



CANADIAN CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION FOR

**Development
and Peace**

Talking about the issues that matter

A guide for meeting with your federal Member of Parliament

1. Who is my MP?

The Canadian Parliament website will help you find your Member of Parliament, including the address and contact information of your local constituency office, through your postal code:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/>.

2. How do I contact my MP?

A member of your Diocesan Council or your group of Development and Peace members, who is also a resident of the MP's federal riding, should write or phone the constituency office staff to schedule an appointment.

This person should say that a delegation of members of Development and Peace would like to meet with the MP to discuss the campaign issues proposed in the actions asked for in Development and Peace's campaign.

3. Does my MP have an opinion on the subject?

It's impossible for an MP to have an opinion on every issue. It's safe to assume that the majority will only have a bit of knowledge of the campaign issue. However, you should still check by visiting the House of Commons website, which gives a profile of each of the 308 members. Of particular interest is that each profile indicates what House of Commons committees your member sits on (click on "committees"). If the member attends proceedings of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, it is quite likely that he or she knows the issues, has an opinion on the subject or has already been made aware of the issues. These are the people you absolutely must meet!

4. How will the meeting likely go?

This type of meeting usually lasts between 30 and 60 minutes. Ideally, all the members of the delegation should be constituents of the electoral riding (and therefore citizens who voted). After introductions, one person should give a presentation on the campaign, while another person should take notes in order to write the meeting report.

When presenting the campaign, it is a good idea to illustrate your point with examples (from the action sheet or backgrounder). Then explain the main actions requested and say that they are supported by a given number of people in the constituency. The MP must also have ample time for asking questions and giving her or his own opinion. He or she may even suggest possible action. It is also possible that your local MP disagrees with these demands and may express that strongly. The MP might think that the government has no right to interfere in this issue, because it is international, or for some other reason. If this is the case, explain calmly and politely why you and those who have signed the action cards disagree.

At the end of the meeting, be sure you obtain some sort of commitment from your MP. This commitment may take several forms. You could ask him or her to support the recommendations of Development and Peace, to write to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to raise the issue in the House of Commons or to discuss it at a caucus meeting with the members of her/his party.

If you are presenting a petition to your MP, ask whether he or she will present it in Parliament and when. At the end of the meeting, before thanking your MP and taking official photographs, it is recommended that a designated member of the delegation summarize the commitments made during the exchange.

5. How should I prepare for the meeting?

Re-read the documents prepared by Development and Peace about the campaign and then make a list of questions you may be asked. Some questions are easy to answer, while others are more difficult:

- Who are the members of the delegation?
- What is Development and Peace?
- What activities are you organizing in this constituency?
- Why do you feel strongly about this issue?
- Why is a Catholic organization involved in this matter?

6. What are the important things to remember?

Here are a few hints. Most of them are common sense, but it may be helpful to be reminded of them.

- Keep calm throughout the meeting. After all, you are meeting your elected representative, the person who acts and speaks on your behalf in Parliament.
- Do not arrive late. This creates unnecessary tension.
- Remain polite, even if the MP shows disagreement or even annoyance with your demands. You are expressing the viewpoints of constituents who have signed action cards, but you are also representing Development and Peace.
- The length of the meeting has probably been set in advance. Keep to it.
- Do not take up the entire time. After presenting the issue and the solutions proposed by Development and Peace, allow your MP to give his or her views on the issue.
- If your MP doesn't know the issue well, he or she may ask the following question: "What would you like from me? What role can I play?" Be prepared to suggest that he or she can sign the action card, ask a question in the House of Commons, or to discuss it at a meeting with the members of her/his party.

7. What follow-up is required after the meeting?

Soon after your meeting, you should write a **thank you note and follow-up letter**. The MP must be thanked for welcoming the delegation and reminded of the commitments that were made, on both sides. The letter can serve as a reminder of any deadlines agreed on. Finish the letter by asking to be informed of any parliamentary activity which may be of interest to the campaign.

Every delegation that meets an MP should submit a **brief activity report** after the meeting. This report is an easy way for Development and Peace to gather the maximum amount of data on these meetings and to measure their impact. An electronic form has been developed to make it easier to submit these local reports. You can fill it out at: <http://www.devp.org/en/advocacy/mp/report>. Every delegation must indicate the name of the MP met as well as the date and location of the meeting. More importantly, the person who completes this report must include details on how the meeting went (such as the atmosphere, the different steps involved, etc.) and on the decisions the MP intends to make or positions

he or she will defend (will the MP ask a question in the House of Commons, consult their party, answer in writing within two weeks, try to obtain a meeting with a minister, or did or she completely reject the demands). Filling out this questionnaire will only take a few minutes. It is important to assign this task to a member of the delegation.

8. Is my local visit important?

It is very important for at least two reasons:

1. This meeting provides an opportunity for you to make contact with your MP and make him or her aware that there are people in his or her constituency who are really concerned about international issues. It will also allow your Diocesan Council or group of members to learn more about the MPs whose ridings are located in the region of the diocese.
2. For Development and Peace, every meeting held across Canada adds further pressure for MPs to take action on our campaign issues.

9. Can we use the media?

Yes. The media can bring your issue to the attention of a much larger audience. Anyone elected to public office is particularly conscious of their image. All elected officials, including mayors, city councillors, MPs, or school board trustees, see –usually in a positive light – many of their acts and decisions being scrutinized and portrayed by the media.

Sending a press release to local newspapers, radio, and television stations, will help to publicize your meeting with your Member of Parliament. Here is a sample press release:

(letterhead)

NEWS RELEASE

Local members of Development and Peace call for (Insert campaign issue here)

MP (name) responds with support / is against the proposal

Time, date – The Canadian government must act quickly to (insert campaign call to action here), say members of Development and Peace. This statement was reinforced on (day) to the MP of (constituency name), (MP's full name).

(Number of people) of the region of (name of the district) recently signed a postcard supporting this demand.

The MP (name) was (favorable, unfavorable) to these demands. He/she also demonstrated his/her intention to (list the commitments made). "Include a quote".

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Source : (name + telephone number+ email address)

(Include a photo of the meeting)

A few tips:

- Think about who you are targeting
- Use a clear and catchy heading
- Write in a simple and accessible style
- Include at least one quotation
- Include all relevant facts
- Include contact details (including cell phones)

10. Questions / Answers

- **Do I have enough expertise on the issue?**
We are not experts on the campaign issue! Neither is your MP! But you are experts in defending populations of the Global South and you are voters interested in international issues.
- **Should we invite our bishop?**
His presence would add a sense of importance to the meeting. Our advice is to inform diocesan authorities of the meeting.
- **Can an MP receive more than one delegation?**
Yes. Some electoral ridings encompass more than one diocese. We suggest you verify if that is the case for your riding and see if it might be possible to combine the delegations into a single one. The important thing is that each MP be met at least once.
- **Will certain diocesan councils or groups of members meet several MPs?**
This is also true. There are 308 MPs in Canada and less than 70 Catholic dioceses. The most populous dioceses usually encompass several electoral ridings. Smaller groups of members from your Diocesan Council made up of constituents from each riding can meet with their own MPs, to ensure that most MPs are contacted and met with.