

Lift Canada's Economic Sanctions against the World's Poorest Countries. Trudeau Government "Must Respect the Rule of International Law"

Joint Statement by the Hamilton Coalition to Stop the War and Le Mouvement Québécois pour la Paix

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One year ago, following the declaration of the Covid-19 pandemic, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed to G-20 leaders to lift all of their economic sanctions against the poorest countries of the world for the duration of the pandemic. [Guterres noted](#), "Let us remember that we are only as strong as the weakest health system in our interconnected world."

Not a single G-20 leader complied. Some, like Trump, actually increased their coercive economic measures against countries such as Venezuela and Iran, hoping that the combination of economic sanctions and pandemic would lead to regime change in those countries.

Here in Canada, two peace organizations, one each from the two main language groups in the country, united to amplify the Secretary-General's appeal to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau by organizing an [open letter](#) from 100 prominent Canadians on April 13, 2020, asking Trudeau to lift [Canada's economic sanctions](#) against 20 countries of the world, 9 of which are in Africa. Regrettably, the PM did not even bother to reply to the substance of the open letter.

In response, the two organizations organized both a Change.org petition to the PM with the same demands. When that too failed to elicit a response, they also initiated [parliamentary petition e-2630](#), sponsored by NDP MP Scott Duvall. The parliamentary petition did finally get a [response from MP Rob Oliphant, Parliamentary-Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs](#). However, that response found little favour with the two peace groups.

Below is a rebuttal of the government's position, as stated by Parliamentary-Secretary Rob Oliphant:

1) The government of Canada must respect the rule of international law. The UN Charter recognizes that economic sanctions are an act of war that often kill more people than bullets

and bombs and therefore reserves the right to level these coercive economic measures solely for the Security Council. Canada's economic sanctions against 19 countries of the world are unilateral, i.e., they don't have the approval of the UNSC. Therefore, they are illegal. Moreover, they constitute meddling in the internal affairs of other sovereign countries, which is also illegal under the UN Charter and many centuries of international law. Canada needs to stop applying unilateral coercive economic measures.

2) Human rights have been weaponized by many western governments, including Canada's. Alleged human rights violations, which are cherry-picked unilaterally by these governments, have been used respectively to invoke the doctrines of *humanitarian interventionism* and *the responsibility to protect (R2P)* against countries, such as the former Yugoslavia and Libya, to destroy entire states and turn large populations into refugees. Human rights violations are never used as excuses to intervene or level sanctions in major human-rights-violating countries such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or the apartheid State of Israel, because these states are within the sphere of influence of the main imperial power, the USA.

3) We take exception to the Parliament-Secretary's characterization of Canada's sanctions as "appl(ying) a targeted approach and rigorous analysis to minimize adverse consequences for the civilian population, including vulnerable groups... such as women and children." In fact, Canada's sanctions on Syria and Venezuela, for example, have caused widespread unemployment, devaluation of currencies, loss of life-savings, fuel and food shortages, lack of medications, homelessness, increases in crime, and death. Furthermore, these adverse consequences of economic sanctions disproportionately affect marginal groups, such as women and children. In Venezuela, for example, [40,000 people are estimated to have perished](#) due to sanctions organized by the Lima Group, of which the Trudeau government of Canada is a founding member. In Syria, combined with the incursions of proxy armies of mercenaries sponsored by the US Coalition, of which the Harper government of Canada was a founding member, coercive economic measures contributed to turning nearly [5.5 million Syrians into refugees](#). The well-to-do in both countries have the resources to ride out the economic sanctions. It is the poor and marginalized who suffer most or flee. In the context of hybrid war and widespread poverty, human trafficking has risen in both countries, affecting especially women and girls, who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of Trudeau's allegedly feminist foreign policy.

4) It is fallacious for Mr. Oliphant to state his government "ensure(s) sanctions regimes do not present an unintended barrier that would hinder the humanitarian response to the pandemic." In fact, the US government has forced other countries to obey its sanctions regime (in which the Government of Canada is a partner) against targeted states through the use of extraterritoriality, that is, by penalizing foreign corporations which dare to trade with countries which the USA has sanctioned. This extraterritoriality is deterrent enough in practice for virtually every financial institution in the world NOT to provide the necessary funding and paperwork to facilitate the transfer of food and medical supplies to sanctioned countries. For example, Iran was [unable to receive doses of Covid-19 vaccines](#) from COVAX although the vaccines were offered to that country.

5) Finally, the Trudeau Government of Canada would do well to look into the mirror. Rather than looking abroad for the "gross human rights violations, significant corruption, or behaviour that flouts the rule of law and threatens global peace and security", which Parliamentary-Secretary Oliphant notes are the *raison d'être* of Canada's coercive economic measures, the federal government ought to focus on eliminating systemic discrimination

that results in [dozens of native communities still lacking potable water](#) as well as adequate medical and educational facilities. It also resulted in RCMP killings of [alarming numbers of native persons last year](#) as well as thousands of [murdered and missing native women](#). These “gross human rights violations”, a term used by Oliphant in his response, are on top of the [residential schools](#), the [forced sterilization of native and Metis women](#), the [Chinese Head Tax](#), the wartime [internment of Japanese-Canadians](#), the [refusal to allow Jewish refugees of Nazism](#) to land in Canada, the [deportation of would-be Sikh immigrants](#), and many other national disgraces. Canada also suffers from corruption of which the [SNC Lavelin affair](#) and the We Charity were recent examples. As for upholding the international rule of law, the parliamentary-secretary should blush at his government’s [kidnapping of Meng Wanzhou](#), its [growing sales of arms to Saudi Arabia](#) for its illegal war on Yemen, and its continued support for the juntas in Haiti and Ukraine, which were put into power respectively by [Canadian-backed coups in 2004](#) and [2014](#).

People in glass houses should not throw stones.

Conclusion

On this first-year anniversary of Secretary-General Guterres’ call for G-20 countries to lift all their economic sanctions for the duration of the pandemic, Prime Minister Trudeau ought immediately to drop all of Canada’s sanctions against twenty countries of the world – permanently.

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