



## CANADIAN PEACE CONGRESS

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# Solidarity and Hope at a Time of Crisis

As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads rapidly around the globe, claiming many thousands of lives in its path, Canadians from coast to coast to coast along with peoples around the world are confronted with an extraordinarily alarming threat. At this most difficult moment, the Canadian Peace Congress conveys its solidarity and best wishes to our members and friends, and to all peoples across the country in our common struggle to control this dreadful contagion.

We urge everyone to closely abide by public health advisories and directives aimed to slow the spread of the virus, and to safeguard the health and wellbeing of everyone. We especially salute the selfless efforts of doctors, nurses and medical workers in the front lines keeping us all safe.

In these dire circumstances, it is only natural that we attend to preserving the health of our loved ones, our friends, our neighbors, and our communities by extending assistance to the elderly, disabled people, and all who are vulnerable and in need of help. In the midst of this crisis, we need to find ways to act in social solidarity. We must especially pay attention to the plight of Indigenous peoples who in many regions lack clean water and safe housing and therefore are much more vulnerable.

While it is fully understandable that we focus our attention on dealing with the immediate challenges before us, this must also be a time of reflection, of drawing lessons from this experience – both for the present and the future. These are not new concerns, but there can be no question that the pandemic has thrown more light and added greater clarity to their importance and urgency:

### **A time for international cooperation, not for finger-pointing and ‘cold war’ rhetoric**

The global reach of COVID-19 demonstrates once again that all humanity shares a common future. This virus knows no borders; it touches all, regardless of language, culture, ethnicity, financial or social status, gender, age or national origin. Like the threat of nuclear war and global warming, this newest threat can only be overcome through genuine international cooperation, friendship and solidarity amongst all peoples around the world. We must oppose isolationism, national chauvinism and exclusivity, groundless “cold war”-style accusations and finger-pointing, and the promotion of xenophobia, racism and intolerance. And we must speak out firmly wherever such behavior raises its ugly head.

We appreciate and thank those countries – especially Cuba, Russia and China – which have reached out to many other peoples and countries with concrete assistance, including scientific experts and much needed medical staff and supplies. This is *true internationalism in action*, and we call on the Canadian

government, and all governments, to follow suit.

In this regard, Canada must end its illegal and punitive economic sanctions against Venezuela, Iran, Syria, North Korea and a number of other countries. Regardless of their intent, the reality is that these sanctions mostly impact civilian populations, spreading suffering and deprivation amongst millions. Canada must also speak out forcefully against the U.S. blockade of Cuba. ***End all the Sanctions NOW!***

## Healthcare is a human right, not a privilege

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the short-sightedness and anti-people actions of too many governments, including Canada, which have deprived necessary funding of healthcare, and weakened or undermined free universal and comprehensive healthcare, in favour of private, for-profit medicine available only to those with the ability to pay. Driven by neoliberal prescriptions, these actions have prioritized the vested interests of the few over the health and wellbeing of the majority. This must be reversed. ***Universal healthcare is a fundamental human right!***

## People, not bombs

The pandemic should remind us of the absurdity of the arms race, and the drive to militarism, aggression and war. And remind us of the human, social and environmental costs that war preparations entail. Trillions of dollars are poured into weapons production – and into the coffers of the military-industrial-complex – while funding for education, healthcare, and vital social services are eroded, or dismantled completely.

The drive to militarism and war has many expressions – the expansion and modernization of nuclear arsenals, the militarization of space, and of the High Arctic, imperialist interventions and occupations, the promotion of ‘regime-change’, proxy wars, and the sophistication and use of economic, cyber- and psychological warfare. War is never an acceptable ‘solution’ to economic and social crisis; it only deepens the suffering of peoples. ***We demand that Canada, and all countries, abide by the UN Charter and the principles of international law, including respect for the equality and full sovereignty of all peoples and states.***

Canadian military expenditures continue to rise, while spending on social programs, infrastructure, affordable and subsidized housing, poverty alleviation and environmental protection plummet. **Enough is enough!** We demand that the military budget be slashed, and public resources be diverted to peoples’ needs. Canada must get out of the aggressive NATO military alliance – the main factor driving up ‘defense’ spending – and pursue a truly independent foreign policy based on peace and disarmament, not militarism and war. ***Cut the military budget! Canada out of NATO!***

## For a new ethos

Sooner or later, the COVID-19 pandemic will recede. What kind of Canada will be left in its wake, and what transformations should we demand to help shape Canada’s future?

The current economic crisis and the impending recession/depression are on everyone’s mind. As unemployment soars, and incomes and living standards nosedive, we demand that the interests of the vast majority of working people, the poor, the marginalized be protected. We urge the Government not to once again institute bailouts and subsidies to the corporations, the banks and the privileged minority. The current crisis must not be used to shift wealth from working people to the corporate elite.

The sign of the maturity and compassion of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable, marginalized and deprived. This means ending the colonial and genocidal abuse of indigenous peoples,

raising wages and real incomes of working people, guaranteeing comprehensive healthcare and education for all, eradicating poverty, providing affordable and subsidized housing, defending democratic, social and human rights, and protecting our environment for present and future generations.

More fundamentally, it means *changing the ethos* – the defining principles and characteristics – of our society, placing the interests of the many, of the collective good, above those of the privileged and wealthy. Canada needs to practice this new ethos at home, and advocate for it internationally.

These are some of the real lessons we should draw on from the current pandemic and demands around which we need to organize and act.

*Executive Committee,  
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*For more information about this statement, please contact Miguel Figueroa, President of the Canadian Peace Congress, at [info@canadianpeacecongress.ca](mailto:info@canadianpeacecongress.ca).*