight commitments to strengthen Access to Information Legislation were::

- To implement the Information Commissioner's recommendations for reform of the Access to Information Act.
- To give the Information Commissioner the power to order the release of information.
- To expand the coverage of the act to all Crown corporations, Officers of Parliament, foundations and organizations that spend taxpayers' money or perform public functions.
- To subject the exclusion of Cabinet confidences to review by the Information Commissioner.
- To oblige public officials to create the records necessary to document their actions and decisions.
- To provide a general public interest override for all exemptions, so that the public interest is put before the secrecy of the government.

- To ensure that all exemptions from the disclosure of government information are justified only on the basis of the harm or injury that would result from disclosure, not blanket exemption rules.
- To ensure that the disclosure requirements of the *Access to Information Act* cannot be circumvented by secrecy provisions in other federal acts.

The Conservative Party's original intent was to include the above reforms in the *Accountability Act*. When that act was introduced in April 2006, Treasury secretary John Baird noted that the reforms were not included, but assured us that the government would live up to its promise to reform the 23-year-old Access to Information Act as a key part of its drive to clean up government.

Since then, your government has had a number of opportunities to implement these reforms, but has failed to do so. In fact your MPs voted against opposition motions to pass the commitments you yourself made in the last election.

Your government was elected on a platform of accountability and transparency. We, along with many other Canadians concerned about openness and accountability in government, have been disappointed that to date you have not followed through on your campaign promise to reform the ATI Act.

Can you let us know before the end of this election campaign what you intend to do in this regard if you are re-elected, and specifically whether or not you will agree to fulfill your 2006 campaign promises during the coming Parliament? We believe this is an important issue, and we plan to share your response with the Canadian public.

Sincerely yours,

For

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