



January 6, 2021

The Honorable Mary Ng, PC, MP
Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion, and International Trade
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON

Dear Minister Ng,

I am writing on behalf of the Martha Justice Ministry Core Group to share our disappointment in the recent news regarding the office of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE). Following significant public calls for a stronger mandate for the CORE, including a recent Parliamentary e-petition with over 6000 signatures, we are saddened to hear the decision that this office will remain without the independence, powers, and resources it needs to operate effectively.

As you know, organizations from across the country and international partners have for years been reporting on instances of mistreatment of workers, human rights abuses, sexual violence, and environmental violations at the hands of Canadian-owned businesses and their subsidiaries across the supply chain and across industries ranging from resource extraction to food and garment production.

The seriousness of these violations led to years of advocacy calling for the Canadian federal government to create a meaningful Ombudsperson office to address these complaints with independence, with powers to compel evidence, with accountability mechanisms, and with public reporting of findings.

Our excitement with your government's commitment to creating this office has been dampened by the delay in its operations and in the weakening of its mandate.

Now, following the resignation of the civil society Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Board, *en masse*, and the continued civil society advocacy efforts and Parliamentary e-petition tabled in October, we are frustrated to learn that you have not heard us.

Canada has made significant commitments to human rights and environmental protections, particularly through adopting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, being a signatory to and recently tabling for legislation the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and through the ratification of a number of human rights conventions and multilateral treaties.



Yet, we lack the basic institutional tools to implement these commitments when it comes to the operations of Canadian corporations globally. This is shameful and seems to reflect not a lack of capacity, but a lack of political will. Further, it is damaging to Canada's reputation globally as a human rights champion when we make these commitments and do not follow through, leaving already vulnerable communities open to further exploitation.

As long-time advocates for an independent, well-resourced Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise, we would like to know why the decision has been made to allow this office to remain without the independence, resources, and accountability mechanisms it requires to be effective in fully addressing complaints.

We will continue to advocate for a stronger mandate for the CORE office by reaching out to our local MPs and through ongoing advocacy with networks working to care for the Earth and those impacted by these devastating violations.

We hope to hear from you for further explanations of why the government has backed down on its original commitment and what efforts will be made to follow through on our human rights and environmental obligations.

Sincerely,

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Sisters of St. Martha, Antigonish
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cc:

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Francois-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Honourable Karina Gould, Minister of International Development
Sheri Meyerhoffer, Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise
Sean Fraser, Member of Parliament, Central Nova
Mike Kelloway, Member of Parliament, Cape Breton – Canso
Jaime Battiste, Member of Parliament, Sydney-Victoria