

November 26, 2020

The Honourable Filomena Tassi, PC, MP
Minister of Labour
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Via Email



Dear Minister:

On behalf of the National Union of Public and General Employees' (NUPGE) more than 390,000 members, I am writing to urge you to take immediate action to address violence and harassment in the world of work.

This letter is a follow up to my letter to the Prime Minister on December 3, 2019, in which I urged your government to ratify the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190). It is disappointing that Canada has yet to ratify this landmark treaty. The first international standard on violence and harassment in the world of work, Convention No. 190, and its corresponding Recommendation No. 206, outline clear actions for prevention, support, enforcement, and education.

I commend your government's previously stated commitment to ratify the Convention, which was identified in your December 2019 ministerial mandate letter. But almost one year later, the time to act is now.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the existing ills and inequities in our world. Among them is the workplace violence and harassment that remain all too prevalent. We have all seen the video clips of customers exploding at front-line retail workers due to masking requirements. The stories of violence and harassment towards the already-strained workers in our health and care systems are all too common.



NUPGE has been sounding the alarm on the heightened risk of domestic violence during the pandemic. The public health measures needed to limit the spread of COVID- 19 have meant that people are spending more time at home. Coupled with financial stress, job loss, and general uncertainty, the risk of domestic violence has surged. For workers in these situations who now find themselves working from home, their workplace has now become a dangerous place.

NUPGE members are all too familiar with violence and harassment. Among our members are the health care professionals, justice workers, social service providers, care workers, and even liquor store workers who experience unacceptable rates of workplace violence.

The majority of NUPGE workers are women. We know that violence and harassment disproportionately impact women, gender diverse, and Two-Spirit workers. Particularly at risk are Black women, Indigenous women, women of colour, women living with disabilities, transgender women, lesbians and bi-sexual women, and immigrant, refugee, and migrant women. The Convention explicitly recognizes these uneven impacts.

In the 2020 Speech from the Throne, your government made distinct commitments to address gender-based violence, tackle systemic racism, and to advance Indigenous rights and reconciliation. While these are complex problems requiring complex, systemic solutions, ratifying Convention No. 190 would be one, but important, step forward on these mandates.

Canadian governments, employers, and unions all have a role to play in eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work, and to ensure the proper supports are in place for those who are affected. In fact, I believe we have a shared responsibility to do so.

Ratifying ILO Convention No. 190 would demonstrate Canada's commitment to the right of all workers to a work environment free from violence and harassment. Further, the Convention also provides governments with a roadmap for how to get there. This includes measures for preventing violence and harassment in the world of work, and for protecting those who are affected.

As a feminist government committed to advancing equality and safeguarding human rights, ratifying Convention No. 190, and implementing the recommendations, would demonstrate a meaningful commitment beyond mere rhetoric. Ratifying the Convention will also show Canada's leadership on a global scale.

I look forward to your response on this matter. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with your office to further discuss the Convention and, more broadly, the issue of violence and harassment at work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LB', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Larry Brown
President

cc: The Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
The Hon. Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality
The Hon. Erin O'Toole, Leader of the Opposition
Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Annamie Paul, Leader of the Green Party
Hassan Yussuff, President of the Canadian Labour Congress
Bert Blundon, NUPGE Secretary-Treasurer
National Executive Board