

Quaker Concern

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

By Joy Morris



After dinner one night, a friend of my mother's shared a story that has stayed with me. She had been shopping at the local mall with her kids when police officers stopped her and took her in for questioning. She matched the description of a shoplifter they'd been looking for. As it happened, she had a solid alibi and was released within a few hours. But her kids had gone through a terrifying experience. They had seen their mother treated with disrespect by police—the very people we tell kids to seek help from. They had felt afraid and abandoned. She had not even been allowed to make arrangements to get them home safely. Fortunately, a neighbour had also been shopping at the mall and was able to take the children home. These kids were relatively lucky. Many children go through experiences like this and worse. Children are often overlooked victims when their parents or caregivers come into conflict with the law.

We don't actually know how many kids go through this sort of ordeal in Canada. Generally, no one asks someone who has been accused of a crime whether or not they are a parent, or if so, how many children they have. This information may be volunteered by parents during the legal processes, but it is neither required nor officially tracked. Parents may be reluctant to mention their children for fear of having them taken away by child welfare authorities. Families and children rarely mention that they are affected by a loved one's incarceration, since it carries a stigma.

CFSC estimates that at least 200,000 children across Canada have an incarcerated parent. This is based on the number of people incarcerated, combined with sample data that allows us to estimate how many of them are parents, and then guess how many children they are each responsible for. But these calculations are unreliable, and so this estimate is almost certainly far lower than the actual numbers.

“Every classroom in the country would include a child with a parent who is incarcerated right now.”

Even our 200,000 estimate would mean that, if they were distributed evenly, every classroom in the country would include a child with a parent who is incarcerated right now. Of course, even more children have been affected by this at some point during their childhood.

The numbers are far worse among Indigenous people, who are vastly over-represented in Canada's jails and prisons. Despite the focus on reconciliation, the Canadian criminal justice system continues to systematically separate Indigenous parents from their children.

Canada signed the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1990, and it was ratified in 1991.

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CFSC expresses solidarity with Wet'suwet'en people

Coastal GasLink is in the process of creating a pipeline, which crosses territories of many Indigenous Nations, including the Wet'suwet'en. Intimidation and arrests have been used against nonviolent Indigenous land defenders. CFSC has shared our deep concerns; called for respectful, good faith dialogue; and expressed our solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en. We've also compiled links to some of the best media coverage to help you understand the situation: <https://quakerservice.ca/Wetsuweten>

The COVID-19 pandemic and respect of human rights

In light of the highly infectious nature of COVID-19, and the particular threat that it poses to vulnerable communities with inadequate access to healthcare, housing, water, and other essential services, it is imperative that governments respect the right of Indigenous peoples to set conditions of entry into their territories. Where Indigenous communities have required suspension of certain activities in their territories, this must be adhered to. This is the urgent message we joined with expert partners to deliver: <https://quakerservice.ca/COVID19>.

We also joined a massive open letter on human rights oversight of responses to COVID-19 in Canada, signed by 157 organizations and 144 individual experts: <https://quakerservice.ca/COVID19-2>

COVID-19 and synthetic biology

Once a year we see what's making headlines in the weird world of synthetic biology. Our 2020 update starts with synthetic biology responses to COVID-19 and the latest on genetically engineering humans. We touch on other recent stories including monkeys given human genes, and living "programmable" beings designed by artificial intelligence and built from frogs' skin and heart cells: <https://quakerservice.ca/SB2020>

Canada calls for peace, allows more arms exports to Saudi Arabia

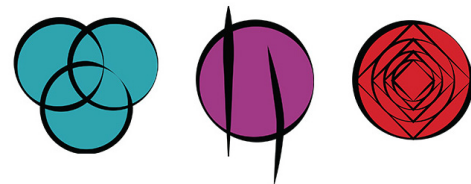
The UN Secretary General called for a global ceasefire so the world could address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Canada joined with the Secretary General to urged for one—a day after it quietly lifted its moratorium on selling more weapons to Saudi Arabia. Find out more in this op-ed by Cesar Jaramillo, the Executive Director of Project Ploughshares (of which Friends are members): <https://tgam.ca/2Siwvvc>.

