December 20, 2018

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2
Email: pm@pm.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to express our concern about the situation facing Honduran and other Central American migrant women, men and children who have fled their homes to walk towards the United States’ southern border. Your government has shown leadership on responding to refugee crises, and once again, your leadership is needed to find solutions to this humanitarian crisis and address the root causes of this caravan.

Development and Peace–Caritas Canada is currently leading an education and action campaign called Share the Journey, in which Canadians are showing their solidarity with the 68.5 million forced migrants around the world. These migrants include thousands of Central Americans who are making the dangerous crossing to the United States’ southern border, where disturbingly a 7-year-old girl recently died while in U.S. custody.

Since 1967, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada has been working in partnership with local organizations in the Global South who are defending the human rights of communities living in poverty. We currently work with several partners in Honduras who warn us that the situation there is alarming. Today in Honduras, 60 per cent of the population live in poverty and the country has the highest level of economic inequality in Latin America. Honduras has become one of the most dangerous places on the planet – for youth, women, and particularly for human rights and environmental defenders. When communities question mining projects on their territory, they are often threatened and have even been murdered by security and government forces, as was tragically seen in the case of Indigenous environmental leader Berta Cáceres in 2016.

Canada has had a political, economic, and environmental impact on Honduras that has contributed to the poor living conditions that have resulted in this caravan. As such, we have the responsibility to find solutions to this crisis. After disputed elections in 2013 and again in 2017, which featured widespread evidence of electoral fraud, the Canadian government recognized the presidency of Juan Orlando Hernández, who leads a government deeply implicated in serious human rights abuses and corruption scandals responsible for the impoverishment of Hondurans. In 2014, Canada signed a free trade agreement with Honduras and provided technical support in revising the country’s mining code to allow...
foreign companies to exploit mining concessions with greater ease. This opened the door to Canadian companies, which at one point held up to 90% of foreign mining investments in the country. Mining projects have contributed to the insecurity, poverty and the deteriorated living environments that force people to migrate. Many Hondurans in the caravan are small-scale farmers whose crops have failed because of drought and flooding caused by climate change. Canadians are among the highest producers of greenhouse gases per capita of any country, and so we are contributing to this situation.

Although Canada is one of the main contributors to a UN Human Rights Mission in Honduras, your government must do more. If Canada continues to contribute to the root causes of forced migration rather than being part of the solution, then people will continue to flee in search of a better life for themselves and their children.

In the short term, it is urgent that the Canadian government show leadership in the region by working with their American and Mexican counterparts to protect the migrants who are currently requesting protection and to not tolerate any violation of their dignity or rights under the 1951 Geneva Convention.

Canada must also work to provide long-term solutions to this migration crisis by ensuring that thousands of people in Central America are not put in a situation where they have no choice but to flee. Canada must condemn repressive political and economic measures that affect these citizens, and support democracy and human rights that allow people to live in dignity. Canada must also provide access to justice for communities in Honduras whose livelihoods have been affected by the activities of Canadian mining companies. Without an ombudsperson for the extractive sector, mining companies will continue to be unaccountable for their actions.

To conclude, we wish to express our gratitude, on behalf of our organization and our members across Canada, for the initiatives that the Canadian government has already taken to address the migration crisis. It would be our pleasure to meet with you to discuss additional solutions that would ensure a better future for our migrant brothers and sisters from Central America.

Yours sincerely,

Serge Langlois
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