



May 7, 2020

The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
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Dear Minister Champagne:

Warm greetings to you from Mennonite Central Committee Canada, the Nobel Women's Initiative, and The United Church of Canada.

We write to express appreciation for the leadership your government is demonstrating in response to the unprecedented challenges presented by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we applaud your government's support of United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres's call for a global ceasefire and the recent announcement of \$159.5 million in funding to support the global COVID-19 response.

We join with others who share a vocation to be peacemakers and a commitment to work for the health and wholeness of the human and created world. This calling leads us to encourage you to demonstrate further global leadership by ensuring that humanitarian assistance is not impeded by economic and political sanctions during this health crisis.

As civil society actors, we have active relationships with partner organizations and friends in Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Gaza, Iran, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Zimbabwe working for a peaceful end to conflict, the creation of conditions for reconciliation and peace, and the provision of the basic needs for everyone, including women, children, the elderly and the disabled. Even when sanctions provide an exemption mechanism for humanitarian aid, humanitarian agencies still face challenges with financial institutions blocking wire transfers to local partners. Given the threat that COVID-19 presents to the most vulnerable, it is essential that sanctions, embargoes or blockades not block the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilian populations in these and other countries.

We lift up the words of UN Secretary-General Guterres:

"I am encouraging the waiving of sanctions imposed on countries to ensure access to food, essential health supplies, and COVID-19 medical support. This is the time for solidarity not exclusion.... Let us remember that we are only as strong as the weakest health system in our interconnected world."

We believe that this crisis provides an opportunity for Canada to build on its commitment to a feminist approach to foreign policy, a robust Women, Peace & Security agenda, and the Feminist International Assistance Policy that supports the economic, political, and social empowerment of women and girls, and makes gender equality a priority, for the benefit of all people. Unilateral economic and political sanctions discriminate against women and the most marginalized: They hurt ordinary people and have the most severe negative consequences on women, children, the elderly, the disabled, and those living in impoverished communities.

We ask that Canada demonstrate its commitment to international and humanitarian law in this time of particular crisis by repealing Canadian unilateral economic and political sanctions, and by providing facilitation and support to Canadian and other INGOs providing humanitarian assistance in countries experiencing global sanctions, embargoes or blockades.

We look forward to consulting with you further on these concerns and providing you with more information as desired.

Grace and peace to you and your staff as you continue to exercise leadership in these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,



Rick Cober Bauman
Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee Canada



(Ms) Liz Bernstein
Co-Executive Director
Nobel Women's Initiative



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