



March 30, 2020

To: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau,
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Bill Blair,
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Marco Mendicino,
Minister of Health, Patty Hajdu

RE: Migrant Detainees on Hunger Strike in Laval Immigration Holding Center

I am writing on behalf of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association to strongly urge you and the Government of Canada to immediately address the concerns of migrant detainees who are on hunger strike at the Laval Immigration Holding Center in Quebec. The detainees have launched an indefinite hunger strike to demand their immediate release amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social distancing is simply impossible in Canadian immigration holding centers and provincial jails, where migrant detainees are held. As Human Rights Watch [details](#) “Detainees are forced into close proximity with others in facilities that tend to have poor ventilation, lack hygiene products, and provide limited access to medical care. While immigration holding centres are designated for immigration detainees, they resemble medium-security prisons, where detainees are subjected to constant surveillance and strict rules and routines.”

Canada has already been criticized by the United Nations Human Rights Committee for the practice of indefinite migrant detention. The BCCLA intervened in the Supreme Court of Canada *Chhinha* case, arguing that habeas corpus is a necessary legal mechanism for migrant detainees held for lengthy and uncertain periods of time to challenge the lawfulness of their detention. Now, amidst the global health pandemic, migrant detainees are facing uncertainty and the fear of COVID-19 transmission. The hunger strike is a desperate, urgent and clear call for immediate action to be taken to ensure their release in order to protect detainees’ lives and our public health.

The continued detention of migrant detainees is a public health catastrophe. I urge you to immediately release all migrant detainees in Laval Immigration Holding Center and all releasable detainees across the country. No one should be left behind in our public health responses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Harsha Walia', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Harsha Walia
Executive Director