



FAFIA-AFAI

Feminist Alliance for
International Action

L'Alliance Féministe pour
l'Action Internationale

CANADA

May 8, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

RE: COVID-19 and Women's Human Rights

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

Thank you for your leadership during this COVID-19 crisis. We appreciate the daily information and direction your government provides during this time of uncertainty alongside public health officials and experts, including Dr. Theresa Tam. We also thank you for moving quickly to ameliorate the economic hardships brought by physical distancing measures, for continuing to make adjustments as they are necessary, and for encouraging social solidarity in this moment.

Our organization, the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, is an alliance of over sixty women's organizations whose goal is to ensure the implementation of women's human rights in Canada in accordance with the international human rights treaties to which Canada is signatory.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, and the Inter-American Commission of Women recently issued reports and statements urging states to ensure that women are equal partners in decision-making regarding states' COVID-19 response and recovery. We support their call for a new "social and gender pact." We want to work with your government to ensure that the recovery is informed by women's human rights and that planning for a new economic and social model draws on the depth of feminist expertise on the economy, taxation, social policy, anti-racism, disability and Indigenous issues.

It is evident now that because of pre-existing inequalities, Canada is experiencing a social crisis that is inextricably intertwined with the health and economic crisis. Sadly, Canada has been reluctant to treat social and economic rights as real rights, contrary to Canada's international human rights obligations. In various ways, governments in Canada have permitted social and economic inequality to thrive. Now we are confronted with the result: the risk of death and disease, and the ability to be protected from it, falls unevenly across the population.

In this moment, we are deeply worried about the most marginalized: impoverished Indigenous people in communities that do not have clean water, adequate housing, or health care facilities to enable them to

stay safe; homeless people on the streets, in camps and overcrowded shelters who are unable to practice physical distancing and are without adequate social services; and the many criminalized people from marginalized communities who are in Canada's prisons and are now at high risk of disease and death. We are particularly concerned about Indigenous women in their communities, on the streets, and in Canada's prisons who are at high risk of disease, and are targets for male violence.

As we move forward towards recovery, we must address social and economic inequality in Canada honestly and directly. In doing so, it is essential to recognize that this is a crisis with critical gender dimensions, and the impacts on women are diverse and harsh. Women, many of whom are racialized or immigrant workers, comprise a disproportionate number of the front line essential workers. They are at risk at work, where they are among the lowest paid workers in our economy; many are also at risk of male violence in their homes and on the streets. Women are also most at risk of being out of work, as recent unemployment figures show.

Planning for the transition out of the health emergency and into the 'post-COVID-19' period cannot be seen narrowly as an exercise in economic recovery. Nor can it be limited to patching up the largest holes in Canada's tattered social safety net. A new economic and social model is needed, one that works from the bottom up for everyone, and that places the values of human rights, social justice, and gender equality at the centre.

From the perspective of the substantive equality rights of women, it is not enough to devise policies and then conduct an after-the-fact gender based analysis, even if it is an intersectional one. As your government puts in place the committees to plan for the transition out of the health emergency and into the post-COVID-19 era, we urge you to work collaboratively and to draw on a wide range of expertise, including feminist economists, social policy advocates, Indigenous leaders, Indigenous women's organizations, and human rights experts. Those with the expertise on the social, human rights, race, disability, and gender impacts of policies must be centrally involved in the planning and design of programs from the outset.

We look forward to your earliest reply, and to embarking on a creative engagement to consolidate lessons learned and to forge new approaches. Please reply to: Diana Majury at director@fafia-afai.org.

Sincerely,



Barbara Cameron
FAFIA Co-Chair



Lara Koerner Yeo
FAFIA Co-Chair

CC:

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland – Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honourable Bill Morneau – Minister of Finance

The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos – President of the Treasury Board

The Honourable Catherine McKenna – Minister of Infrastructure and Communities

The Honourable Maryam Monsef – Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development

The Honourable Patty Hajdu – Minister of Health

The Honourable Ahmed Hussen – Minister of Families, Children and Social Development

The Honourable Bill Blair – Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

The Honourable David Lametti – Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

The Honourable Marc Miller – Minister of Indigenous Services

The Honourable Andrew Scheer – Leader of the Official Opposition

Mr. Jagmeet Singh – Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet – Leader of the Bloc Québécois

Ms. Jo-Ann Roberts – Interim Leader of the Green Party of Canada

All MPs and Senators