

April 3, 2020

Honourable Karina Gould  
Minister of International Development  
125 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, ON

RE: Letter on COVID-19 and the International Cooperation Sector

Dear Minister Gould,

We are writing as representatives of Canada's international development and humanitarian community, including over 180 charitable, profit and non-profit organizations, academic institutions and individuals based in Canada and working around the world. Our sector includes over 2,000 organizations, employs some 14,000 Canadians on a full-time basis, and invests over \$5 billion annually to support global sustainable development and humanitarian assistance – frequently in close partnership with the Government of Canada. Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and using feminist and human rights-based approaches, we support climate action, global public health systems, education, sanitation and hygiene, economic development, public engagement, good governance, and the broad achievement of the human rights to which all the world's people are entitled.

Minister, the current COVID-19 pandemic is challenging that work – our shared work. We applaud the Government of Canada's commitment to global engagement and cooperation to address the pandemic, including the allocation of \$159.5M through Canada's International Assistance Envelope. You, the Prime Minister, and your Cabinet colleagues have provided important global leadership in making a connection between the compassion and cooperation that underpin Canada's international assistance and our own national interest. Global Affairs Canada has made important and early commitments to flexibility and continued partnership. The ambitions and commitments of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, feminist foreign policy, multilateral engagement and inclusive trade agenda are even more important in this time of crisis. Canada should be a leader in applying feminist and human rights-based approaches in a whole-of-society and global response to COVID-19.

Though the challenges we face in Canada are severe, those before our Southern partners are far greater. We are committed to supporting this worldwide fight however we can. This includes making the choices within our own organizations and supporting choices by government that will help us all emerge from this crisis with stronger partnerships and a more equitable and sustainable future. We believe that strong, decisive and ambitious actions now – domestically and internationally – will help all emerge stronger from this crisis.

Yet, this pandemic also poses a grave risk to the vitality and viability of Canada's international cooperation sector. The Business Council of Canada, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses, along with their counterparts around the world, have called for unprecedented federal support for the widest possible range of organizations. International development organizations of all types and sizes must be part of this response. We welcome the Government of Canada's commitment to support Canadian employers, as well as individuals who work on a contract basis.

Imagine Canada has [rightly noted](#) that charities and non-profits are at particular risk given minimal reserves, low margins and a heavy reliance on revenues from philanthropy that have now dried up. Imagine Canada has estimated that registered charities – not including non-profit organizations – face potential financial losses this year of between \$9.5 billion and \$15.7 billion and layoffs of between 118,000 and 194,000 people. In a sector where a majority of employees are women, the gender dimension of these impacts is considerable. We endorse and echo Imagine Canada’s call for broad-based federal action that will help Canada’s charities and non-profits access resources, raise funds, sustain operations, retain staff and inform government decision-making going forward.

Canada’s international cooperation community is at the frontlines of the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic – as it has been in responses to epidemics from Ebola, Zika, and H1N1 to HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. Canadian aid workers save lives every day and bring with them expertise in the intersectional and gendered impacts of pandemics. Women, people facing poverty, people with disabilities and marginalized individuals are often the primary users of services now being closed. Many women are primary caregivers responsible for supporting people affected by disease in their families and beyond – and therefore more vulnerable to infection themselves.

Many Canadian humanitarians, development workers and public health experts are now applying their expertise in Canadian communities. Those who remain abroad – and those working with partners in developing countries – serve the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people. As you and the Prime Minister have noted, they also help to contain the disease’s spread locally and globally.

While Canada’s humanitarian and development professionals are key to Canada’s COVID-19 response, they are also supporting ongoing global and community needs such as climate action, gender equality, education, economic development, good governance, food security and nutrition. Their continued contributions in these areas and others will be essential for an effective recovery worldwide, including by building and empowering local leadership by people in partner countries. Canada and the international community can emerge from this crisis with stronger partnerships and systems that will help build a fairer, more sustainable and safer world. As this pandemic shows, this is in Canada’s own enlightened self-interest.

Telling the story of this contribution to Canadians is essential. The current context, while immensely challenging, gives us an opportunity to reshape mindsets and language around the value and spirit of development cooperation. More and more Canadians see clearly how what happens in the farthest and poorest countries of the world relates to their own lives here. We welcome your ongoing challenge to us to enhance communications with Canadians. We are keen to work with you and Global Affairs Canada to shape a new collective narrative for global cooperation that engages and supports a wide range of Canadians as organizations, networks, movements, volunteers, and citizens.

As our sector works to maintain progress on development around the world and respond to emerging needs, the sector is experiencing unique and unprecedented challenges in its work:

- Widespread repatriation is disconnecting Canadian organizations from their in-country partners, and travel restrictions are constraining programming globally.
- The risk of exponential infection in developing countries may force a shift in focus away from important planned programming to address immediate health and development needs.

- While Canada's government has been a strong advocate for the importance of multilateral action to address COVID-19, other countries' movement towards isolationism has raised the spectre of general withdrawal from international cooperation and assistance.

This last risk is existential not just to our sector but – in a global public health system whose strength is substantially defined by its weakest link – to all people everywhere. We are, at this time of global pandemic especially, in this together.

As we adjust to this new reality, our sector has developed a set of proposals to help inform your response to this crisis. These are complementary and additional to the recommendations outlined by Imagine Canada and reinforced in a [joint letter](#) of over 200 charities.

- Continue to support a globally coordinated and cooperative approach to address COVID-19 – including by working with partners to build a positive and important narrative about the importance for global solidarity now and always.
- Sustain and increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) to support humanitarian response and sustainable development. The \$159.5M so far announced for international assistance is from existing funds and represents 0.15% of Canada's federal response to COVID-19. Additional funding could be rapidly disbursed through a focus on reinforcing global health systems, scaling the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, direct expansion of existing partner programs – notably including those of Canadian organizations – and funding the UN's COVID-19 humanitarian response plan.
- Ensure that all Canadian organizations working internationally are eligible for all federal initiatives aimed at helping employers to retain staff, and that all initiatives to support individual Canadians are open to individuals working in international cooperation.
- Ensure that ongoing global needs like climate action, gender equality, education, food security and nutrition, economic development, and civic space continue to be supported during the response to COVID-19.
- Ensure that Canada's response to COVID-19 is guided by feminist and human rights-based approaches.
- Allow partner organizations to use development and humanitarian funds flexibly to support responses that most appropriately address urgent and emerging community and individual needs, to avoid the need for project-by-project adjustments.
- Fast-track funding renewals for multi-year international programs and program extensions as needed, and minimize reporting for ongoing projects and programs.
- Temporarily lift restrictions that limit charities to only providing funds to qualified donees.
- Create an ad hoc forum for Global Affairs Canada and other relevant departments to share advice and ideas with leaders in the international cooperation sector.

These requests are made in the spirit of partnership that informs all of our work. As a sector, we are wholeheartedly committed to supporting the government's efforts, through physical distancing at home and program implementation abroad. We look forward to hearing from you on these requests, to continuing our conversation in the months to come, and to working with you to tackle this crisis, help those who need it most and recover better together.

Sincerely,

*List of Signatories Below*

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Canadian Foodgrains Bank	Jim Cornelius
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