

Brief for the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology on the Canadian Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

**Submitted by KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
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Introduction

KAIROS recognizes that the federal government has taken significant actions to respond to the immediate needs of people during the COVID-19 pandemic, but much more needs to be done. The current crisis has exacerbated human rights and environmental abuses engendered by systemic forces, such as white settler colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, among others, that industry, science, and technology not only magnify but also expose. Federal recovery plans, including those involving industry, science, and technology, must deliver a just and feminist transformation for all people and the planet. We are at a *kairos* moment to ensure that we build a more resilient and equitable future that respects ecological integrity and upholds human rights. Such a response must be rooted in feminist political and socio-economic narratives that respect people and the environment. This means rejecting militarism, nationalism and other structural forms of violence and promoting a positive peace in which all people, especially women, can fully participate in political, economic and social life free from discriminationⁱ.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the interconnectedness of the economic and ecological crises facing the world today. Uncontrolled resource extraction, deforestation, infrastructure development and the exploitation of wild species have created perfect conditions for the spill over of diseases.ⁱⁱ Our dominant economic model, based on extractivism, commodification and the exploitation of resources, has little concern for planetary health and has left us susceptible to viruses like COVID-19. Recovery plans for Canada must prioritize the planet and all peoples over profit.

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities, particularly those with poor access to healthcare, clean drinking water, and essential services. The needs and priorities of Indigenous peoples must be the foundation of recovery plans. Furthermore, these plans must support an active process of decolonization – with ourselves and our communities - but also in how we develop industry and conduct research in this country.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an acutely gendered crisis. Women are disproportionately at risk during the pandemic as they make up most essential workers, particularly in health care settings. They are also responsible for the majority of care work within families spending many hours a week caring for children and the elderly. The pandemic has significantly increased this burden and in some cases interrupted their ability to fully participate in professional activities. Innovative approaches to economic and industrial recovery need to recognize these extra responsibilities and find ways to accommodate and equalize them.

All over the world violence against women, including domestic violence has significantly increased with the pandemic and associated lockdown, including in Canada where gender-based violence and domestic abuse rates have increased by an estimated 20 and 30 per cent in parts of the country. Furthermore, militaristic responses to the crisis by repressive governments have exacerbated violence particularly against marginalized groups and human rights and land defenders.

Refugees, displaced persons, and migrant workers are also especially vulnerable at this time. In Canada, migrant workers and refugee claimants play a vital role to the economy and care work. The pandemic has exacerbated conditions for migrant workers, who are exposed to overcrowding, unhygienic living quarters, limited access to benefits, and workplace abuse. In Quebec, asylum seekers working as porters in long-term care homes have been disproportionately infected by COVID-19 because of their jobs and living conditionsⁱⁱⁱ. Recovery plans must ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all people who come to Canada to work or escape danger, and to grant them with permanent resident status.

KAIROS urges the federal government to invest in a future that promotes the integrity of our planet, people's access to basic human right and the dignity of all peoples. KAIROS endorses the Principles for a Just Recovery^{iv} and has joined an informal alliance of more than 300 national and local civil society groups to demand that recovery plans move us toward a more equitable and resilient future for all. Below, KAIROS has outlined a series of recommendations related to the work of this Standing Committee that are rooted in our core commitments for human rights and ecological justice. We are also guided by this [Ethical Framework for a Post-COVID Recovery](#). Some of the recommendations below address issues that have arisen directly from the pandemic, while others address the pre-existing conditions that have exacerbated the threat of the virus for the most vulnerable populations.

