

# Quaker Concern

## Canada's human rights report card

By Jeremy Vander Hoek



**D**o you remember getting report cards in school? Whether you were proud of the results or not, maybe your report card helped you take stock of where you were on your learning journey. Taking stock is an important part of any effort to improve. This is also true for human rights implementation.

Did you know that Canada gets report cards too? Okay, so not exactly report cards, but something similar. Canada, like many other countries, has made agreements through the United Nations (UN) in treaties. These set out how the country should act—how it must live up to its human rights obligations. How do we make sure countries stay true to the promises they make when they sign treaties? Report cards! More accurately, treaty body reviews.

### What is a treaty body review?

During treaty body reviews a group of human rights experts examines a country to see how well they're following the treaty under consideration. The group of human rights experts is like the teacher writing the report card. However, they don't work alone as a teacher might. This is a team effort, and that's where you come in! Your support allows organizations like Canadian Friends Service Committee to tell the group of human rights experts how Canada has done over the past several years. We just did this, together with partners in the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In March, the UN reviewed how well Canada was implementing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The ICCPR lists multiple things countries must do or not do to stay true to the human rights promises they made. For example, when someone is arrested, the ICCPR states they must be informed of the charge against them.

### Our submission to the UN

In our contribution to the review (see it in PDF at <https://QuakerService.ca/ICCPR2026>), we focused on the right of self-determination for Indigenous Peoples. In simple terms, the right of self-determination says that Peoples are allowed to make their own decision about how they live together as a group. This right is guaranteed in the ICCPR in Article 1.

There are many aspects of the right to self-determination. It includes things like the right for Peoples to speak their own language, what kinds of development projects they might allow on their territory, and much more.

One of the key components of this right is that the countries must discuss any laws they're going to pass—ones that might impact Indigenous Peoples—with Indigenous Peoples. This is part of what we call free, prior, and informed consent. Another way Indigenous advocates have phrased this is, "Nothing about us, without us."

Continued on pg 6



## Partnership continues to support humanitarian relief in Gaza

In addition to raising our voices, we're still working with American Friends Service Committee, which has staff on the ground in Gaza. AFSC has reached more than one million people in Gaza with lifesaving aid. Your donations are vital to those persevering amidst devastating conditions. Assistance you give includes large-scale food distribution, safe drinking water and hygiene supplies, shelter materials, and targeted nutritional support for children.

<https://QuakerService.ca/Gaza>

## BC must recommit to the UN Declaration

A joint letter from over 80 civil society leaders including CFSC supports British Columbia's *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. The letter explains how a "recent rise in anti-Indigenous rhetoric and fearmongering" has put this Act at risk, which would "set back our collective reconciliation efforts by decades."

<https://QuakerService.ca/BCDeclarationAct>

## Webinar on the arms trade

Are you worried about Canadian-made weapons and their impact in the world? Did you know that in May of every year, CANSEC—the largest arms fair in North America—is held in Ottawa? Find out more in this webinar recording (and in Sandra's article on p.7!):

<https://QuakerService.ca/ResistingCANSECWebinar>

## Investing in an age of big tech

Two guest posts by socially responsible investment (SRI) expert Alan Harman share what goes into ethical investment decisions, and some recent cases where decisions are challenged by military and social impacts of big tech companies:

<https://QuakerService.ca/SRI>

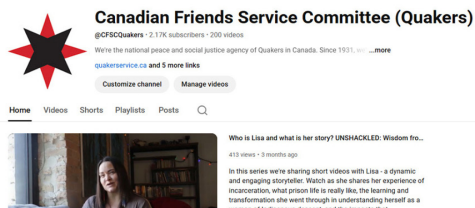
## Peace education bursaries

We're pleased to announce new educational bursaries, which recognize the potential for students to be change-makers. This opportunity is available to fund both academic and non-academic learning for Quakers or non-Quakers based in Canada.

<https://QuakerService.ca/Bursaries>

## Why do we assume there are no alternatives to war?

There are always alternatives to war. So why aren't more of us aware of them? This post for *Psychology Today* explores several of the many reasons, including some surprising research on censorship in Hollywood: <https://QuakerService.ca/AlternativesToWar>



## CFSC publishes 200<sup>th</sup> video!

With so much going on at CFSC you might not have noticed, but our YouTube channel has quietly turned into a rich educational resource. In fact, we now have over 200 videos! There are longer recordings of informative webinars on peace and social justice. There are also short video series:

- *Indigenous voices on reconciliation*
- *Weekly tips for better conflicts*
- *Unshackled: wisdom from a formerly incarcerated woman*
- *What does sustainability mean to you?*

Have a look! <https://QuakerService.ca/YouTube>

## Quaker Concern

**Quaker Concern** is the newsletter of Canadian Friends Service Committee, the peace and social justice agency of Quakers in Canada. Since 1931, CFSC has worked for a world where peace and justice prevail.

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

Read current and past issues online at [QuakerConcern.ca](http://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](mailto:Info@QuakerService.ca)

➦ [QuakerService.ca](http://QuakerService.ca)

📘 [@CFSCQuakers](https://www.facebook.com/CFSCQuakers)

Charitable Number: 13214 6549 RR0001

**T**his short article is meant as a reminder and reintroduction of our Israel-Palestine working group (IPWG) and its current areas of concern.

The roots of the IPWG go back to 2012, when a small group of concerned Friends began meeting informally to discern how to respond to the situation unfolding in Palestine and Israel. That group moved quickly from reflection to action. They were instrumental in drafting a Minute of support for the boycott of Israeli settlement goods. This was approved in 2014 as an Addendum to the 2009 Minute of Record on peace in Israel and Palestine (you can read both on [QuakerService.ca](http://QuakerService.ca)).

In 2015 that ad hoc group formalized its work and the IPWG was officially established as a volunteer working group under Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC). The IPWG brings together Friends from across the country who meet monthly by video call, deepening our understanding and discerning how to act on issues including Palestinian children held in Israeli military detention, Canadian-Israeli military trade, and boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS). Any concerned Friend is welcome to join.

IPWG's work has included drafting a 2016 statement that was accepted at Canadian Yearly Meeting calling on Canada to refuse arms sales to countries that may use them in violation of international law or to suppress civilian populations. The Minute urged Canada to sign and ratify the UN Arms Trade Treaty and called on Canada to move from backing wars to supporting creative, non-military approaches to building peace.

In 2020, IPWG helped instigate Parliamentary e-petition 2667, calling on the Canadian government to send a special envoy to monitor the treatment of Palestinian children by the Israeli military—a recommendation from eighteen Canadian Members of Parliament (MPs) who visited the region in 2018. When the government responded, it claimed to already be monitoring the situation. But monitoring without action is not enough. Canada signed the UN *Convention on the rights of the child*, and Friends believe those obligations must be honoured in practice, not merely in words.

In 2025, the IPWG put forward the *Apartheid free communities pledge* to Monthly Meetings across Canada, succeeding in gathering supporting Minutes of Record from more than half.

### **The children we cannot forget**

One aspect of IPWG's ongoing concern is a reality that is difficult to sit with: between 500 and 1,000 Palestinian children are detained by Israeli military forces each year. Most are prosecuted in military courts, which don't afford the same protections as civilian courts. Children as young as twelve can be tried in this system, most commonly for alleged stone-throwing. Over half of detained children are arrested at night. The majority report physical and psychological abuse during arrest and interrogation. In military courts, the conviction rate is 95%.

Friends may remember reading about Shadi Khoury—a student at the Ramallah Friends School—in a Spring 2023 *Quaker Concern* article. In 2022, when Shadi was sixteen, Israeli police entered his home in East Jerusalem, beat him, and dragged him away barefoot, blindfolded, and bleeding. After years of proceedings, Shadi—now an adult—was sentenced to 32 months in prison. He has consistently maintained his innocence, and other youths who testified against him later reported that their statements had been coerced under duress. Shadi's case is not an exception. It is, heartbreakingly, part of a clear pattern.

As of September, 168 Palestinian children were being held in administrative detention—meaning they hadn't been charged with any crime. Reports document torture, and at least one child died due to inadequate food and medical care. For years now the International Committee of the Red Cross has been unable to visit any Palestinian detainees in Israeli detention facilities, removing a critical layer of oversight and protection.

IPWG's work continues—in Monthly Meetings, in advocacy, and in keeping this concern alive within the wider body of Friends. We invite you to join us in asking the Canadian government to go beyond monitoring and to act in accordance with its obligations under the *Convention on the rights of the child*. Write to your MP, raise the concern in your Meeting, and learn more through the organizations doing careful, documented work on the ground: Military Court Watch ([MilitaryCourtWatch.org](http://MilitaryCourtWatch.org)) and Defence for Children International-Palestine ([DCI-Palestine.org](http://DCI-Palestine.org)).



**Linda Taffs and Sara avMaat** are both former members of CFSC who continue to volunteer on its Israel/Palestine working group.

# Every person is worthy of healing

By Karen Ridd



I met Lisa in jail. She was awaiting sentencing. Lisa had dealt drugs, and had served time previously. Her sentence hadn't changed her behaviour, just created a new layer of trauma. Immediately upon her release, Lisa had gone back to dealing. Within a few months, she was re-arrested and incarcerated again, this time facing what she knew would be a longer sentence.

I was at the jail to teach a Walls to Bridges course on the topic of Restorative Justice. Walls to Bridges teaches university courses inside prisons and jails to a mix of "inside students" (people who are currently incarcerated) and "outside students" (people studying at the local university). We learn together. The topic can be anything from literature to business to peace and conflict studies. All the students can earn university credits from taking the course.

Until a few years ago, people inside could take university courses by correspondence. But since universities have moved those courses online, and since incarcerated people don't have access to the internet, that's no longer an option.

Programming inside correctional centres is scarce and, especially with this latest round of Canadian military spending and corresponding cuts to social programs, keeps getting scarcer. Librarians have been cut from all federal institutions, and there are fears that teachers will be the next on the chopping block.

So Walls to Bridges courses provide rare opportunities for growth and learning, a chance to gain self-confidence, a moment of community, and an escape from the overwhelming boredom of incarceration. For outside students, Walls to Bridges courses also serve to break through stigma and biases about incarcerated

people. As one outside student said to our group just before we entered the jail for the first time, "We won't be the same people when we come out later today." This was so true.

As you can imagine, there are unique challenges to teaching a university course with students who can't access a full library, computers, or the internet. One of the main difficulties is communication. Usually students can easily access their professor to talk about the course or ask questions. It's very different for inside students. They can't drop by my office, phone me, or send me an email. They can only wait until the next time I make the trip to the institution.

For many of the women, this was not enough. None of them had taken a university course before, and many hadn't finished high school. Fortunately, there was Lisa. Although she too hadn't been to university, she's an excellent writer, and became our informal "inside tutor."

She was also the caring heart of the class. A cardinal rule for us throughout the course was to avoid physical contact. We knew that an exchange of hugs between inside and outside students would mean a demeaning strip search of the incarcerated woman after class. So on that last day we stood, awkwardly, tears in our eyes... until Lisa moved forward, arms outstretched, despite the consequences she knew she'd have to deal with.

Lisa's story is important. She served time in a retributive jail and it did nothing to "rehabilitate" her or give her new options to help her get her life on a good path on release. As she herself says, "I know firsthand that punishment alone doesn't heal anyone. I spent a year incarcerated, and it didn't make me better, it made me feel smaller, more afraid, and less human."

*Continued on next pg*

## *Every person is worthy of healing* continued

But Lisa's story doesn't end there. It's also a story of healing and growth. In the restorative justice course, Lisa began for the first time to consider the impacts that selling drugs might have had on others. She then decided to apply to serve her federal sentence in the Okimaw Ohci Indigenous Healing Lodge:

It wasn't until I was given the chance to go to a Healing Lodge that I truly began to heal. Surrounded by culture, ceremony, and community, I felt safe for the first time. I began to understand that healing doesn't come from isolation or shame, it comes from connection, compassion, and being seen.

We need more Healing Lodges, more programs that honour people's stories and offer real opportunities to heal. The current system breaks people down, but restorative justice builds people back up. I am living proof of that. These spaces, rooted in love, understanding, and culture, are what truly change lives. If we want to see an end to recidivism, we must start believing that every person is worthy of healing, hope, and another chance.

Lisa has been out for several years now. She's in a long-term committed relationship, is sober, and is an entrepreneur. She's an artist and an inspiring teacher who leads beading workshops, where she shares about her experiences inside. She's now deeply committed to advancing restorative justice. So she sat down with CFSC over two days to record stories that shed light on her experiences of incarceration.

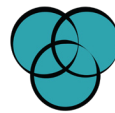
**“Healing doesn't come from isolation or shame, it comes from connection, compassion, and being seen... every person is worthy of healing.”**

Lisa spoke from the heart. She shared passionately, with gentleness, and with humour. She talked about her emotional experiences and her own learning. And she told us details about solitary confinement, overcrowding, the over-prescription of sedatives, and other aspects of the inhumanity of caging people.

She also spoke about her very different and transformative experiences at the Healing Lodge, where she was led to explore the “why.” Why did she do what

she did? What needed to be healed in her? CFSC is so grateful to Lisa for her contributions to our work. We strongly encourage you to meet this amazing partner of ours through the Unshackled video series: <https://QuakerService.ca/Unshackled>

And if you attend Canadian Yearly Meeting this year, you have an additional gift in store. Lisa will be taking part in our CFSC Anniversary Celebration evening on Tuesday July 21, where she'll be teaching beading, sharing her stories, and bringing us to tears of laughter and joy. We can't wait to see many of you there!



**Karen Ridd** is CFSC's Transformative Justice Program Coordinator.

## General Secretary's corner

I miss writing for *Quaker Concern* so I've decided to make the *General Secretary's corner* a regular feature where I'll share some reflections with you.

The CFSC team is always very busy with many areas of work—a taste of which you get with each *Quaker Concern*. Right now staff are engaging with CFSC supporters across the country in many ways, as well as being active at the United Nations headquarters in New York. You can keep up with us on our social media @CFSCQuakers (did you love the April Fool's post??)

Speaking of keeping up with us, please send us a note if you move so *Quaker Concern* keeps going to the right place. And if you ever want to be switched to an email copy, let us know that too.

I am currently working with heads of other Quaker organizations discussing Quaker responses to the world we are currently in—more will be coming on that in the months to come.

Also a heartfelt thanks and best wishes to our Jeremy Vander Hoek as he moves from our team to becoming a teacher. We will miss him dearly and our loss is the gain of a generation of students to come!

**Jennifer Preston** is CFSC's General Secretary.

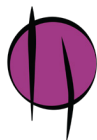
## *Human rights report card* continued from pg 1

The report card the group of human rights experts writes for treaty body reviews is called the *Concluding observations*. It explains what countries are doing well on and what they need to improve on. In this case, the group of UN human rights experts' concluding observation for Canada included a specific recommendation that it review an omnibus bill (C-5).

The experts agreed with our submission that Canada didn't properly discuss C-5 with Indigenous Peoples who might be impacted by it. In fact, after introducing the law, Indigenous Peoples were given only a week before it went to Parliament. That isn't nearly enough time! Especially for something as complicated as a major piece of legislation. As our submission stated, the human rights experts agreed that Canada's process didn't live up to their commitment to free, prior, and informed consent and the right of self-determination.

### **Indigenous Peoples' voices at the UN**

The relationships we've developed with Coalition members from Indigenous nations and organizations across the country allow us to work together to bring their voices to the UN. These opportunities are invaluable. Official recommendations from the UN to Canada, informed by the priorities and expertise of Indigenous partners, add tremendous weight to our advocacy. These opportunities require sustained support. Your donations, volunteer efforts, shares on social media, and other engagement are critical to this.



**Jeremy Vander Hoek** is CFSC's Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator.

## *Why research? How three new papers will advance the cause of peace in Canada*

by Mel Burns

**Q**uakers have always understood that bearing witness is not passive. It requires us to show up—in meeting houses, in communities, and increasingly, in the spaces where policy is shaped and decisions are made. This year, CFSC is taking on three new peace-related research projects, and we want to share with Friends why we believe this work is a faithful and strategic use of our resources.

### **Research as a form of witness**

Peace advocacy is most effective when it's grounded

in evidence. When we bring carefully researched and academically sound analysis to conversations about peace policy, international multilateralism, and what defence really means, we're not just adding our voice to the chorus—we're contributing something the field genuinely needs. Our goal is to produce work that holds up to scrutiny in non-Quaker spaces: in policy journals, academic publications, and government consultations. That kind of credibility takes time to build, and it starts with doing the research well.

We also recognize that CFSC's relationship with the Canadian government—and our ability to be heard in public consultations—grows stronger when we come to the table with substantive contributions. Research gives us that standing. It signals that we are not simply advocating from values alone, but offering analysis that decision-makers can engage with and cite.

The three papers underway this year reflect areas where we believe Quakers have something meaningful to say. The first examines the history of peacebuilding in Canadian government policy—tracing the commitments Canada has made, and asking what it would mean to take them seriously again. The second challenges prevailing assumptions about defence and security, offering a reframing that centres climate defence, human security, and conflict prevention rather than militarization. The third engages with the United Nations' Transitional Justice framework, exploring Quaker implications for peace and accountability in today's most urgent conflicts.

Each paper is distinct, but together they point in a common direction: toward a Canada that leads with peace. We hope this work will also provide our Network partners—the many organizations across Canada working toward similar ends—with shared language and calls to action they can carry into their own advocacy. A more unified voice among Canadian peace organizations is something worth working toward deliberately, and research is one way to build that common ground.

We're grateful for the support of Friends that makes this work possible. We welcome your questions, your reflections, and your engagement. Peace is built together.



**Mel Burns** is CFSC's Peace Program Coordinator.

## ***Canada increases military spending while rejecting weapons oversight*** by Sandra Wiens

**I**n March, the House of Commons rejected An act to amend the export and import permits act (EIPA), also known as the *No more loopholes bill*. The bill was trying to close the loophole that gives export and import exemptions for certain countries, notably the United States. It's through this loophole that Canadian made weapons and components are winding up being used in areas that Canada has prohibited, embargoed, or deemed illegal to ship arms to, like Sudan and Gaza. Canadian weapons potentially being used against civilians in some of the bloodiest wars on the planet is inconsistent with what Canadians want and with Canadian obligations under the *Arms Trade Treaty*.

While a disappointing outcome, the vote on the *No more loopholes bill* did show that there were MPs within the Liberal caucus who felt they were able to vote with their conscience and saw merit with the bill's proposals. In arguing against the bill, Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand implied that applying Canada's rigorous export controls to the US could jeopardize jobs, the economy, and Canada's international standing. She called the proposed bill "irresponsible" for those reasons.

Yet it remains clear that the government needs to address the loophole that allows Canadian weapons to wind up being used in places where Canada says it's illegal to ship them. Failing to do so risks making Canada continually complicit in violations of international humanitarian law. This is especially pressing right now as Canada has committed to record increases in military spending.

It's worth putting this vote into context. Canada recently announced reaching the 2% military expenditure target set up by NATO for members. According to the Prime Minister's office, this was "the largest year-over-year increase to Canada's defence spending in generations." Canada's military budget ballooned from \$45 billion to over \$63 billion—and it took less than a year to do it. More worrisome yet, such spending is on track to reach 5% of GDP over the next nine years, meaning \$150 billion by 2035.

Canada is entering a phase of unprecedented production and investment in weapons manufacturing and, at a minimum, should ensure this does not contribute to war crimes or other unnecessary suffering abroad. It is a political choice to remain indifferent to the realities of the moment—Canadian made weapons are going where they shouldn't, and as

such, it is imperative that a solution is found for this concerning reality.

### **But what can be done?**

While it seems a little hopeless, there are things that can be done. We can insist that alternative proposals be put forward that address the loopholes. Talk to your MP and see how they voted, if they voted against, ask what they propose to fix the problem instead. This is a Parliament that says it is solution-oriented. CFSC is also planning to be present at CANSEC this year, May 27-28 in Ottawa. CANSEC is the largest weapons fair in North America. We believe this is a moment where being present matters. We're planning a silent vigil/ Meeting for Worship on the afternoon of the first day of CANSEC to be a physical presence of unity and nonviolence—showing that strength comes through peace.

We invite you to join us that day and show your opposition to the burgeoning war industry—directly and in a Friendly way. If you are unable to travel to Ottawa, we are also looking at holding an online Meeting in tandem with the actions on the ground.



**Sandra Wiens** is CFSC's Government Relations Representative.

**Are you tired of all the stuff?  
Ask your loved ones to support justice  
and peace instead of buying a present for  
your next birthday. Tell them to give to  
CFSC at:  
[QuakerService.ca/BirthdayGift](https://www.QuakerService.ca/BirthdayGift)**



# Friends on the move



MEL BURNS HAS BEEN BUSY CREATING AND delivering workshops for various community groups and churches—including a five-part peace education series in St. Stephen New Brunswick, a two day communication workshop in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, and a two-part depolarization workshop with a bike repair coalition based in Toronto. On top of many virtual speaking engagements, Mel hosted another gathering for Quaker peace and justice groups across Canada.

She's also hosting a monthly book club on civil resistance/nonviolent defense. Have you been wondering about nonviolent resistance in Canada? Are you unsure if it would really work in the face of invasion, occupation, or other violent force? Join in the book club! It's OK if you missed the first meetings. We're reading *Civil resistance: what everyone needs to know* by Erica Chenoweth. Find out more and register for free: <https://QuakerService.ca/BookClub>

Together with CFSC's Israel-Palestine Working Group, Mel has hosted information sessions for Monthly and Half-yearly Meetings, and a threshing session for Canadian Yearly Meeting on the topic of the *Apartheid-free communities pledge*.

Peace education continues to be central to Mel's work, and she would be happy to talk to anyone looking for workshop facilitation or a guest speaker on the topic. For more on the workshops she offers see <https://QuakerService.ca/Peace>

CFSC members and staff had their bi-annual program meetings in

different parts of the country again this year. The photo is of **Jennifer Preston** and our Peace Committee Clerk **Siân Bowen-Cole** following successful meetings in Prince Edward Island.

KAREN RIDD LED WORKSHOPS ON FOUR occasions throughout March, sharing about the topic of nonviolent resistance. The workshops, held on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, drew around 250 people! Karen was interviewed about this by Nadia Kidwai on *CBC radio* and by John Longhurst for the *Winnipeg Free Press*.



SANDRA WIENS WAS INTERVIEWED for *This Magazine* about CFSC's work to advance a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income in Canada. Find out more about this work at <https://QuakerService.ca/GLBI>

JEREMY VANDER HOEK AND Jennifer Preston attended the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) meetings in Geneva in July.