

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau  
Prime Minister of Canada  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

March 24, 2020

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

**RE: Strengthening Human Rights Protection in Canada's COVID-19 Response**

On behalf of Amnesty International supporters across the country we send our best wishes to you and your family as you remain in self-isolation and Sophie Grégoire Trudeau's recovery from the COVID-19 virus continues. As well, we commend officials in your government and governments across the country for their diligent efforts to respond to and contain the pandemic's spread in Canada.

Prime Minister, Amnesty International is actively monitoring the human rights implications of government efforts to test for, treat and prevent the spread of the COVID-10 virus. We are also tracking the restrictive measures that have been adopted by governments, as well as the human rights impacts of the economic crisis resulting from measures taken to respond to this pandemic. We do so because, as we note in the attached set of ten principles for *Putting human rights at the heart of Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic* (which we are releasing today), all aspects of this crisis directly engage a wide range of human rights obligations.

**We are writing to specifically draw your attention to the recommendation we have made in the 9<sup>th</sup> principle regarding the need for strengthened human rights accountability and oversight of the response to COVID-19.**

The necessity to act to treat and curtail the spread of the virus is a clear human rights obligation. The need to do so with care for particularly vulnerable communities is a clear human rights obligation. And the importance of avoiding or limiting further human rights violations as part of that response is also a clear human rights obligation. With decisions being taken, policies adopted and laws passed so rapidly by governments at all levels across the country, and with little time for broader consultation, the need for close attention to and scrutiny of the human rights consequences of measures being pursued is greater than ever.

We urge that federal, provincial and territorial governments move quickly to establish what we have called a **Human Rights Oversight Committee**, made up of a wide-range of experts and reflective of communities most vulnerable to human rights violations. That could include representatives from federal, provincial and territorial human rights commissions, Indigenous peoples' organizations, civil society and academics. The Committee would be tasked with providing prompt and immediate advice to governments across the country with respect to the human rights impact of decisions being taken as well as recommendations regarding areas of COVID-related human rights concern where action is needed.

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Specifically, the Committee would take an intersectional gender-based approach to assessing human rights impact. The Committee would also identify statistics and information that are needed to ensure human rights impacts are being properly considered. Through regular public reporting the Committee would help to assure people across Canada that human rights are indeed at the heart of governments' response to this crisis.

We have also urged that representatives of Indigenous knowledge keepers, and representatives of relevant federal, provincial and territorial human rights commissions and municipal human rights office be included in special committees, emergency task forces and other bodies that have been established by governments across the country to oversee and coordinate their responses to the COVID-19 crisis. In that regard we recommend that you invite a member of the Canadian Human Rights Commission to play a formal advisory role to the Cabinet Committee on COVID-19.

Prime Minister, very often governments are faced with accounting for human rights violations associated with times of crisis or emergency after the fact. We urge your government and all governments across the country to institute recommended Human Rights Oversight Committees so as to more deliberately ensure that human rights concerns are being anticipated, identified and minimized from the outset.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with government officials to discuss this further.

Sincerely,



Alex Neve  
Secretary General  
Amnesty International Canada  
(English branch)



France-Isabelle Langlois  
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Amnistie internationale Canada francophone

- cc. Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister (Chair, Cabinet Committee on COVID-19)  
Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, President of the Treasury Board (Vice-Chair, Cabinet Committee on COVID-19)  
Honourable David Lametti, Minister of Justice and Attorney General  
Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health  
Leaders of the federal opposition parties  
Provincial and Territorial Premiers  
Mayors