



February 9, 2021

The Honourable Mary Ng, P.C, M.P.
Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON

Subject: An independent and effective ombudsperson for responsible enterprise

Dear Minister Ng,

As Catholic leaders from dioceses across Canada, as well as Catholic organizations, religious congregations, and communities from across Canada, we are writing today to urge you to fulfill the promise of your government to ensure that the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) has the power to investigate complaints, including the power to compel documents and testimony.

For over fifteen years, Catholic leaders, organizations, and communities have joined other concerned Canadians and affected communities in the Global South to call for rules to regulate Canadian businesses overseas. Many of us have been working for many years defending the human rights of communities affected by the activities of natural resource extraction companies around the world, and we hear their cry for help. The voluntary measures that are currently in place have not been effective at preventing human rights and environmental abuses, nor at providing access to justice when abuses have taken place.

Pope Francis has emphasized over and over that the human rights of communities and the environment must be protected. As Pope Francis states in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, "a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (49).

For over a decade, Canadians have been asking the government to create rules for Canadian businesses operating overseas. In 2009, over 500,000 postcards were sent to members of Parliament to call for accountability for Canadian mining companies engaged in abuses overseas. Then, in 2014, over 80,000 signed action cards calling for an ombudsperson for the overseas extractive sector were delivered to MPs at a rally on Parliament Hill. This was part of the Development and Peace-Caritas Canada [Voice for Justice](#) campaign, and the [Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability's Open for Justice](#) campaign. In 2017, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops sent a [letter](#) to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to express concern over the environmental degradation and human rights violations caused by Canadian extractive companies operating in Latin America. The letter included recommendations for action, one of which was the creation of an independent ombudsperson with the power to independently investigate complaints. That letter followed [one](#) sent in 2016 to Prime Minister Trudeau that was signed

by over 200 Latin American organizations, many of them Catholic, asking for greater oversight of Canadian extractive companies by the Canadian government.

As you can imagine, [we were greatly encouraged, in January 2018](#), when the Government of Canada announced the creation of an independent ombudsperson's office to investigate allegations of abuse, with the mandate and tools needed to be effective. As recently as September 2019, former international trade minister Jim Carr indicated that he had asked his officials to begin the work required to pursue "a stand-alone legal framework for the office, including stipulating its powers to compel documents, witnesses, and other key testimony." However, since the federal election over a year ago, the CORE has still not been given the powers needed to be effective, even though Sheri Meyerhoffer has publicly agreed that the power to compel documents would ensure fair investigations.

The CORE has announced that it will soon be open to receiving complaints, but it still does not have the basic minimum powers required to ensure that it fulfils its mission to make Canadian companies accountable for their activities overseas. The CORE could suffer the same fate as its predecessor, the Extractive Sector CSR Counsellor, which also did not have the power to do independent investigations, and was eventually closed down. We have direct knowledge of communities living in poverty while defending their land, water, health, livelihoods and lives against the actions of multinational corporations. An impartial and fair process needs to be ensured, in order to address the dramatic power imbalance between the stakeholders.

Acting on this promise would ensure that Canada would uphold its international obligations, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We urge you to fulfill your government's promises and make the new Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) independent, and provide the CORE with the power to compel documents and testimony, so it can effectively investigate human rights abuse allegations linked to Canadian corporations operating overseas.

As faith leaders, it would be our pleasure to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss this urgent demand by thousands of Canadians, as well as hundreds of faith-based organizations and civil society groups across Canada and around the world. In order to arrange this meeting, please contact Kelly Di Domenico at kdidomenico@devp.org.

Yours sincerely,

Organizational sign-ons

The Executive Committee of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops of Canada
Serge Langlois, Executive Director and Evelyne Beaudoin, President of Development and Peace-Caritas Canada

Jenny Cafiso, Executive Director, Canadian Jesuits International

Joe Gunn, Executive Director, Centre Oblat – A Voice for Justice

Alain Ambeault, CSV, Executive Director, Canadian Religious Conference
Darlene O'Leary, Coordinator, Martha Justice Ministry, Sisters of St. Martha, Antigonish
Sr. Margo Ritchie, Congregational Leader, Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada
Josée Lemire, Executive Director, Mer et Monde
Norbert Piché, Country Director, Jesuit Refugee Service Canada
Mark Hathaway, Executive Director, Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice
Jack Costello SJ, Director, Jesuit Refugee and Migrant Service
Centre Justice et Foi
Fr. Ken Thorson OMI, Provincial, OMI Lacombe Canada
Sr. Julienne Turmel, o.p. Prioress general, the Dominican Missionary Adorers
Sister Cécile Dionne, Superior General, Ursulines of the Canadian Union
Louise Royer, Director, Social Action Ministry, Archdiocese of Montreal
Ursulines Sisters of Bruno
Jericho House - Youth Leadership, Justice and Spirituality Centre
Linda Joseph, Provincial Leader, Daughters of Wisdom of Canada
Ginette Laurendeau, a.m., Superior General, Soeurs Antoniennes de Marie
Georges Madore, Provincial Superior, Les missionnaires montfortains du Canada
Filles de la Sagesse of Canada
Ursuline Sisters of Chatham
Sue Wilson, Executive Director, Office for Systemic Justice, Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada
Real Doucet, Provincial, Missionaries of Africa
Loretto Sisters Canada
Scarboro Missions
Mary Beth McCurdy, SCIC Congregational Leader, Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception
Colette Harvey, President, Regroupement pour la responsabilité sociale des entreprises
Missionary Oblates of S.C. and M.I.

Individual sign-ons

John McCarthy, S.J., Jesuits in Canada
Kim Gottfried Piché, English Network Coordinator, Social Action Office, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal, on behalf of the Parish Social Action Representatives
Archbishop Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R., Archdiocese of Grouard—McLennan
Timothy F. Hartnagel, PhD, Edmonton, Alberta
Fr. Richard Bardier, Brothers of Charity
M. Gaby Ouellette, student at the Institut Pastorale des Dominicains
Laura Reitsma, Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
Sr. Susan Scott, Companions of Angela & Francis
Sr. Irène Léger, the Religious of Notre-Dame du Sacré-Cœur
Sr. Marie-Pierre Delorme, Sisters of St-Mary
Sr. Francine Gauthier, Daughters of Wisdom of Canada
Sr. Anne Marie Beaudoin, Provincial Secretary, Daughters of Wisdom of Canada

Jocelyne Morin, Regroupement pour la responsabilité sociale des entreprises
Emile April, pastor, Diocese of Saskatoon
Ghislaine Clavet, Co-President, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada Diocesan Council, Diocese of Edmundston
Elizabeth Hogue, Chair, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada Diocesan Council (Anglophone), Archdiocese of St. Boniface
Dr. Cathy Driscoll, Chair, Development and Peace - Caritas Canada Diocesan Council, Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth
Marcella Pedersen, Chair, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada Diocesan Council, Diocese of Prince Albert West
T. Winnie Winnifred Odo, Chair, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada Diocesan Council, Diocese of Antigonish
Rita Bailey, Chair, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada Diocesan Council, Diocese of Hamilton
Sylvianne Perry, Secretary/Treasurer, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada Diocesan Council, Archdiocese of Edmonton
Estela Rios, Chair, Development and Peace - Caritas Canada Diocesan Council, Archdiocese of Toronto
Ms. Pauline Banville Perusse, Diocese of Edmundston
Mr. Bruce Herbert, Social Action Committee, Archdiocese of Montreal
Ms. Bianca Mailloux, Diocese of Nicolet
Marylou Grondin Santerre, Edmundston
Caroline Young, Diocese of Trois-Rivières
Mr. Luc Boisvert
Nathalie De Lachevrotière, Diocese of Trois-Rivières
Karen Gleeson
Bernice Daratha

Cc: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Marc Garneau, Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Honourable Karina Gould, Minister of International Development
Sheri Meyerhoffer, Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise