

Quaker Concern

Bringing It Home

By Nancy Russell



In the summer of 2020, the catastrophic death of George Floyd created a sudden swell of public attention regarding calls to defund the police, the over-representation of Black and Indigenous people in the criminal justice system, and systemic racism in Canada. CFSC discerned the need to respond, and began planning for a new project—*The Only Way Forward*.

We saw this as an unexpected opportunity to advance Friends' long-standing goal of reducing the punitive mindset that pervades society, and increasing understanding and support for restorative justice practices. The project was intended to examine the impacts of the existing criminal justice system, possible alternatives, and next steps. It was offered to Quakers across Canada and to the community at large.

The Only Way Forward has involved four phases:

- Summer 2020—project planning and formation of an advisory group made up of persons with lived experience and/or expertise acquired through education, research, or working in related fields;
- September/October 2020—film screenings, *Do the Work Calendar*, and companion Facebook page;
- November/December 2020—film screenings and webinars presenting expert panelist;
- January/February 2021—feedback, follow up and “bringing it home.”

The project has been well received and our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/741139059777233>) remains active. New members are always welcome!

“Over 50 resources were posted during a 30-day period.”

The *Do the Work Calendar* at the beginning of the project was designed to provide a variety of mixed-media resources (and perspectives) related to the impact of colonialism, systemic racism, the criminal justice system, and policing in Canada.

We included information about restorative practices and alternatives to incarceration. The calendar phase was a self-directed and reflective undertaking. Over 50 resources were posted during a 30-day period: films, videos, articles, essays, and lectures with potential for sharing feedback on Facebook. This was followed by the webinar series and film screenings in November and December.

We have now had four months of exploration, learning and perspective sharing. We have increased our awareness and understanding of the criminal justice system in Canada.

Continued on pg 7



No fighter jets

Canada is attempting to procure new fighter jets that could turn out to cost \$77 billion dollars. These jets are not needed for security and could produce tremendous harms to humans and to the environments where they are used. Polls suggest that the purchase is unpopular. Politicians need to hear from us. On the website <https://NoFighterJets.ca> you can learn more and write a letter to your Member of Parliament if so led.

Joint statement on Mi'kmaw fishing rights

The members of the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples has spoken out against acts of violence and intimidation directed at Mi'kmaw fishers exercising their Constitutionally protected, legally affirmed, inherent, and Treaty rights. Read the full joint statement at: <https://quakerservice.ca/MikmawFishingRights>

2019-2020 Annual Accountability Report

Our *Annual Accountability Report* hits the highlights of what was a year full of unexpected challenges as well as many successes in our work for justice and peace. You can read the report at: <https://report.quakerservice.ca> and read our audited financial statements at: <https://quakerservice.ca/2019-2020Audit>

Debunking myths about Indigenous peoples' human rights

A newly updated resource is here to explain why so much of what is circulating in the media and on social media about the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is simply wrong.

All sorts of misinformation is out there, like false claims that the *Declaration* creates new rights for Indigenous peoples, to a failure to recognize that it does not create absolute veto powers, to the inaccurate idea that the *Declaration* could somehow undermine existing rights of Indigenous peoples, including Treaty rights. This handout (PDF) is here to help set the record straight about what the *Declaration* is and is not:

<https://quakerservice.ca/myths>

Peace education

CFSC is pleased to join organizations from all over the planet in endorsing the Global Campaign for Peace Education. The campaign is helping to spread both formal and informal peace education through increasing the political and cultural support for this type of education and through sharing resources to help to improve the capacities of teachers to deliver peace education. You can find out more and endorse the campaign too:

<https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/endorse>

At CFSC we continue to do our small part toward practical and informal peace education. We've shared tips and insights on our ongoing blog for *Psychology Today* (<https://psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/are-we-done-fighting>), spoken at events and classes at York, Waterloo, and Furman universities for groups that are studying CFSC's book *Are We Done Fighting?*, and appeared on the radio and popular podcasts: <https://unlatchedmind.com/ep-30-lets-fight-right>

If you haven't read the book yet, CFSC is now offering *Are We Done Fighting?* for \$20, shipping included (you can even get it signed if you like). Contact us to order. It is also available in e-book and audiobook, for links see: <https://AreWeDoneFighting.com>

Quaker Concern

Quaker Concern is the 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

[f](https://www.facebook.com/CFSCQuakers) [t](https://twitter.com/CFSCQuakers) [@CFSCQuakers](https://www.instagram.com/CFSCQuakers)

Charitable Number: 13214 6549 RR0001

The *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*

By Jennifer Preston



Former Member of Parliament Romeo Saganash and Jennifer Preston pose in the House of Commons after Bill C-262 passed in the House.

On December 3, 2020, Minister of Justice David Lametti tabled Bill C-15, a federal government bill to implement the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. This is intended to provide the overdue framework for the federal government to work cooperatively with Indigenous peoples to implement the rights affirmed in the *UN Declaration* in both law and policy.

As I write this article, I have just finished reviewing a video that CFSC associate Don Alexander filmed shortly after the adoption of the *Declaration* (watch it at <https://quakerservice.ca/DeclarationInterview>). 13 years later, and I find myself saying similar things. International human rights instruments, such as the *UN Declaration*, find meaning in their implementation. Indigenous peoples from around the globe went to the UN to have their rights recognized and affirmed.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called the *UN Declaration* “the framework for reconciliation.” It is well past time to have legislation in Canada recognizing this.

CFSC has been deeply engaged in this work for decades. In our relationships with Indigenous partners, we worked for the development, adoption, and implementation of the *Declaration*. Indigenous peoples and their allies have done much implementation work since the General Assembly adoption in 2007. However, we need legislation to both formalize and legalize the government’s commitment. Legislation creates a framework to carry out the systemic work needed to realize the government’s responsibilities.

CFSC was very committed and involved in the efforts to see Romeo Saganash’s private member’s bill C-262 through parliament over several years. We

were dismayed when it was blocked by undemocratic actions in the Senate before the last election. With our many partners in the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples we strongly advocated for new legislation that would build on Bill C-262.

“Human rights instruments find meaning in their implementation.”

Bill C-15 is consistent with the purpose of C-262 and affirms the *Declaration* “as a universal international human rights instrument with application in Canadian law.” This both reflects the reality that the *Declaration* is already being used by Canadian courts and tribunals to interpret Canadian laws, and also reminds the courts of the legal effect of the *Declaration*.

Further, the Bill states that a designated Minister “must, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples and with other federal ministers, prepare and implement an action plan to achieve the objectives of the *Declaration*.” The action plan “must include measures to address injustices, combat prejudice and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination, including systemic discrimination, against Indigenous peoples and Indigenous elders, youth, children, women, men, persons with disabilities and gender-diverse persons and two-spirit persons.”

Bill C-15 has a more comprehensive preamble than C-262 did. This provides the context for understanding C-15. The status of the Bill as a decolonizing lens for all discriminatory laws and policies is secured by the preamble, building on the *UN Declaration* itself. One important example is that the preamble includes a provision that repudiates all racist doctrines of superiority and rejects colonialism. Another important

Continued on next pg

provision recognizes that implementation “can contribute to supporting sustainable development and responding to growing concerns relating to climate change and its impacts on Indigenous peoples.”

A main purpose of C-15 is to provide a framework for implementation, and much of the work reforming laws and policies will follow only after C-15 is adopted into law.

“C-15 repudiates all racist doctrines of superiority and rejects colonialism.”

Time will be a challenge for this Bill. Originally intended to be tabled last spring, the emergencies of COVID delayed the process. C-15 only had first reading before the Christmas break. It has committee processes in both the House and Senate to accomplish. With a minority government, the threat of election is always present. If an election is called before this Bill reaches Royal Assent, again this work will get sent back to the starting gate. CFSC has participated in meeting with Justice officials urging the need to prioritize this work to ensure the successful completion before the next election.

In addition to our work with the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples (see <https://DeclarationCoalition.ca>), CFSC is working with faith groups from across Canada to support this legislation. Faith bodies want C-15 to become law! (Consider adding your faith group to the growing list.)

Our work for the UN Declaration is an example of how Friends commit for the long term. CFSC will continue our advocacy, working with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners as part of our commitment to reconciliation. For more, read the Coalition statement welcoming C-15: <https://quakerservice.ca/C15>



Jennifer Preston serves as CFSC’s General Secretary and Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator. She is a member of Hamilton Monthly Meeting. She recently had her 24th

anniversary with CFSC—she has spent most of these years working on the UN Declaration.

