



MODERATOR OF THE 2019 GENERAL ASSEMBLY
The Rev. Amanda Currie, B.A.Sc., M.Div.

Monday, July 6, 2020

The Honourable Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

I write to you on behalf of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, whose 2019 General Assembly met recently in Waterloo, Ontario.

Justice for all workers, including temporary foreign workers, is an area the church cares deeply about and over the course of its deliberations, the General Assembly considered the precarious situations of temporary foreign workers in Canada.

The Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) facilitates the recruitment of people outside Canada to perform necessary services in Canada, including services provided by migrant workers. The General Assembly is concerned about the vulnerabilities of migrant workers and the lack of consistent and fair access to pathways to permanent residents across the TFWP. As an example, workers in the TFWP's agricultural stream, often migrant workers, work long hours, frequently for very low pay. Though these workers pay into the same benefits as other workers, access to benefits such as Employment Insurance, parental benefits and Canada Pension Plan are difficult and inconsistent and the right to unionize is not sufficiently protected. Additionally, their living conditions can be precarious and isolated and until recently, pathways to permanent residency were closed to them.

The Government has made some positive changes to the TFWP, including workplace inspections with administrative penalties for violations as well as more stringent housing requirements and accommodation inspections for seasonal and caregiving migrant workers. The Presbyterian Church in Canada was also encouraged at hearing about the new pilot program announced in July of 2019 offering paths to permanent residency for temporary agricultural workers. We understand details of this program are due to be released soon, and we look forward to seeing those details.

Providing greater and more consistent access for TFWP workers to permanent residency would be an important step toward addressing the barriers to rights we have mentioned in this letter and to ensuring temporary foreign workers are treated with dignity and respect and we look forward to seeing how the pilot program will be implemented and expanded. We also ask that Canada sign and ratify the UN Convention Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and

Members of Their Families, and ensure consistency in the quality of the treatment of migrant workers within all provinces and territories.

Additionally, we note the toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on migrant workers and their employers through the loss of their workforce. The Government of Canada has taken steps to lower eligibility requirements to access Employment Benefits, protecting the health and safety of seasonal agricultural workers by ensuring that employers provide proper housing and accommodation in compliance with public health needs for social distancing and sanitization, and implementing the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). These are important steps that demonstrate how much migrant workers contribute to Canada.

We urge the government to place the safety and wellbeing of migrant workers at the centre of care when assessing COVID-19 related benefits and all other steps toward lifting pandemic-related restrictions. This must include ensuring that workplace comply with public health directives related to COVID-19 including physical distancing, self isolation, housing, sanitation and access to health care and all necessary COVID-19 testing and treatment.

The Globe and Mail reports that over 800 migrant farm workers have tested positive (though some are asymptomatic). Three people have died from COVID-19: Bonifacio Eugenio Romero, 31, Rogelio Munoz Santos, 24, and Juan Lopez Chaparro, 55.¹ We are saddened by these deaths and pray for the peace and wellbeing of their families and communities. The close quarters of work and housing contribute to workers' vulnerability and protective measures that do not penalize workers, such as loss of wages from isolation, must be prioritized in order to ensure the safety and protection of workers.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please rest assured of our continuing prayers, even and especially during the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



Rev. Amanda Currie
Moderator
The 2019 General Assembly
The Presbyterian Church in Canada

¹ Kathryn Blaze Baum, "Ontario sees jump in migrant farm workers with COVID-19", Globe and Mail, June 28, 2020. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-ontario-sees-jump-in-migrant-farm-workers-with-covid-19/>
Clerks of Assembly: The Rev. Stephen Kendall and The Rev. Donald Muir