

Open Letter:

31 March 2020

To Bill Blair, Federal Minister of Public Safety, (bill.blair@parl.gc.ca)
Marco Mendocino, Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees And Citizenship, (minister@cic.gc.ca)
Patty Hajdu, Federal Minister of Health (patty.hajdu@parl.gc.ca)

I am writing in support of the hunger strikers currently incarcerated at the Laval Immigration Detention Centre. It is time to FREE THEM in order to keep them safe during this COVID19 pandemic.

Did you know that the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights has stated that incarceration is an amplifier of infection and embodying a possibly disastrous spread of the COVID-19 virus? As stated on their website, "The consequences of neglecting [people in detention] are potentially catastrophic." Governments must work quickly to reduce the number of people in detention, the High Commission said, and she noted that several countries have already taken positive actions.

I live and work in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where it was recently announced, by CBC, that "Nova Scotia is granting temporary release to some inmates during the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate the virus's spread within jails. The province announced Wednesday it would grant temporary absences, with no fixed end date, to 41 people serving intermittent sentences."

It is imperative that the government of Canada take proactive measures to protect all human life by meeting all of the demands of the hunger strikers, including releasing them immediately. Once they have been released, they have a better opportunity to protect themselves and their loved ones from the COVID19 pandemic.

To not act, to leave them in detention, is to signal to Canadians and the global citizens that their lives do not matter. Is this message that Canada wants to send?

It is unconscionable that detainees – many of whom have pre-existing health conditions – have now been on hunger strike for 7 days in order to access the basic protections being recommended to the general public.

Not only must the hunger strikers be released but ALL migrant detainees must be released. It is time to FREE THEM ALL!!!

Best,

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