Recommendations

- Incorporate care analysis in the COVID-19 response to reduce and redistribute unpaid care responsibilities in our economy
- Ensure the full and meaningful representation of women, gender-diverse people, Black, Indigenous and Persons of Colour, people with disabilities, and civil society organizations in the development design and implementation of COVID-19 response measures
- Pass legislation ensuring the laws of Canada are in harmony with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. This legislation should build on Bill C-262
- Implement the Calls for Justice for extractive and development industries as outlined in [Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#)^v
- Develop a [National Decarbonization Strategy](#), that supports publicly owned agencies and assets and prioritizes investment in low-carbon projects and infrastructure for Indigenous communities^{vi}. A National Decarbonization Strategy would:
 - Legislate net-zero by 2050 and establish new 2030 targets to ensure Canada's fair share contribution to keeping global temperature rise to below 1.5°C.
 - Establish an independent body to monitor progress and to hold the government accountable to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions targets.
 - Phase out oil, gas and coal production for fuel and place a moratorium on new oil and gas projects, including pipelines to export bitumen and liquefied natural gas (LNG).
 - End all federal subsidies for oil, gas, and coal projects after 2020.
 - Uphold Indigenous rights in the development of renewable energy projects

- Introduce a [Just Transition Act](#) with funding to ensure fossil fuel workers and communities are supported in the transition to a clean economy^{vii}.
- Establish a [Strategic Training Fund](#) to recruit and prepare workers—especially workers from historically marginalized groups including women, Indigenous peoples, and racialized Canadians — for new jobs in the clean economy^{viii}.
- Ensure that the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada has processes that meet international legal standards and maintains Indigenous peoples’ right to free, prior, and informed consent. These processes should ensure meaningful representation of Indigenous peoples by the appropriate leadership.
- Reassess the mandate of the [Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise \(CORE\)](#)^{ix} to ensure it is independent and has the power to investigate the Canadian corporate sector, including their subsidiaries, for alleged human rights and environmental abuses at their overseas operations.
- Adopt and fully implement a legal framework that requires extractive corporations to conduct consultations that abide by local Indigenous governance practices as stipulated by frameworks like the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. These processes must fully engage women and guarantee that communities near proposed extractive project sites ultimately determine if and how a project will move forward.
- Enact a comprehensive human rights due diligence law that compels businesses to respect the most current international human rights standards across the entirety of their global operations and supply chains and holds them liable for harms caused by or on behalf of their operations.
- Facilitate access to Canadian courts for overseas plaintiffs who claim harm by the actions of Canadian mining companies and their subsidiaries.
- Adopt the guidelines and recommendations of reports such as [Voices at Risk: Canada’s Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders](#)^x, and [Raising her Voice: Confronting the Unique Challenges Facing Women Human Rights Defenders](#)^{xi}, and others that recognize the leadership of Indigenous women human rights defenders and the importance of safeguarding their well-being.
- Provide [Status for All and Landed Status Now](#), meaning everyone in the country without permanent resident status must be regularized and given permanent resident status immediately, including migrant workers^{xii}.
- Provide all people who come to Canada as migrant workers in the future with permanent resident status on arrival. Migrants in low-waged occupations currently coming into Canada through the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, Caregiver Program, Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, and other programs with work authorization permits, as well as refugees and individuals on study permits, should be able to come to Canada as permanent residents if they so choose, and be able to bring their families with them.

KAIROS appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the development of COVID-19 recovery plans. We are developing a more comprehensive set of recommendations that reflect our commitments for ecological justice and human rights in Canada and abroad.

KAIROS Canada unites ten Canadian churches and religious organizations in a faithful ecumenical response to the call to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Inspired by a vision of God’s compassionate justice, KAIROS advocates for social change, amplifying and strengthening the public witness of its members. We are Indigenous, settlers and newcomers in Canada working with people of faith or conscience all over the world for ecological justice and human rights.

ⁱ <https://www.kairoscanada.org/an-act-of-care-reframing-global-efforts-to-contain-covid-19>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/27/halt-destruction-nature-worse-pandemics-top-scientists>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-chsld-asylum-seekers-1.5559354>

^{iv} <https://justrecoveryforall.ca/>

^v <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>

^{vi} New Decade, New Deal — Alternative Federal Budget 2020 Our plan for a just and sustainable economy. *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*.

<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2020/03/AFB%202020.pdf>

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} https://core-ombuds.canada.ca/core_ombuds-ocre_ombuds/index.aspx?lang=eng

^x https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/rights_defenders_guide_defenseurs_droits.aspx?lang=eng

^{xi} <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/FAAE/Reports/RP10585326/faaerp29/faaerp29-e.pdf>

^{xii} <https://migrantrights.ca/statusforall/>