

October 2022

Honorable Melanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dear Minister Joly

Re: Mandatory Human Rights, Labour Practices, and Environmental Law

The members of the National Council of Women of Canada are increasingly concerned with human rights abuses, labour practices imposed on workers, and damage to the environment by offshore industries that supply many of our day-to-day needs. We are particularly focused on the lives of women - many of them young girls – who form the labour force in these factories.

It is apparent to Canadians as we traverse the retail market, whether high end or discount, that everything from Canadian fashion brands, electronics, and kitchen tools to hand soap, greeting cards, make-up, and food is sourced from places like Bangladesh, Vietnam, Korea, China, India, and other countries too numerous to name. When the label says “prepared for” or bearing a tag with the logo of a trusted brand, or with a maple leaf, only to find that the clothing/product may be designed in Canada but manufactured elsewhere, one must be concerned about deception.

Canadians recognize that exploitation and dangerous working conditions may be found, fair trade rules ignored, weak international labour laws ineffective, human rights abandoned, and poor environmental standards maintained with sometimes toxic chemicals found in products, all contributing to the concern for workers and for us as well.

Your government has presented a strong feminist, human rights, and environmental concern image to the world that must be supported by action. Our members urge you to ensure that Canadian companies operating abroad maintain human rights, labour and environmental practices, and adhere to the same labour standards and commitment to a living wage policy as expected in Canada. Credible values are critical. Canadians expect nothing less.

Sincerely,

Patricia Leson, President
National Council of Women of Canada

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Canada is the traditional territory of Indigenous and Metis People. We are grateful to join with others in peace and hope, advocating for an improved quality of life for women, children, families, and society.

Note: The original draft of this letter was prepared by Monica Cullum, NCWC Justice Convnor

C: Hon. Hargit S. Sajjan, Minister. International Development and Pacific Economic Development
Hon. Carla Qualtrough, Minister Employment and Workforce Development
Hon. Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Labour
Hon. Mary Ng, Minister International Trade
Hon. Steven Guilbeault, Minister of the Environment
Hon. Marci Ien, Minister Women and Gender Equality
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