

2 October, 2020

Re: Apology from Amnesty International

To Suzanne Smoke

On behalf of Amnesty International Canada, I unequivocally and unconditionally apologize for the unauthorized and inappropriate use of your image in our most recent ad campaign. While this campaign was meant to highlight the challenges various vulnerable groups, including Indigenous communities, health care workers and refugees are facing as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, we recognize that it is impact, not intention, that matters.

On a personal level, we are deeply sorry for the individual harm that this incident has caused for you, including the emotional energy and additional work that you have had to undertake because of our error. We have learned much from this experience and we apologize that our learning has come at personal cost for you. We also are cognizant that this has also taken time away from your important work in areas such as food sovereignty, homelessness, and human trafficking. For that too we offer our apology. More broadly, our apology extends as well to all other members of Indigenous communities who experienced harm as a result of our misstep and we hope that this apology demonstrates our desire and commitment to learn and understand how to be better partners moving forward.

We further acknowledge that this incident did not occur in a vacuum, but rather that unacceptable mistakes such as this occur against and are part of the backdrop of ongoing harms caused by the legacy of colonization in Canada. We recognize that there is vital ongoing work that our organization can and must do to confront the colonial structures and mindset in our own ways of working, and our crucial responsibility to both listen to and learn from our Indigenous allies and partners. This certainly includes following up to ensure that the necessary continuing cultural competency and anti-Oppression education and training is implemented, and that a thorough review of our own due diligence processes and protocols takes place for everyone whether they are management, staff, contractors or volunteers.

Accepting responsibility for our errors is only the first in our steps to ensure we hold ourselves accountable. Other steps include providing private restitution to you as well as conducting a review of our own internal due diligence processes and protocols to mitigate against the possibility of this type of incident recurring. In addition to this public as well as the private apologies which we, along with our communications firm, Grassriots, have offered, we will also be sharing the lessons this experience has taught us with other sections of Amnesty International and hope that they, along with other organizations in our sector, may take these and apply them in their work with Indigenous communities.

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Let me end by assuring you that Amnesty International stands ready to fight racism and to do the hard work of decolonization both in our human rights campaigning and in our internal ways of working. As part of that ongoing process, we look forward to working to support and strengthen the work you do with Indigenous communities. It is our commitment to you that we aspire to rebuild a relationship with you that is grounded in and based on mutual trust and respect.

Kind regards

Alex Neve  
Secretary General  
Amnesty International Canada  
(English branch)

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