We are profoundly troubled by this continued profiting from selling weapons to human rights abusers, even as Canada claims to champion human rights. For more details see: <https://quakerservice.ca/ArmsTradeTreaty> and <https://quakerservice.ca/ArmsTrade>

Say hello to our new program icons

In this edition of *Quaker Concern* you'll notice something different: we're using three new icons for our three program areas (criminal justice, Indigenous peoples' human rights, and peace). The icons are part of our overall strategy of sharing communications that are simple, honest, and easy to understand. Find out how we chose these icons and what they represent at: <https://quakerservice.ca/icons>



Quaker Concern

Quaker Concern is the three times a year newsletter of Canadian Friends Service Committee, the peace and social justice agency of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada. Since 1931 CFSC has been a small team but has had a big impact.

Donations are received with gratitude. The generous support of individual donors makes all of the work described here possible. CFSC issues tax receipts for donations over \$10.

Read current and past issues online at QuakerConcern.ca (contact us to switch to a digital subscription).

Canadian Friends Service Committee

60 Lowther Ave, Toronto, ON M5R 1C7

(416) 920-5213

info@quakerservice.ca

quakerservice.ca

@CFSCQuakers

Charitable Number: 13214 6549 RR0001

Just Olives

By Lana Robinson



*T*hose are Palestinian olives, he said as I cleared out the last of the ovoid green gems he had on display. I was shopping for Christmas treats to share with friends. “I know,” I replied. “I was just there.”

He looked at me seriously and asked what I was there for. Cautiously, I explained that I was part of a delegation to Israel/Palestine to witness life under occupation. His gaze softened as he looked into my eyes and said, “God bless you.”

I had no idea how deeply impactful that trip was until I returned to Canada. Everything had changed. It was close to Christmas, but it felt hard to think about celebrating in the usual ways. I had stories to share from that Holy Land and they would not rest silently within me. They remain on my lips still, waiting to be freed; like the Palestinian people themselves.

“The contrast could not have been clearer.”

KAIROS, the coalition of ten Canadian churches and religious organizations, of which Quakers are founding members, had arranged for the group of seven delegates from member churches, and three staff people, to make this trip. I had the chance to represent Quakers. The group’s diversity made for rich reflection, spirited conversation, and a broad range of perspectives, which was a gift then, and one that keeps giving as each of us moves forward now, in our separate lives connected by a collective experience.

Though we were spared the pain of life under occupation the way the locals have endured it for over

seventy years, we did witness its dehumanization. We travelled between the West Bank and Israel, subjecting ourselves to the anxiety-producing, stress-ridden process of passing through checkpoints to enter and leave Bethlehem.

We all felt the burden of privilege, our passage often made easier by our Western appearance. Sometimes a smile was all it took to have our small bus waved through a checkpoint. Meanwhile, the local population was detained, inspected, and interrogated by the often very young and always heavily armed Israeli Security Forces. It was disturbing to imagine my son, similarly aged, fully armed and wielding such sway over lives and livelihoods.

We travelled within the Occupied Palestinian Territories; through decades-old refugee camps designed to hold thousands of people. Now crammed with tens of thousands, they lack the basic services needed for humane living conditions. What is available—even necessities like water—is under constant threat of suddenly becoming unavailable.

We journeyed through the state of Israel: Nazareth, Tel Aviv, Tiberius... The contrast could not have been clearer. Unable to drill wells, or receive permits to access ground water, Palestinians are forced to purchase their water from an Israeli company that ships it to cisterns atop their houses. There are no cisterns to be seen in Israeli cities and settlements. They have access to city water. Irrigation systems water the boulevards, keeping flowers blooming in the heat. The bitter irony of an entire people prevented from freely accessing the most basic of resources, thereby not reaching their full potential, while flowers are kept nourished in the desert

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Indigenous Voices on Reconciliation

By Keira Mann



Collin Orchyk explains what reconciliation means to him.

What does reconciliation mean to you? What suggestions do you have for non-Indigenous people to respectfully engage in reconciliation? Have you seen a change in how people are engaging in reconciliation in recent years? If you had to choose one thing that you wish every person knew about reconciliation, what would that be? What are your thoughts on how to be a good ally?

Many settlers wish they could ask questions like these to Indigenous people without appearing foolish or rude. Canadian Friends Service Committee knows that not every settler has the opportunity to have open dialogue with Indigenous friends and neighbours. This is why we want to give you a chance to hear the answers to these questions from some of our Indigenous partners, people that we work closely with and trust to give us honest responses, and who trust us enough to engage with this project!

Recently we met with five of our Indigenous friends and asked them each of the five questions above. Are you curious about their responses? The good news is that we brought a videographer with us to capture the conversations. More good news, we will be sharing those videos with you soon. But we wanted to give you a sneak peek at what we learned during this project.

Dr. Sheryl Lightfoot is Anishinaabe from the Lake Superior band of Ojibwe. She is the University of British Columbia's Senior Advisor to the President on Indigenous Affairs and the Canada Research Chair of Global Indigenous Rights and Politics. CFSC has worked with Sheryl over a number of years and asked her to be a part of this project. When asked about what non-Indigenous people can do, she said "[Reconciliation] requires a huge burden and responsibility to not

only learn about the Indigenous peoples who are your neighbours, who are to be your family. It means learning about their customs, their languages, their societies, and their legal systems. It means learning about the land that you live on and the people of that land and then putting that into action in daily life."

Learning about your Indigenous neighbours was something that every person we interviewed mentioned. Each one said that the first step is educating yourself about who you are reconciling with and not putting the burden of educating settlers onto Indigenous peoples.

"It is a mutual respect of Nations. It needs to come from a place of love."

Many of the interviewees also highlighted the importance of approaching reconciliation with the right attitude. Haana Edenshaw is from the Tsiits Git'aneen clan of Haida Gwaii. Haana accompanied CFSC's delegation to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York last year. Haana emphasized that, "I think you need to know that reconciliation isn't a favour you're doing for Indigenous peoples. It is a mutual respect of Nations. It needs to come from a place of love." Similarly, Collin Orchyk of Treaty 1, Peguis First Nation, Manitoba, reflected, "A Cree Elder in Saskatchewan once asked me, 'Who is reconciliation for?' and I said, 'Well... it's for Indigenous people,' and he said, 'No it's not. They did nothing wrong.' And that really put things into perspective for me."

When we began working on this project, we didn't want it to be a step-by-step guide to how to reconcile

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Indigenous Voices continued

with Indigenous peoples. We wanted to open up the conversation and remind Friends it is our responsibility as Quakers and settlers to educate ourselves. When asked about being a good ally, Naomi Bob (Snaw'naw'as/Nanoose First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Peguis First Nation, and Melbu, Norway) said, "To me, being a good ally is an active state, it's not an identity. Being a good ally is something you are continuously doing."

Kirby Muldoe, from the Tsimsian and Gitxsan Nations, is a partner that CFSC works closely with. He frequently holds speaking tours in Northern BC where CFSC's Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator Jennifer Preston and CFSC associate Paul Joffe present about the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Kirby said, "Think about the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Learn it. Think about how you fit in there. I'd also like people to look at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's handbook and the *94 Calls to Action* and see how you can fit in there and help Indigenous peoples gain back their human rights." Kirby's message is one that CFSC shares—the first step of implementation is to read the *Declaration* and the *94 Calls to Action*. We all can see ourselves—and therefore actions we might take—in different elements of these instruments.

All of the interviewees agreed, the first step in reconciliation is to educate yourself.



Keira Mann is CFSC's Assistant Coordinator, Programs and Events.



We've made resources to help you learn how to engage in reconciliation. Visit <https://quakerservice.ca/resources/#Indigenous> for guides, information on what Quakers across the country are doing, and more. But don't forget to go beyond this and learn about the land that you live on and the people of that land.

CFSC is Going Strong!

We're each living through a very strange and difficult moment, with the stresses of possibly catching COVID-19 and with the pandemic causing lockdowns and physical distancing. This situation is impacting each of our lives and we are holding you and all of our supporters and partners in our thoughts and prayers. We feel very blessed by these connections.

We want you to know that, although staff are working from home right now, we're still going strong and our collective efforts continue to be felt.

Thanks to generous donors, we're still defending human rights and pushing for justice and peace, especially for the most vulnerable who are being disproportionately impacted by this pandemic and the economic downturn. If anything, our work has become all the more pressing. We also see, in the midst of so much pain and uncertainty, major opportunities to build a more just and peaceful future together. There are many ways you can be involved.

In the coming weeks we will release the series of reconciliation videos discussed in Keira's article, offer a virtual book study group for our book *Are We Done Fighting? Building Understanding in a World of Hate and Division* (which this month won a Nautilus book award, get a free chapter at: <https://AreWeDoneFighting.com>), host online video screenings, and much more.

We invite you to stay informed and not lose out on these opportunities.

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Convention continued from pg 1

Based on the fundamental principle that children have human rights that must be respected, the *Convention* explicitly lays out principles to protect these rights.

Among other things, it says that: “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by...courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”¹

The *Convention* also includes clauses upholding a child’s right not to be separated from their parents except in the child’s best interests, and to be heard in any judicial proceeding that affects them. Although the experience I heard about was only one anecdote, available data and research show that Canada has done very little to ensure that the best interests of children are taken into account when their parents come into conflict with the law.² This is seen in the actions of police officers (as in my story), but also of lawyers, judges,³ and other legal representatives.

“Children have human rights that must be respected.”

When a government signs on to a United Nations convention, there is a process through which the UN regularly reviews and assesses how the country is implementing that convention. Canada is currently going through this process with respect to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

In March 2019, Canada produced a self-assessment report (<http://rightsofchildren.ca/canada-crc-5-6th-report>). Civil society was invited to respond to this with their own “alternative” reports, highlighting areas of concern. The UN committee will read all of the reports and produce a list of issues that they will make public this summer. In the fall, Canada will have an opportunity to respond.

CFSC submitted an alternative report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. We highlighted ways in which Canada has neglected its obligations to respect the human rights of children whose parents are incarcerated, and made recommendations for much needed improvements (<https://quakerservice.ca/zt79>).

Canada has no rules or guidelines to encourage judges to avoid incarcerating parents whenever possible, so that the parents can continue to care for their children. This is tremendously harmful. Prolonged separation from a parent (particularly due to imprisonment) is one of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that have been linked to many negative outcomes in life.⁴ Studies have also shown that children who have gone through ACEs are more likely themselves to come into conflict with the law.⁵

Canada’s laws and regulations also make it hard for incarcerated parents to maintain strong relationships with their children. Visiting and even phone calls are expensive, difficult to arrange, and the required processes are often described as demeaning to inmates and to their families.

We hope that our alternative report, and the forthcoming UN report, will encourage Canada to do a better job of recognizing and respecting the human rights of vulnerable children. As a signatory to the *Convention*, Canada needs to live up to its commitment to make the best interests of children a primary consideration in our criminal justice system. No child should be put through an experience like the one my mother’s friend shared with us.



Joy Morris, Calgary Meeting, is a member of CFSC’s criminal justice program committee. Learn more about this work at <https://quakerservice.ca/justice>

1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3, Part 1.
2. See Canadian Friends Service Committee, “Breaking the Silence: Dialogue on Children of Incarcerated Parents,” 2019, <https://quakerservice.ca/BreakingtheSilence>
3. CFSC has conducted legal research about the extent to which children are (or are not) considered by judges when sentencing parents, see Canadian Friends Service Committee, “Considering the Best Interests of the Child when Sentencing Parents in Canada: Sample Case Law Review,” 2018, <https://quakerservice.ca/CaseLawReview>
4. US Department of Health and Human Services, “Child Welfare Information Gateway: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs),” <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/resources/ace>
5. See for example Amanda McCormick et al., “In the Best Interests of the Child: Strategies for Recognizing and Supporting Canada’s At-Risk Population of Children with Incarcerated Parents,” University of the Fraser Valley, 2014, <https://bit.ly/2KL3ZOU>, iii-v.

so close by, was not lost on any of us. Access to medical care is equally fraught. Palestinian children who need specialized cancer treatment or dialysis must attend the one hospital in East Jerusalem that can provide that treatment. But their parents can't come along if they are under 35. These younger parents are deemed a security threat and not given permits. Treatment, already difficult to obtain, is thus made additionally traumatic.

