



WRITTEN BRIEF FOR THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND  
TECHNOLOGY STUDY ON THE CANADIAN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

SUBMITTED BY **FOR OUR KIDS VANCOUVER**

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Thank you for the opportunity to make written comments and recommendations to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology Study with respect to Canada's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

### **FOR OUR KIDS VANCOUVER - WHO WE ARE**

We are a group of parents located in Vancouver, British Columbia concerned about the impacts of the climate emergency on the quality of life of our children.

We are united by our fears of the severity of the crisis; our hopes for a sustainable future and our commitment to take action to find solutions.

We join parents and grandparents across the country taking similar steps as part of the "For Our Kids" movement. Learn more here: <https://www.forourkids.ca/>

By taking collective action, it is our hope that we can transcend individual action in order to address the scale of the climate crisis.

As individual members of the group, we are from diverse backgrounds both professionally and racially. Professionally, we are doctors, artists, lawyers, academics and full-time care-givers. We recognize the immediate need to further broaden our membership across socioeconomic and minority and racialized lines to advance the imminent threats to the health and safety of our population and democratic principles of systemic racism.

### **CANADA'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS – AN EXERCISE IN CLIMATE CRISIS RESPONSE**

It is clear that the Covid-19 crisis provided Canadians with an imminent and "existential" threat to us personally and the very fabric of our society- socially, culturally and economically. These are all threats caused by the climate crisis.

At the early stages of the pandemic, before the impact of our collective efforts to "stay home" were known, medical officials were preparing guidance protocols on whose life would be saved faced with a shortage of ventilators.<sup>1</sup> High fatality rates were predicting deaths of at least someone we knew or someone who knew someone.

Terrifying scientific evidence that led to full-scale national and collective effort, both individually and at government levels, to address this threat. Never before in our lifetimes had we seen the Prime Minister provide daily briefings on the billions of dollars the government would spend to help people through a crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/covid-19-one-dead-as-b-c-deals-with-460-active-cases-including-53-over-the-past-day>; <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/montreal-low-income-inequality-covid-19-1.5570296>

Our message to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology Study is simple:

RECOMMENDATION: the Government of Canada must apply the lessons of the Covid-19 Crisis to fight the Climate Crisis TODAY.

### **IN TIMES OF CRISIS, WE MUST LISTEN TO THE SCIENTISTS**

Canada's response to the Covid-19 pandemic confirms that at times of crisis, we must follow evidence-based science and avoid making policy decisions in favor of special interests.

The federal and provincial governments' steadfast adherence to public health official expert advice and the guidance of the World Health Organization, even though it was acknowledged the science was still emerging, allowed us to flatten the curve and save lives. The unprecedented scale of global collaboration to develop and share the emerging science to respond to the Covid-19 crisis<sup>2</sup> must continue to find solutions to the climate crisis. This is a crucial lesson that must be applied to the address the climate crisis and demonstrates the importance of the Committee's current study.

### **CANADA'S FAILED RESPONSE TO PROTECT THE RACIALIZED AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS**

From our perspective in British Columbia, the provincial response appears to have generally been successful. The numbers of people infected and death rates were lower than feared. Nationally, we understand all provinces have been able to maintain transmission numbers at levels that do not overwhelm health care systems.

The stark exceptions to Canada's "success story" were in populations of our most vulnerable - long-term elder care centers, prisons, and food processing plants.

It is common knowledge that while Indigenous citizens make up a small portion of Canada's overall population (above 5%), they are overrepresented in the prison system.<sup>3</sup> Elder care center caregivers and food processing workers are often immigrant, low paid women working several jobs just to make enough for a full salary.<sup>4</sup>

Census data shows that Canada's poorest and most racially diverse neighborhoods have been hardest hit by Covid-19, among the highest fatality rates.<sup>5</sup>

The vulnerability of minority populations to the Covid-19 pandemic appears to be a symptom of systemic racism recognized to exist by the Prime Minister of Canada and it must also be addressed to effectively address the climate crisis.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/global-science-collaboration-open-source-covid-19/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-indigenous-leaders-say-csc-needs-to-address-outbreak-at-mission/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/6924817/coronavirus-nursing-retirement-homes/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/race-covid-19-montreal-data-census-1.5607123>

Scholars have identified that the systems of oppression of racialized populations are the same systems that perpetuate environmental degradation and injustice.<sup>6</sup> At the very least, what is evident from the Covid-19 crisis, is that vulnerable and racialized populations will suffer the greatest impacts of an unstable climate.

RECOMMENDATION: The Government of Canada take measures to address systemic racism as one of the pillars of addressing the climate crisis.

### **CANADA'S INADEQUATE RESPONSE TO FOOD SECURITY ISSUES**

It remains unclear how Canada took any measures to address the food security concerns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. What was abundantly clear, however from the crisis, was how dependent Canada's food supply is on fossil fuels both with respect to migrant workers and the transportation of food into Canada.

Canada's response to the food security problem by opening borders is not a long-term and sustainable solution. Reports from agricultural producers showed that despite efforts, producers would be forced to waste up to 50% of their crops.<sup>7</sup> Others have had to deal with significant food waste.<sup>8</sup>

The 2019 IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land makes it clear – the way we grow food is a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and the impacts of climate change are a significant threat to food security.

RECOMMENDATION: The Government of Canada must rebuild our food systems; to develop sustainable and secure food systems that can withstand all kinds of future crisis.

### **UNACCEPTABLE RESPONSE TO DELAY IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS**

The COVID-19 pandemic cannot be used to fuel the climate crisis. We are extremely disappointed to have heard Minister John Wilkinson's indications of potential delays to Canada's key environmental commitments made by the Liberal 2019 re-election campaign.<sup>9</sup>

Canada must take all measures to implement commitments on expedited timelines:

- Ban all single use plastics, which threaten the ability of our oceans to mitigate climate impacts;
- Implement the Clean Fuel Standards regulatory approach; and
- Upgrade emissions targets to net-zero by 2050.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-a-warming-planet/racism-police-violence-and-the-climate-are-not-separate-issues> ; [https://www.vogue.com/article/why-every-environmentalist-should-be-anti-racist?fbclid=IwAR0YdBZlr3yHUy2SKtUWAoVH9KZi6ILAAmNZoFoQoXp5nWCd5M\\_8GE1w8O8](https://www.vogue.com/article/why-every-environmentalist-should-be-anti-racist?fbclid=IwAR0YdBZlr3yHUy2SKtUWAoVH9KZi6ILAAmNZoFoQoXp5nWCd5M_8GE1w8O8)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/sunday-tfw-fruit-veg-1.5571508>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/manitoba-potato-producers-covid-19-1.5545584>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/climate-plastics-covid-1.5574981>

The single use plastic ban appears even more acute now as a result of the restrictions to reusable products and personal protective equipment in response to the pandemic.<sup>10</sup> Canada alongside the global community must develop a sustainable solution to the need for individual personal protective equipment and safe consumer product use.

RECOMMENDATION: The Government of Canada direct resources during the pandemic to continue to implement expedited timelines for environmental commitments made in Liberal 2019 re-election campaign.

### **CANADA'S FAILURE TO COMMIT TO A GREEN AND JUST RECOVERY ALONGSIDE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS**

To call on the Government of Canada to take immediate actions for a Green and Just Recovery to rebuild the global economy from the coronavirus, we simply rely on the June 5, 2020, expert opinions of Andrew Bailey, governor of the Bank of England; François Villeroy de Galhau, governor of Banque de France; Frank Elderson, chair of the Network for Greening the Financial System and executive board member of the Nederlandsche Bank; and Mark Carney is UN special envoy for climate action and finance published in the Guardian:

*The world must seize this opportunity to meet the climate challenge*

As current and former central bankers, we believe the pandemic offers a unique chance to green the global economy.

We are currently in the midst of the most severe macroeconomic shock since the second world war. The disruption to our daily lives and subsequent impact on our economies has been enormous. We are seeing first-hand that a collective response is needed to defeat a common enemy, as authorities across the world courageously mobilize all available resources to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

This crisis offers us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rebuild our economy in order to withstand the next shock coming our way: climate breakdown. Unless we act now, the climate crisis will be tomorrow's central scenario and, unlike Covid-19, no one will be able to self-isolate from it.

In the immediate response to the pandemic, governments have taken measures of unprecedented scale to keep economic and financial systems afloat. The IMF estimates that approximately \$9tn of fiscal support has been provided across the world. This is necessary to limit acute and permanent damage. But as we consider the next stage of recovery, we must look beyond the immediate crisis and think more strategically about how we do it.

Collectively, countries around the globe are still far from meeting climate crisis goals, most notably the Paris Agreement to limit the increase in global temperature to well below 2C, and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5C. Over the last year, we have seen record

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/campaigners-fear-coronavirus-is-causing-a-permanent-flurry-of-plastic-waste-1.4923370>

temperatures across Europe, extreme rainfall in the US and wildfires in the Arctic. The effects of the climate crisis are irreversible, so the severity and frequency of these extreme weather events will only increase – by how much depends on our success in transitioning to a net-zero emission world. Recognising this risk, the Network for Greening the Financial System (NGFS) – a coalition of 66 central banks, and supervisors – has been working to “green” the financial system to reduce the costly financial risks that these developments create.

Acting early will help to smooth the transition and avoid a sharp and disorderly adjustment. To meet the goals of the Paris Agreement requires a whole economy transition: every business, bank, and financial institution will need to adapt. The pandemic has shown that we can change our ways of working, living and travelling, but it has also shown that making these adjustments at the height of a crisis brings enormous costs. To address climate breakdown, we can instead take decisions now that reduce emissions in a less disruptive manner. That requires us to be strategic. To build back better.

This will only happen if financial decisions, including those made by businesses, investors, banks and governments, take the climate crisis into account. The economic recovery plans being developed today offer the chance to build a sustainable, competitive new economy.

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... we have reached a fork in the road. We have a choice: rebuild the old economy, locking in temperature increases of 4C with extreme climate disruption; or build back better, preserving our planet for generations to come.

To meet the climate crisis challenge, we must learn from the Covid-19 pandemic. Let us make a green recovery the first step down that road.<sup>11</sup>

Countries across the globe have already started to invest in a green recovery.<sup>12</sup> Canada must be a leader on this front, but has so far delayed making a clear commitment to invest in a Green and Just Recovery. Loans to fossil fuel companies upon disclosure of climate plans are insufficient.<sup>13</sup> The Government’s \$1.7B loan program to clean up orphan wells<sup>14</sup> is a start but not enough. Investment dollars across the board are needed to get people back to work, defeat systemic racism, build healthy and sustainable communities and environment, and lead the globe to achieve net-zero economies by 2050.

RECOMMENDATION: The Government of Canada immediately commit to and direct all investment dollars to a Green and Just Recovery.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/05/world-climate-breakdown-pandemic>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/05/29/environmental-advocates-say-going-green-could-help-boost-canadas-covid-recovery.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/05/12/justin-trudeau-says-companies-will-need-to-show-theyre-thinking-about-climate-change-to-get-government-loans-heres-what-that-means.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/federal-oil-and-gas-orphan-wells-program-1.5535943>

## **CONCLUSION**

We are parents. While we collectively sacrificed to fastidiously follow the government's direction on addressing the Covid-19 crisis, we raise our collective voice to plead that government quickly and effectively respond to the pandemic by committing to a Green and Just Recovery today. Not tomorrow but today. We make this plea for our children. They deserve your commitment to address the climate crisis with the same all government approach and collaborative work across party lines used to address the Covid-19 crisis. There are lessons to be learned from the pandemic. Take the advice of experts and academics with decades of research in effective climate crisis response to take us down the road to a safe and sustainable climate that respects all humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems.