

Canada PM Justin Trudeau slammed for invoking emergency powers to stop protests

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been criticized by several civil liberties groups and politicians for invoking emergency powers to stop the protests across the country against COVID-19 restrictions.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has argued that the protests, which have snarled traffic in cities and at the border, did not meet the standard to have invoked the Emergencies Act.

“The Emergencies Act can only be invoked when a situation ‘seriously threatens the ability of the Government of Canada to preserve the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Canada’ & when the situation ‘cannot be effectively dealt with under any other law of Canada,’” it said on Twitter.

“Governments regularly deal with difficult situations, and do so using powers granted to them by democratically elected representatives. Emergency legislation should not be normalized. It threatens our democracy and our civil liberties,” the association added.

Trudeau on Monday invoked Canada’s Emergencies Act, which gives the federal government broad powers to restore order.

It threatened to tow away vehicles to keep essential services running; freeze truckers’ personal and corporate bank accounts; and take further action to strike at their livelihoods and the sources of their financial support.

“Consider yourselves warned,” Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland told the “Freedom Convoy” members.

“If your truck is used in these blockades, your corporate accounts will be frozen. The insurance on your vehicle will be suspended. Send your rigs home,” Freeland added.

Some groups have approved of the measure, calling it “responsible” and “a good

strategy,” but others have condemned it as government overreach, Fox News reported.

Lori Williams, a politics professor at Mount Royal University in Calgary told Reuters that “there’s the danger this could create more problems,” adding: “That’s why this has to be done with the cooperation of premiers and if they don’t want help, then the federal government needs to hang back.

“It has to be very targeted, very strategic and very restrained, because these are enormous powers that are being implemented,” she said.

Leah West, an assistant professor at Carleton University in Ottawa, said: “The federal government must consult with provinces and Cabinet must believe the protests rise to the level of a national emergency.

“Can it truly be said the security of Canada is threatened by largely non-violent protests? Certainly, our sovereignty and territorial integrity are not at risk,” she said in a tweet.

Quebec Premier Francois Legault said that imposing the act risks putting “oil on the fire” by further polarizing the population and argued that local authorities in the province have the situation under control.

“I was very clear with the Prime Minister that the federal emergency act must not apply in Quebec. I think we don’t need it. I think that at this moment it would not help the social climate,” Legault told reporters, according to Reuters.

“There’s a lot of pressure right now and I think we have to be careful. So it’s about time we put all Quebecers together. But I can understand that enough is enough in Ottawa. You can protest but you cannot do what they are doing since two weeks,” he said.

In Manitoba, Premier Heather Stefanson said she believed that “the sweeping effects and signals associated with the never-before-used Emergencies Act are not constructive here in Manitoba, where caution must be taken against overreach and unintended negative consequences.

“While the situation is very different in Ontario, this ultimate federal legislation should only be considered on a measured and proportional basis, in locations where it is truly needed,” Stefanson told reporters.

Meanwhile, Ontario Premier Doug Ford said: "I'll support the federal government and any proposals they have to bring law and order back to our province, to make sure we stabilize our businesses and trade around the world as the world is watching us right now, wondering if it's a stable environment to open up businesses and expand businesses.

"These occupiers, they're doing the total opposite what they say they're there to do. They're hurting hundreds of thousands of families, millions of jobs across the province," he told reporters.

Goldy Hyder, CEO of the Business Council of Canada told Reuters: "We recognize the gravity of the federal government's decision to invoke the Emergencies Act. Having called on the federal government to show national leadership, we welcome this as a step toward ending illegal blockades across the country and upholding the rule of law."

Phil Boyle, associate chair for legal studies at the University of Waterloo called it "an interesting strategic move there to go after the money. That seems appropriate.

"One of the things that worked in Windsor, with the Ambassador Bridge, was the threat of taking away their licenses. If your livelihood depends on license, you're going to think twice before putting that at risk. So that might very well work with the case of Ottawa," Boyle told Reuters.

"No doubt there will be some litigation to come of this, considering it's never been done before... If these emergency measures are targeted within a particular province... Trudeau would only do it if he had the relevant province on board. Maybe that would lessen the potential for litigation," he said.

"I wonder, how does this Federal emergencies order square with the (Ontario) provincial emergencies order that was just ordered on Friday? I don't think we've ever been in a situation where both the provincial and the federal government have, at the same time, invoked extraordinary emergency measures," Boyle added.

For more than two weeks, hundreds and sometimes thousands of protesters in trucks and other vehicles have clogged the streets of Ottawa, the capital, and besieged Parliament Hill, railing against vaccine mandates for truckers and other

COVID-19 precautions and condemning Trudeau's Liberal government.

With Post wires

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