

For immediate Release

Canada must stop profiteering from human rights violations, environmental degradation, and the pandemic in Brazil

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The [Americas Policy Group](#) (APG), a national network that brings together more than 20 Canadian civil society organizations, released an [open letter](#) addressed to different Canadian ministers and government officials urging “the Canadian government to prioritize human rights over economic interests by refraining from contributing to social, environmental, and public health instability in Brazil.”

“We felt it was important to express our concern regarding Canada’s relationships with the Government of Brazil, which is currently facing serious accusations of misconduct and corruption in the management of the pandemic as well as fueling attacks on human rights and the environment. This is not a good moment to engage with the Brazilian Government”, declared Marie-Eve Marleau, from the Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (CDHAL), one of APG’s member organizations.

More than [100 impeachment requests](#) have been filed against President Bolsonaro in the Brazilian Parliament. Similarly, at least five complaints accuse him at the [International Criminal Court](#) of crimes against humanity. On April 27th, the Brazilian Senate established a [Parliamentary commission of inquiry](#) into the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Professor Pedro Hallal, an epidemiologist who has given evidence during the Senate hearings and leads the most extensive Covid-19 study in Brazil, affirms that [thousands of deaths could have been avoided](#) if Bolsonaro had acted accordingly.

Social and environmental degradation amid the pandemic

The pandemic has significantly impacted marginalized populations, such as women, Black people, rural communities, and the poor. Indigenous and other traditional peoples have also experienced an increase in exposure to other life-threatening conditions. As the Catholic Church Missionary Indigenous Council of Brazil (CIMI) puts it, the president of Brazil is conducting a “[planned extermination](#)” of Indigenous peoples.

In addition, there has been a marked increase in violence and environmental devastation since the current administration took office. Brazilian social movements have [repeatedly warned](#) that President Bolsonaro's discourse encourages illegal and violent activities in protected areas, such as his vocal support for mining in Indigenous lands, often carried out by violent invaders. In the last few months, several Indigenous communities have suffered violent attacks from illegal gold miners with the [burning of houses, schools and community centers](#) inside their territories.

The recent publication of the latest report by the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) [Land Conflicts in Brazil](#) says that “2020 was the year that registered the largest number of land conflicts, invasions of territories and murders in water conflicts ever recorded since 1985. Indeed, the number of occurrences increased from 1,903 in 2019 to 2,054 in 2020, involving nearly 1 million people (...) in a context of a severe pandemic.”

In the first six months of 2021, deforestation in the Amazon region [has risen 17%](#), with 3,610 square kilometres being cleared, according to Brazilian National Institute for Space Research (INPE). There is

strong evidence that the fires ravaging the Amazon, the Cerrado and the Pantanal biomes were caused by large [landowners](#) in Brazil wanting to expand monocultures and pasture lands.

If the free trade Canada-Mercosur agreement is fulfilled, it is likely to encourage the Brazilian government's destructive agenda. According to the Brazilian Confederation of Agriculture and Livestock (CNA), “the conclusion of this free trade agreement has the [potential to increase Brazilian export revenues](#) of agricultural products by US\$7.8 billion”. More than [50,000 people have signed](#) a petition calling Canadians to stop consuming goods that come at the cost of Indigenous rights and rainforest destruction.

“We cannot remain silent while our partners in Brazil call for international pressure to stop this cycle of violence, especially when we know that Canadian government agencies and companies are involved”, deplores Anne Catherine Kennedy of Development and Peace - Caritas Canada.

The APG letter stresses that during the 2021 Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada (PDAC) convention [Export Development Canada \(EDC\) and Global Affairs Canada \(GAC\)](#) sponsored Brazilian events. While Indigenous peoples in Brazil repeatedly express strong opposition to mining projects and investments in their territories, Brazilian officials (supported by EDC and GAC) showcase Brazil as a [land of opportunity](#) for Canadian mining investors. “Therefore, despite attempts by the Brazilian Congress to change environmental legislation to allow extractive activities in Indigenous lands, these projects are all likely to face a rejection of [social license](#)”, remarks Rosa Peralta of the CDHAL.

“It is troubling that Canadian companies push to implement mining projects without respecting Indigenous rights to free, prior, and informed consultation. This is the case of the [Belo Sun](#), and [Potássio do Brasil](#) projects, both in the Amazon region, attempting to deceive Canadian society and investors, claiming to have all the necessary licenses to start operating. This is not true.”, regrets Anne Catherine Kennedy of Development and Peace - Caritas Canada.

The APG remains concerned by a pending visit of the Canadian ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) to Brazil. The CORE declared that the mission was “[initiated by invitation of Brazil’s government](#),” but did not disclose any other information regarding the purpose of this visit. APG members consider this lack of transparency yet another clear sign of proximity between the Canadian and Brazilian governments, revealing Canada’s disregard for the protection of mining-affected communities and for the reparation of damages caused by Canadian companies.

This pending visit of the CORE to Brazil is especially problematic since Canada's International Human Rights Parliamentary Subcommittee recently issued its final [report on the CORE’s mandate](#) questioning its ineffectiveness. The Subcommittee’s recommendations further confront Canada’s exclusive reliance on voluntary measures to address Canadian corporate abuse overseas.

The APG letter also urges Canada to show it has a systemic understanding of the issues at hand and to adopt a concerted strategy to reach its goals with the upcoming Feminist foreign policy and announcements on [enhanced carbon emissions reduction target](#). “This implies reviewing international investments in extractive industries that do not align with the principles of an inclusive economy, greenhouse gas emissions reduction, and gender equality. Canada must also advise Canadian companies to follow suit.”

“Our concerns reflect those of our partners and social movements in Brazil, and we know that [Canadian society, including our networks and members in Canada, do not agree](#) with Canada establishing political and commercial relations with a government that is opposed to science, the

environment, and the human rights of environmental defenders, especially women land defenders,” concludes Gabriela Jiménez of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives.

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