

Trudeau Announces Unprecedented Action, Freezing Bank Accounts Of 'Freedom Convoy' Protesters

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Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked the Emergencies Act on Monday in an effort to crack down on protesters that have shut down parts of Ottawa and various border crossings with the U.S.

Trudeau informed his cabinet and Canada's premiers of his intent Monday morning. The prime minister's announcement marks the first time the act, which replaced the War Measures Act in 1988, has been employed.

"After discussing with cabinet and caucus, after consultation with premiers from all provinces and territories, the federal government has invoked the emergencies act to supplement provincial and territorial capacity to address the blockades and occupations," Trudeau announced in a press conference. "I want to be very clear, the scope of these measures will be time-limited, geographically targeted, as well as reasonable and proportionate to the threats they are meant to address. The emergencies act will be used to strengthen and support law enforcement agencies at all levels across the country."

The Emergencies Act powers will "strengthen" law enforcement's ability to fine and imprison protesters, according to the prime minister. The act will be enforced most heavily in areas of "critical infrastructure" such as airports and border crossings. Trudeau said that the act also ensures "essential services" such as towing away trucks used to blockade roads and highways.

“In addition, financial institutions will be authorized and directed to render essential services to help address the situation including by regulating and prohibiting the use of property to fund or support illegal blockades,” Trudeau added.

The prime minister emphasized that the Canadian military would not be called in to break up the demonstrations.

“We’re not using the emergencies act to call in the military. We are not suspending fundamental rights or overriding the charter of rights and freedoms. We are not limiting people’s freedom of speech. We are not limiting freedom of peaceful assembly. We are not preventing people from exercising their right to protest legally. We are reinforcing the principles, values and institutions that keep all Canadians free,” Trudeau asserted.

The prime minister described the use of the Emergencies Act as a “last resort.”

Chrystia Freeland, Canada’s finance minister, later said that banks and other financial institutions in Canada have the authority to “temporarily cease providing financial services where the institution suspects that an account is being used to further the illegal blockades and occupations. This order covers both personal and corporate accounts.”

Crowd-funding platforms, which protesters have used to sustain their weeks-long demonstrations, would fall under the enforcement of “Canada’s anti-money laundering and terrorist financing rules,” Freeland said.

“These changes cover all forms of transactions,” she said. “The illegal blockades have highlighted the fact that crowd-funding platforms and some of the payment service providers they use are not fully captured under the proceeds of the Crime and Terrorist Financing Act.”

The Emergencies Act defines an emergency as a situation “seriously endangers the lives, health or safety of Canadians and is of such proportions or nature as to exceed the capacity or authority of a province to deal with it.”

Protesters with the “Freedom Convoy” have shut down parts of downtown Ottawa for roughly three weeks over restrictive COVID-19 measures and vaccine mandates. Convoy organizer Tamara Leach said earlier on Monday that protesters will continue to “hold the line” against the Canadian government’s crackdown.

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