

The Right Hon. Justin Trudeau
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Cc: Minister of Immigration, Minister of Public Safety, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Provincial Premiers

March 16, 2020

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, Ministers and Provincial Premiers,

Migrants & Workers Deserve a Just Crisis Response During COVID-19

This letter is initially signed on by 37 Migrant Rights Network members including Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network), Caregivers' Action Centre, Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto, Centre des travailleuses et travailleurs immigrants, Collaborative Network to End Exploitation, Cooper Institute/PEI Action Team, Fuerza Migrante Vancouver, Migrant Students United, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change*, Migrante BC, Migrante Canada, Migrante Manitoba, Migrante Ontario, Migrant Workers Alliance – Niagara, No One Is Illegal – Halifax, No One Is Illegal – London, No One Is Illegal – Vancouver, OHIP For All, Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture, Sanctuary Health, Solidarity Across Borders, Vancouver Committee for Domestic Worker and Caregiver Rights, and Workers Action Centre. *Migrant Workers Alliance for Change also includes Asian Community Aids Services, Durham Region Migrant Solidarity Network, FCJ Refugee House, GABRIELA Ontario, IAVGO Community Legal Clinic, Income Security Advocacy Centre, No One Is Illegal – Toronto, Northumberland Community Legal Centre, OCASI – Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, PCLS Community Legal Clinic, SALCO Community Legal Clinic, UFCW, UNIFOR, and Workers United.

Canada is seeing a rise in Coronavirus / COVID-19 cases, accompanied by growing levels of xenophobia and racism. Crises do not affect us all equally – migrant, poor, and racialized communities are being excluded from response measures and are the worst affected by the economic downturn. We are writing to demand collective responses that leave no one behind,

including migrant workers, undocumented people, low-waged students, poor people, and refugees. Our priorities include:

1. HEALTHCARE FOR ALL:

Access without fear – regardless of immigration status – to free, universal, and expanded healthcare, including testing. This includes migrant workers who must travel here to work and may face quarantine periods. Remove health card and waiting period requirements. Enforce clear and precise guidelines to ensure language and community-specific accessible care. All forms of medical repatriation (deportation) and denial of immigration status on the basis of health status must end.

2. WORKER PROTECTIONS:

In times of quarantines and closures of schools and community spaces, the burden of care and cleaning work will fall disproportionately to migrant and racialized women. Most migrant and undocumented workers don't have access to paid sick leave and face reprisals for taking even unpaid sick days. Employment Insurance excludes most low wage migrants either explicitly, or because of administrative criteria. Campus closures will hit international students the hardest because they rely on on-campus work and housing to survive. Most migrant workers don't receive adequate protective gear. Measures enacted to protect workers must include: **strong anti-reprisal protections for workers taking time off; income security and open work permits for migrants who will lose wages or jobs because of sickness, quarantine or economic downturn, including those who must travel here to work; increased access to EI including special benefits; a federal emergency fund to provide non-repayable allowance for those experiencing a loss or interruption of earnings; and access to paid emergency leave as needed, with a minimum of 21 days for all workers, regardless of immigration status.**

3. STOP DETENTIONS & DEPORTATIONS, STATUS FOR ALL:

Enact an immediate moratorium on all immigration enforcement (detentions and deportations). Continued detentions and deportations will scare people away from the healthcare they need and separate people from their social support networks. Emergency measures are further limiting access to justice for migrants. Financial resources currently allocated to immigration enforcement must be redirected to emergency relief efforts and essential services. **People detained in prisons and detention centres are exposed to increased spread of illness but are denied access to quality health care. They must be released. While non-essential travel is discouraged, border closures have real consequences – families need to reunite, many need humanitarian assistance, and workers' livelihoods depend on being able to travel.** We cannot allow this crisis to be used to further the racist and xenophobic border policies. **Work permit and permanent resident status rules must be relaxed or removed, and open permits granted swiftly to workers in transition,** to ensure no one falls out of status because of job loss, school closures and travel restrictions.

4. SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY:

Community supports such as food banks, emergency shelters and other services are essential for poor, disabled, and other marginalized communities, as well as migrants and non-status people and their families. These supports are already at a breaking point – **immediate increased funding to expand these services must be a first priority. Migrant and non-status families must be granted access to housing, shelter, universal child care, food, and other basic protections freely without economic barriers, or fear of immigration enforcement. Clear policies and mechanisms must be created to stop the rise of xenophobia and racism.** Communications about crisis response measures, including income support, must be made accessible to communities whose first languages are not English or French.

5. THOSE THAT KNOW, LEAD:

Migrant and community organizations should be included in planning and implementation of the current response to ensure that no one is left behind. Migrant and undocumented workers, and their supporters, have long relied on and built effective mutual aid networks. They provide a road map out of this crisis, and must be learned from.

We urge you to take our requests seriously to ensure that this crisis does not have deadly consequences for the over 1.5 million migrant and undocumented people in the country. Please contact Syed Hussan, Executive Director of Migrant Workers Alliance for Change at hussan@migrantworkersalliance.org to continue this conversation.

Thank you,

Migrant Rights Network