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May 28, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau  
Prime Minister of Canada  
By email: [Justin.Trudeau@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Justin.Trudeau@parl.gc.ca)

**Subject: Urgent Call for Action to Protect Canada's Seniors**

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

Like you and millions across our country, Canada's nurses were appalled by the findings of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in the course of their recent deployment within several long-term care homes in Ontario and Quebec.

For years, unions representing health care workers and seniors' advocacy groups have amplified the voices of frontline workers expressing many of the same concerns. For too long, those voices have gone unheard.

Governments have been briefed again and again on the significant problems regarding standards of care, funding, security, wages and hours of work in long-term care homes – particularly in for-profit facilities.

The release of the CAF's findings this week has succeeded in bringing these deplorable conditions into sharp public focus in a way that we hope will finally galvanize decision-makers to act.

Let us be clear: these conditions are the direct result of decades of putting profit before people.

Approximately 80% of deaths in Canada due to COVID-19 have taken place in long-term care facilities. The refusal to take responsibility for the crisis in long-term care has gone on for far too long and its true cost is measured in lives lost.

Let's stop hiding behind squabbles over jurisdiction and roll up our sleeves to finally tackle these longstanding issues.

The situation in long-term care is urgent: of 14 countries surveyed during the current pandemic, Canada had the highest proportion of deaths among seniors. Canada also

has one of the highest infection rates for COVID-19 among health care workers, many of whom are staff in long-term care.

As a nation, we have to make different choices to change this tragic reality. National standards and accountability are long overdue, and profit must be removed altogether from the long-term care sector.

While for-profit, non-profit and municipal long-term care facilities are all equally likely to experience disease outbreaks, studies have shown that non-profit and municipally-run homes have been more effective at containing such outbreaks and preventing deaths than for-profit facilities.

That's because for-profit long-term care is not about promoting the health and well-being of patients and caregivers – it's about padding the bottom line and paying dividends to shareholders. The difference in these approaches is literally a matter of life and death for Canadian seniors.

Your government has repeatedly shown throughout this pandemic that it is capable of assuming new responsibilities when necessary to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Just this week, the federal government announced a much-needed new policy to provide ten days of paid sick leave for workers across the country.

We urge you to continue employing such novel solutions to respond meaningfully to the crisis in Canadian long-term care.

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions calls on your government to immediately take the following actions:

- Bring long-term care in Canada into the public health care system and regulate it according to the fundamental principles of the *Canada Health Act*;
- Eliminate for-profit business from the long-term care sector;
- Require appropriate staffing and health & safety protections for workers; and
- Match wages and benefits for long-term care workers to the value of the work they perform.

Most urgently, the CFNU asks you to target and increase federal funding to provincial/territorial governments for long-term care, community, home and residential care to meet the needs of our aging population – with conditions attached that include standards for staffing levels, training, protective equipment, as well as decent working conditions, wages and benefits for long-term care workers.

Today, approximately 400,000 seniors live in Canada's retirement and long-term care homes. As a nation, we must assume a collective responsibility for the residents of these homes and for their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Prime Minister, you have personally expressed regrets over what has taken place in long-term care in Quebec and Ontario and have promised to do better. We expect you to keep this promise.

Sincerely,



Linda Silas, President, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions



Heather Smith, President, United Nurses of Alberta



Tracy Zambory, President, Saskatchewan Union of Nurses



Darlene Jackson, President, Manitoba Nurses Union



Vicki McKenna, President, Ontario Nurses' Association



Paula Doucet, President, New Brunswick Nurses Union



Janet Hazelton, President, Nova Scotia Nurses' Union



Mona O'Shea, President, Prince Edward Island Nurses' Union



Debbie Forward, President, Registered Nurses' Union Newfoundland and Labrador