We visited mosques, churches, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Holy sites, Yad Vashem, (the Holocaust Memorial), water projects, hospitals, partner churches, women's groups and shelters, and refugee camps. We spoke with women who told us about the challenges of life under occupation, and the struggles associated with the loss, through death or incarceration, of sons and husbands.

“None have escaped the injury of the occupation.”

We spoke with politicians and diplomats, quick to put forward the limitations of their ability to challenge the occupation, while simultaneously speaking to their hopes for a just and lasting peace. We heard from Israeli activists and human rights organizations dealing with personal loss for taking up the cause of the Palestinians and consequently being shunned by their families and friends. The pain of loss was evident in all of these faces and voices. The injustice of the occupation, expressed in countless ways by everyone we spoke to, was witnessed in so many moments, great and small.

Accepting the Israeli occupiers as “villains,” and the occupied Palestinians as “victims” would be all too easy. Instead, with every conversation we had came something greater, more complex, and vitally important to the hope of a just peace. What slowly began to take shape in my mind and heart was the understanding that none have escaped the injury of the occupation.

These injuries have certainly been visited on all of the generations of Palestinians who have known only the struggle for self-determination and a just relationship with Israel. But in very different ways they have also impacted every Israeli, even those who believe fervently in the state of Israel as their God-given homeland,

who perpetuate the injustices and abuses that are hallmarks of the occupation. They too are imprisoned, suffering, and worthy of my compassion. This was the message of every Palestinian individual, religious leader, activist and organization that we spoke to.

The great gift of my journey was a deep and lasting knowledge that what is happening in Israel/Palestine is grievous, deserving of our attention and understanding, and that our response must be large enough to hold all involved. As Yusef Daher of the Jerusalem InterChurch Centre of the World Council of Churches said, “Equality is the pre-condition for justice, and peace is the fruit.” Equality must not only exist in the economic, political, and personal spheres of Palestinian/Israeli relationships, but in the compassionate response we bring to the struggle for peace.

For all of their support prior to and after this powerful trip, my thanks go to Canadian Friends Service Committee and our Israel/Palestine Working Group, individual Friends and Meetings, KAIROS Canada, and Sylvia Love.



Lana Robinson, Cowichan Valley Monthly Meeting, is the Clerk of CFSC. Read the KAIROS delegation's full report:

<https://bit.ly/DelegationReport>. See a video of Lana speaking about her experience:

<https://bit.ly/JusticeForPeace>. Learn more about CFSC's work for a just peace: <https://quakerservice.ca/our-work/peace/israel-palestine>.



Pandemics spread more than sickness. They can bring out the worst in us. **The Quaker voice is needed now more than ever to spread calm, justice, and peace.**

Please donate today:
<https://quakerservice.ca/spreadpeace>

Friends on the Move



Early 2020 saw Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator **Jennifer Preston** traveling to Maskwacis Cree territory (Treaty 6) for meetings related to ongoing partnership work. She and CFSC associate **Paul Joffe** travelled to northwest BC for a series of educational presentations on the *UN Declaration* and meetings, including with regard to the challenging situation in Wet'suwet'en territory. February had her in Ottawa for meetings with the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples and federal government representatives.

In early March, she and staff **Keira Mann** were in Vancouver for the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' expert seminar on repatriation. Keira was a part of the team facilitating the seminar logistics, as CFSC partnered with the University of British Columbia on the event: <https://bit.ly/3aLGpfo>. Jennifer and Keira then joined CFSC's Indigenous rights committee for its bi-annual meeting. Jennifer stayed in BC to present a Presidential Seminar for UBC Leaders about the *UN Declaration* and the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission. She flew home in time to start working from home mid-March, where she remains!

Since the last edition of *Quaker Concern* CFSC staff **Matt Legge** gave two more presentations in Toronto and facilitated workshops in Peterborough and Kitchener about content covered in CFSC's book *Are We Done Fighting?* Additional talks and workshops that were planned have had to be postponed indefinitely, but we are planning to offer a book study group online.

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