



**Open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Public Safety Minister Bill Blair,  
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Minister Marco Mendicino, and  
Health Minister Patty Hajdu in support of #HungerStrikeLaval**

31 March 2020 – We are writing you to echo the demands of those yearning for justice, safety, and health who are now entering the eighth day of their indefinite hunger strike at the Laval Immigration Holding Centre. We demand that you release all immigration detainees who are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 due to their incarceration during this unsettling and precarious time.

In any given year, dozens of lives are lost while in the custody of the Canadian Border Services Agency and Correctional Services Canada. Thousands more have had their lives shattered by imprisonment and have developed life altering mental health and health issues or have existing conditions that have worsened while under your ‘care’.

It is undeniable that putting human beings in cages undermines public health and community safety. Both can be improved through the depopulation of immigration detention spaces and federal penitentiaries to the extent that is possible. Leaving existing federal human caging systems in place in the context of COVID-19 is not only unnecessary, but also dangerous to prisoners, institutional staff, their loved ones and communities. Imprisonment is obsolete, causes significant harm, and we demand a just transition from the prison industrial complex starting now.

Canada’s continued settler-colonialism and genocide – which now sees Indigenous and other racialized populations incarcerated *en masse* – and all the oppressive systems built to support it must be dismantled. In the short-term, we demand the release of detained migrants and the decarceration of federal prisoners where possible. They are human and should not be made to face injustices and a disproportionate risk of illness and death. No one is disposable.

In these exceptional times when we are collectively responding to a global crisis, many provinces and territories are starting to implement measures to safely depopulate their jails and prisons. The Criminalization and Punishment Education Project (CPEP), a joint Carleton University and University of Ottawa community initiative, is calling upon the Government of Canada to free the Laval Hunger Strikers and free all migrant detainees. Build communities, not cages.

Sincerely,

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