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RE: SUPPORT FOR PRISONERS AT LAVAL IMMIGRATION DETENTION CENTRE

We, as members of Joint Effort, are writing to voice our support for the migrants in detention who are currently on hunger strike in the Laval Immigration Detention Centre in face of risks of COVID-19 virus.

As a prison abolition group based in Vancouver, BC, our organization supports Laval prisoners' demands for the immediate release of all migrant detainees as part of measures related to public health. The Canadian government so far has failed to take action to prevent the health catastrophe that COVID-19 poses for prisoners held at the Laval Immigration Holding Centre and in other prisons and detention centres. We support the immediate release of all detainees, and their safe and appropriate housing, in the name of public health. Further to this release, we believe that asylum-seekers should be treated as permanent residents, effectively immediately, an approach that has already been adopted in Portugal.¹

We have similarly written to the Correctional Service of Canada and BC Corrections to share our calls for de-carceration as the most responsible public health approach to COVID-19. We recognize the fears that prisoners at the Laval Immigration Detention Centre have named, all related to the high risks of being confined at this time.² A number of organizations have identified the potential for catastrophe in correctional institutions, including the Office of the Correctional Investigator,³ UN High Commissioner of Human Rights,⁴ and Human Rights Watch.⁵

Prison advocates, human rights, and medical organizations have noted that social distancing is not possible for incarcerated populations, including detainees, and that during the COVID-19 pandemic, detention poses a catastrophic risk to the health of these populations. 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. The failure to respond to the concrete requests of people held in custody is unconscionable and we call on the federal government to act immediately, in line with international human (including prisoner) rights standards.

Sincerely,

Joint Effort
Unceded Coast Salish Territories

CC: Solidarity Across Borders, solidaritesansfrontieres@gmail.com

¹ https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-portugal-idUSKBN21F0N7?fbclid=IwAR33MDI6_xUbS2u8HodZrUfA_ykHxovEgTtAp7NqaBYbwmX-Y4ovGd54RCO

² <https://www.solidarityacrossborders.org/en/act-in-solidarity-with-migrants-detained-by-canada-immediate-release-no-new-detentions>

³ <https://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/index-eng.aspx>

⁴ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1060252>

⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/23/canadas-immigration-detainees-higher-risk-pandemic>