

Quaker Concern

Discovering gifts of learning in Indigenous communities: a journey towards *UN Declaration* implementation

By Jeremy Vander Hoek



Global Indigenous Rights Research Network visit to Samson Cree Nation, 2023.

There's never a dull moment at Canadian Friends Service Committee! This year, for me, that's meant lots of travel. Have you ever experienced the joys of travelling to a new place to learn from people you've just met? In anticipation, I'm often nervous and excited. Travel at CFSC provides amazing experiences and exciting opportunities to advance our work. This was absolutely the case at each research engagement I recently participated in as part of the Global Indigenous Rights Research Network project.

The Network connects the resources and experience of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics, activists, and community organizations, including CFSC. The goal is to formalize our shared work to help bring tools and research on the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* directly to Indigenous communities.

Professor Sheryl Lightfoot at the University of British Columbia received a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant for our joint project *Decolonizing Settler States*. CFSC's Jennifer Preston serves as the co-director with Sheryl. Through this project we seek to learn more about how Indigenous peoples are using the *UN Declaration*.

The three engagements I have participated in so far were in two Mohawk communities: Kahnawake and Kanehsatà:ke, and in Samson Cree Nation, Maskwacis territory.

I assumed (wrongly) that these research engagements would be straightforward: our team would make introductions and have conversations. Instead, on each trip, at the urging of community members, we were invited to step outside ourselves and to do some broader cultural learning. In Kahnawake we visited the Longhouse and heard how Clanmothers and Chiefs made decisions through consensus. In Kanehsatà:ke we walked the path of those who survived the 1990 Kanehsatà:ke siege. While in Samson Cree Nation, we were invited into the sacred pipe ceremony and participated in a mini pow wow. Let me tell you about them.

“We were invited to step outside ourselves and to do some broader cultural learning.”

The Longhouse in Kahnawake

Our conversation in Kahnawake focused on education. Education leaders are hard at work transforming the educational system to foster Mohawk ways of knowing. This informs their views on *Declaration* implementation. After our conversations, Kenneth Deer, our community lead, jumped in the van with us to show us around his community. The first stop on our tour was the Longhouse. Benches lined all sides of the open building. Kenneth showed us where each clan's Chiefs sit and where the Clanmothers take their places.

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Joint statements supporting Indigenous peoples' human rights

The Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples issued a statement. The *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is the most comprehensive international human rights instrument affirming the collective rights of Indigenous peoples and the individual rights of members of Indigenous Nations. Indigenous peoples worked for more than two decades to have this instrument adopted by the UN.

In 2021 Canada became one of the first countries in the world to pass national legislation to fully implement the *UN Declaration*, including adoption of a comprehensive national action plan. The significance of this cannot be understated.

The first action plan commits to numerous important reforms and initiatives brought forward by Indigenous peoples. However, the plan also includes significant inconsistencies, from section to section and in respect to the actual requirements of the *UN Declaration*. Find out more:

<https://QuakerService.ca/ActionPlan>

On National Indigenous Peoples Day 13 churches and faith organizations also came together to release a joint statement:

<https://QuakerService.ca/IndigenousPeoplesDay>

Why your presence alone is surprisingly powerful

Sometimes conflict transformation happens without words. In his newest blog post for *Psychology Today*, Matt Legge looks at interesting research into the power of silently gazing into someone's eyes or sitting together with them:

<https://QuakerService.ca/Presence>

New short videos: what is CFSC? Why are our board members enthusiastic about service?

Our YouTube channel continues to be updated with new content including a three minute video explaining CFSC narrated by our General Secretary Jennifer Preston and a short video of interviews with members of our board of directors sharing what draws them

to serve on CFSC. We welcome your comments and suggestions for future videos!

<https://QuakerService.ca/YouTube>

Reconciliation queries get a fresh design

Quakers have a tradition of using queries to provoke spiritual reflection. Queries are usually simple questions used to stay grounded and gain deeper insights. They promote work on oneself. Any non-Indigenous person, whether Quaker or not, may find these eight queries helpful in prompting reflection on their knowledge and actions for reconciliation:

<https://QuakerService.ca/ReconciliationQueries>

"Culture wars" and just peace

Peace Research: The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies asked CFSC's Matt Legge to contribute an article. In it Matt explores the phenomena of bitter polarization and "culture wars." He presents many of their drivers (including touching on the thorny topics of truth and of victimhood). Most importantly the article lists key insights that peace and conflict studies experts have to offer. Matt encourages this expertise to be shared with activists. He explores how this could help make the urgent work for justice and peace more effective (and less destructive):

<https://QuakerService.ca/PeaceResearch>

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.

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Transformative justice: building a compassionate and equitable criminal justice system

By Tanya Gupta

As a practicum student, I was nervous about stepping into the work of Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC). I was afraid I wouldn't fit in and unsure if my values would truly align with CFSC's, since I'm not a Quaker. When I reviewed the testimonies and Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends' 1981 Minute on Prison Abolition, I found myself surprised that my morals, beliefs, and values closely match those of Quakers in Canada.

In 1981 Friends reached a unified position (minute number 93) in support of penal abolition: <https://QuakerService.ca/PrisonAbolition>. The minute expresses the Quaker concern for transformative justice and the need to move away from punitive measures within the criminal justice system. It emphasizes the importance of rehabilitation, community support, and alternatives to incarceration.

The minute calls for a critical examination of the flaws and harm inherent in the current system. It recognizes the disproportionate impacts on marginalized communities—particularly communities of colour—and seeks to address systemic racism and promote equity. Minute 93 serves as a guiding statement for Quakers and others committed to penal abolition and transformative justice.

When I worked as a youth justice case worker in West Scarborough I gained firsthand insight into the urgent need for transformative change within the criminal justice system. In that community—predominantly composed of marginalized individuals—I witnessed the devastating impact of systemic racism and inequality. Young people, especially those from racialized backgrounds, are disproportionately affected by over-policing and harsh sentencing practices. This

What Would a World Without Prisons Look like?

We already have many examples of what an alternative to prisons would look like. Here are some that are already working in our society to reduce crime, increase community safety, rehabilitate people, and address the conditions that result in people going to prisons.

HEALING LODGES



Healing Lodges are currently used by Indigenous people in the justice system. By connecting to Indigenous culture, values, traditions, and beliefs, Indigenous people who have been involved in criminalized behaviour can heal from their own trauma and shift

Cover of CFSC's double-sided handout Alternatives to Prison (available on our website or contact us for print copies).

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE 'DANGEROUS FEW'?



The 'dangerous few' in the words of Quaker prison abolitionist Ruth Morris, are the very few individuals who do need to be separated from our society to keep us safe. We can do that in ways that do not rely on

resonates deeply with the principles set forth in Minute 93 and with the Quaker commitment to transformative justice. It affirms the necessity of centering the narratives of marginalized communities and advocating for alternative approaches that prioritize rehabilitation, community support, and equity.

Through my work I've witnessed the transformative power of restorative practices and the potential for healing when individuals have the opportunity—in a supportive environment—to address underlying causes of their actions. There were many times when I facilitated open dialogues between youth, their families, and victims. Often times a young person charged with an offence grew to understand the impact of their actions, leading to genuine remorse and a desire to make amends. In this restorative circle, a supportive environment was provided for people to share and to begin to address underlying causes of harmful behaviour. The youth received support for core issues such as substance use and family conflicts, fostering personal growth and accountability.

Restorative practices are instrumental in stopping a cycle of re-offending, thereby setting youth on a path to a brighter future. The value of a restorative approach is further demonstrated by the eagerness of many youth to participate in mentorship programs after their initial engagement. This validates the impact of these practices and the desire of these individuals to "give back" by assisting others facing similar challenges. Such outcomes exemplify the transformative power of restorative approaches in nurturing empathy, personal growth, and a commitment to positive change within the community.

During my time at CFSC I've had the opportunity to

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Transformative justice continued

engage in advocacy to promote policy reform within the criminal justice system—calling for changes to address systemic inequalities and reduce the reliance on punitive measures. One example is collaborating with the organization YouthRex to create a webinar with expert speakers, including CFSC’s Nancy Russell. The webinar focused on educating front-line child and youth workers and others about how to support youth with incarcerated family. Those with lived experience led the conversation, which raised awareness about current systemic inequities. You can watch it at: <https://QuakerService.ca/SupportingYouth>.

While at CFSC I’ve also had the chance to speak with two teenaged youth about concerns they had around remaining connected with and visiting an incarcerated family member. Through conversations like this CFSC offers practical assistance—in this case referring the family to specialized agencies that work closely with people facing similar situations, as well as sharing the documentary *Bonds that Hurt, Bonds that Heal*.

Empowering families directly impacted by incarceration to share their experiences and advocate for change not only fosters healing and connection but also serves CFSC on two crucial fronts. Firstly, it enables us to stay informed about the grassroots-level challenges and realities within the criminal justice system. Secondly, our practical assistance in connecting families with relevant support organizations is a tangible expression of CFSC’s commitment to promoting a more compassionate approach to criminal justice.

As an individual who identifies as a person of colour and does not belong to the Quaker community, I hold a multifaceted perspective on Minute 93. It can be read as a crucial acknowledgement of the systemic injustices that permeate the criminal justice system. It serves as a recognition of the disproportionate impact that policing, sentencing, and incarceration have on marginalized communities, specifically those of colour. And it’s a call to confront historical oppression, urging us to dismantle the structures that perpetuate racial disparities within the criminal justice system. I deeply appreciate the emphasis placed on transformative justice, rehabilitation, and community support as viable alternatives to punitive measures.

In the past five years, we’ve witnessed a growing

global movement towards reimagining the existing penal system. Public conversation on the need for revolutionary change has been sparked by the emergence of movements like Black Lives Matter and the demand for justice reform in the wake of high-profile incidents of police violence. These events have shed light on the systemic racism ingrained in the criminal justice system and ignited conversations about the over-policing and over-incarceration of communities of colour. The pandemic has further exposed the vulnerabilities and health risks faced by individuals within prisons, prompting discussions on the need for de-incarceration and alternative approaches to justice. These events serve as significant reminders of the urgency to address deep systemic issues, highlighting the ongoing relevance and timeliness of Minute 93’s principles in fostering a more just and equitable society.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have worked with CFSC and to have delved into the principles of the prison abolition minute. CFSC’s commitment to transformative justice and the pursuit of penal abolition resonates strongly with my understanding of social justice and the urgent need for systemic change. As I move forward, I am inspired by Minute 93 to continue advocating for a more inclusive and compassionate society, where the voices and experiences of those affected by the criminal justice system are centered and where justice is truly transformative.



Tanya Gupta is a practicum student serving CFSC’s criminal justice committee.



Long after you’ve passed on, you can still be a voice for peace. You can be present, creating a more just world for your children and grandchildren. Find out how:

QuakerService.ca/VoiceForPeace

Occupation hurts the occupied and the occupier

By Linda Taffs



A graphic made by the Canada, Stand Up for Palestinian Children's Rights campaign.

For many years Canadian Friends have had a concern for all people living in Palestine and Israel. In 2009, Quakers adopted a position that, among other things, calls for a nonviolent path that recognizes the dignity of all. In 2014, Canadian Friends approved an Addendum to the 2009 Israel/Palestine position. The Addendum notes that "Our hearts are full of compassion for Israelis and Palestinians, all of whom are suffering from the effects of the occupation." (These statements are available in full at <https://QuakerService.ca/IsraelPalestine>)

In 2014, I had a leading to join a delegation to Palestine/Israel. I was excited to join this Sabeel-led delegation because we were going to visit 20 peace groups: Palestinians and Israelis working nonviolently for Palestinian human rights.

I was very thankful for a Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) individual grant, and one from Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting. This financial and emotional support enabled me to go and witness what was happening to Palestinians living under on-going occupation. For me, it was a life changing experience.

Before I went, I didn't fully understand how the occupation was hurting the occupier. I had to be there to learn that Israeli children are taught in school how, as one person told me, "Everyone in the world is out to kill them, and they are shown different times in history where this is true." This leads to the belief among Israeli children that they absolutely must do their military service once they turn 18. I also learned how during their service these conscripts are asked to do things that are contrary to their sense of morality and religion, so they too suffer their own form of trauma. According to Jennifer Shifrin, a psychotherapist

who also served in the Israeli military, "These young conscripts suffer from moral injury and Post Traumatic Stress."

I confess that before I went on this delegation, I had little sympathy for the Israeli military personnel, but that has changed for me. I am happy to know that CFSC has been supporting the Israeli refusers organization Mesarvot since 2017.

Since my trip, I have had a strong leading to work on the Israel/Palestine issue. One of the things requested by most of the Palestinian and Israeli peace groups that I visited was that our delegation members work on our own governments, to get them to speak out about Israel's violations of international law. To that end, I have been working with a cross-Canada interfaith campaign called "Canada, Stand Up for Palestinian Children's Human Rights." We are requesting that the Canadian government appoint a special envoy to go to the West Bank to monitor violations of the human rights of Palestinian children by the Israeli military. CFSC is one of the founding members of this Coalition. More can be found out about it at <https://www.unjppi.org/join-childrens-rights-campaign.html>

"For me, it was a life changing experience."

The situation we're working on is indeed dire. In June of this year, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East released a report entitled *Heartbreaking Disparity: Child Detainees in Canada vs. Israel* (https://cjpme.org/heartbreaking_disparity). The report highlights the systematic ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the West Bank vs. how Israeli settler children living in the same area are treated. The report then compares the

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Occupation hurts continued

treatment of these youngsters in the West Bank to how Canadian children are treated in Canada's justice system. For me, seeing these differences is eye-opening.

If, like I was, you feel curious and moved to learn more about Palestinians' daily lived experiences and what lies behind the injustices and human rights violations, you're in luck. A delegation organized by Sabeel Liberation Theology Centre is going to Israel/Palestine from October 15th to 26th. This delegation is based on a commitment to nonviolence and being inclusive of all. They intend to meet people from various organizations, Palestinian Muslims, Palestinian Christians, and Jewish Israelis, all of whom are working to support human rights. The delegation plans to visit Bethlehem, Jerusalem, the Old City, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Vad Yashem (the Holocaust Museum), and more. Plus you will enjoy delicious food and hospitable people.

The delegation leaders are Rev. Marianna Harris, and retired lawyer George Bartlett. Both have led many delegations. If you would like to know more please e-mail them with your questions holymom1@shaw.ca; g.bartlett@sympatico.ca. Some financial support for participating may be available upon discussion with Marianna or George. Also Quakers can contact CFSC about individual grants. I did and it changed my life.



Linda Taffs (Cowichan Valley Meeting), is a member of CFSC's Israel/Palestine Working Group and past clerk of CFSC's Peace Committee. She has the pleasure of living next

door to two of her grandchildren on Vancouver Island. CFSC does not run and has no affiliation with the witness trip Linda describes above. As such CFSC is unable to accept responsibility for security risks if you choose to participate.

Discovering gifts continued from pg 1

As I imagined this taking place in the Longhouse, I saw how the design fostered consensus rather than antagonism. As Chiefs discuss the business of the day, procedures guide the way proposals are passed back and forth.

Meanwhile Clanmothers keep a close eye on things, appointing and dismissing Chiefs when necessary. Kenneth explained that oversight from the

Discovering gifts continued

Clanmothers is essential for keeping conversations focused on peace and consistent with Mohawk laws. Every Chief knows the Clanmothers are watching as they discuss the decisions of the day.

As Kenneth shared these details, our research was enriched. Hearing about Kahnawake's focus on consensus-building and maintaining Mohawk law gave context to our conversation about education rights and the right to self-determination. Understanding decision making in the Longhouse is crucial for understanding *UN Declaration* implementation in Kahnawake.

“The design fostered consensus rather than antagonism.”

Walking the Path of the Kanehsatà:ke Siege

Our engagement in Kanehsatà:ke provided a different opportunity. Community members shared about the inspiring work they're doing to serve the community through activism and advocacy. Many of the challenges they face stem from the lasting trauma inflicted on the community during the Kanehsatà:ke siege, often inaccurately referred to as the “Oka crisis.” Wanda Gabriel, a social worker from Kanehsatà:ke, taught about this trauma publicly in a video on our website (<https://QuakerService.ca/WandaGabriel>). She explains that working through trauma requires an invitation to share stories without judgement. Her hope for the *UN Declaration* is that it helps Kanehsatà:ke reclaim their land and their place on it. Implementation of the *UN Declaration* in Kanehsatà:ke will require different levels of government to recognize and take responsibility for ongoing harms.

After our conversations, our tour of Kanehsatà:ke led us to the place where the 1990 siege occurred: a small road leading into the Pines, where a sacred Mohawk burial ground was being threatened by a golf course expansion. Our community lead, Katsi'tsakwas Ellen Gabriel, showed us where the Canadian military advanced on their territory and where violence occurred. Seeing this place in person added immense weight to our conversations regarding the *UN Declaration*, especially in reference to the right to security for Indigenous peoples. It is one thing to hear how corporate and political interests can cause insecurity to Indigenous peoples. It's quite another to walk the path of those that have faced it.

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Sacred Pipe Ceremony and Mini Pow Wow in Samson Cree Nation

As in Kahnawake and Kanehsatà:ke, our time in Samson Cree Nation also provided opportunities for learning alongside our conversations. Our second day there began in teepees set up in our community lead—Laurie Buffalo’s—backyard.



Elders and community members gathered our team together for sacred pipe ceremonies. The pipe carriers prayed blessings, passed the pipe, and we each had an opportunity to take in the smoke. Afterwards an elder graciously shared the teachings of the ceremony. The stone at the end of the pipe that holds the tobacco is strong, so we should learn strength. The pipe stem is straight, calling us to truth and honesty. The tobacco smoke rose from the pipe as our prayers rise to teach us about Creator. Finally, the feather teaches us of sharing and of the ancestors that have gone before us. Being invited into this ceremony was a privilege and joy for everyone on the team.

That afternoon, we attended a mini pow wow meant to set our conversations on a good path. Dancers of all ages from little kids to Elders donned their regalia and danced. Just as it was beginning, I was quickly shuffled into the opening procession with Jennifer and other team members. Although my dancing skills left much to be desired, it was overwhelming to be honoured in this way and I was thankful for the guiding rhythm of the drum. Elders, chiefs, and an RCMP officer joined us in the procession. This officer was present as an affirmation of Treaty Six between Samson Cree Nation and Canada.

Both experiences informed the way our team processed our conversations. As community members shared about the need to interpret and implement the

UN Declaration within a Cree context through Cree principles, we were lucky to have an insight into what those are. The teachings of the pipe and the celebration of the mini pow wow informed how the Declaration would be understood in a Cree context where principles of truth, honesty, community, and Treaty were of the utmost importance.

Conclusion

At each research engagement for this project, I was surprised by the unexpected places we were led. Engaging with work at the community level is critical for understanding and collaborating to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Decolonizing Settler States project is also looking at Aotearoa New Zealand and Sampi (Nordic States). This winter Jennifer and Sheryl will be traveling to the Sami University in Norway. Watch for updates!



Jeremy Vander Hoek is Assistant, CFSC Events and Indigenous Rights.

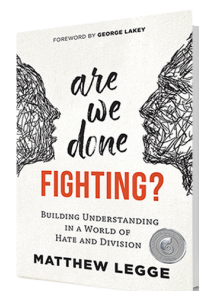
“This book is a joy. The research is fresh and fascinating, the writing is clear and crisp.”—Stephanie Van Hook, Executive Director, Metta Center for Nonviolence

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Friends on the Move



THIS IS A SPECIAL MOMENT BECAUSE WE'RE taking your concerns directly to decision makers in a much bigger way. For the first time in our more than 90 year history, we've expanded to have a Government Relations Representative, based in Ottawa!

Your voice, grounded in our Quaker faith, will reach decision makers more than ever before. We'll keep doing grassroots peace and justice work, but now we're also expanding into having a deeper policy influence.

Our new Government Relations Representative **Sandra Wiens** has been working in the nonprofit sector since 2005, focused on gender equity and health policy advocacy. She has worked with various organizations in South America, Canada, and Australia.

Sandra studied International Development and Conflict Resolution Studies at the University of Winnipeg, and feels drawn to how the work of CFSC combines these two streams of study in a practical way. This is her second time working with CFSC, having

started her career in 2005 with the Quaker International Affairs Programme (QIAP). Watch CFSC board members explaining why this expansion of our work is so invigorating: <https://QuakerService.ca/GovernmentRelations>

JULY SAW **CFSC's** INDIGENOUS RIGHTS TEAM headed to Geneva. Supported by a grant, we were able to send **Jennifer Preston, Jeremy Vander Hoek, and Rachel Singleton-Polster** to the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP). Our team had a lot going on while in Geneva.



Rachel and Jenn at EMRIP. Credit: Ellen Gabriel.

Our work with the Coalition on the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples included three statements from the floor (for all three statements see

<https://QuakerService.ca/EMRIP>) and a side event on monitoring the implementation of the *UN Declaration*. We supported our partner Professor Sheryl Lightfoot in her role as the Chair of EMRIP. We hosted the annual EMRIP dinner at Quaker House Geneva. And Jennifer attended breakfast with the Canadian Ambassador.

This is the 100th anniversary of Cayuga chief Deskaheh Levi General traveling to Geneva with an appeal to speak at the League of Nations (the precursor to the UN). There were many events to commemorate this critical beginning of the journey to have Indigenous peoples working inside the international system to protect their rights. We were honoured to be a part of this history.

As a CBC article (<https://bit.ly/Deskaheh>) notes, "Today, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is still unable to address the United Nations as a government. The confederacy, along with other Indigenous nations, is only eligible to address the UN as a non-governmental organization."