Show your support for C-15!

Have your Meeting or faith group add its name at: <https://www.FaithInTheDeclaration.ca>

Interpretation

By Matthew Legge

For several years my service work with CFSC has involved researching conflicts of all types, as well as various peacebuilding skills and techniques. In 2020 associate member Trevor Chandler and I began facilitating online workshops to help people practice some of these techniques. Over 100 people have taken part so far. In these many conversations, and in the research I’ve done, I’ve seen certain patterns emerge. One that’s particularly important is the powerful role that interpretation plays.

Imagine this: you’re on a dating game show and there are three singles behind a curtain. You can ask the three anything you want to know, but so that their voices don’t sway your decision, they text their answers to the show’s host, who reads them out. Who would you pick to go out with?

The show *Mind Field* tried this¹ but, unbeknownst to the female contestants, the game show was fake and bachelor number two wasn’t human, it was just an artificial intelligence (AI), a sophisticated computer program!

The AI’s answers were often absurd. To the question “What would you cook me for dinner?” it replied, “Roasted bagels.” To “Describe your clothing style,” it responded, “They are made of cloth and have colors.”

But because the women were lacking information—they didn’t know they were talking to an AI—they read into the answers and constructed a whole story about a complex personality on the other side of the curtain. One of the women called bachelor two, “a little sassy” and two of them said he was similar to their ex-boyfriends. Although the AI’s answers were only barely coherent, the women variously described him as: playful, mysterious, a little into himself, a man-child, and hilarious.

Amazingly, two of the four women chose to go on a date with the AI over either of the human bachelors. What this illustrates clearly is that much of what we believe about a person (or even a non-person) depends not on them, but on us.

You can try this at home. Find a picture of two or more people doing anything whatsoever. Now try to write several different interpretations of what’s happening. Make some generous, and some critical.

Continued on next pg

Interpretation continued from previous pg

I'll illustrate. Imagine you happen to walk up and see me (a white man) taking this picture.



You might interpret this scene many ways:

1. A photo of an Asian person being taken by a white person.
2. The continued control of Asian bodies by whites: an expression of colonialism and violence.
3. A tokenistic attempt by a white photographer to appear to care about diversity.
4. The celebration of an Asian subject: an inclusive centering of Asian people who have too long been under-represented and marginalized.
5. Documenting the disgusting and unnatural practice of dying one's hair.
6. A photo taken of a person with a mask on.
7. A man being predatory and sexualizing a woman: an example of patriarchy and rape culture.
8. Standard behavior of someone socialized into the professional class.
9. An artist freely capturing a moment in time.
10. A grown man wasting his time with an expensive toy.
11. Some fruit, a street, several buildings, a sidewalk, some people, some cars...
12. A man sublimating his unconscious murderous impulses into the use of a camera (a symbolic gun).
13. A vast quantity of atoms moving in particular ways.

We could go on and on with these. Some may sound more plausible than others, but most are actually surprisingly difficult to verify or falsify.

Whatever interpretation you state, if I disagree, how will we know who's correct? I could theoretically have any subconscious motivation whatsoever, so I don't

necessarily know what my true motivations are, but then neither do you.

That makes many of these interpretations fertile ground for bitter conflicts, in particular because this simple scene involves sensitive issues like race, identity, and individual freedoms.

Any interpretation we settle on may help us to have new insights into the scene, but it will also limit and filter our understandings.

“Much of what we believe about a person depends not on them, but on us.”

The last interpretation may be technically correct, but it takes the scene to such a complicated level of detail that it's impossible to understand. Since we're not super-computers, people can't deal with describing what happened at the atomic level. We have to round off some of the complexity, to zoom out and pick some elements to highlight and some to ignore.

But each of us will have different preferences about how far to zoom. You may consider the scene in terms of events that happened centuries ago and their impacts up to the present day, while I'm just thinking about what shutter speed to use on my camera.

Maybe you read over my list and shook your head at some: “That's absurd!” Maybe you read one and thought, “That's obviously true.”

In either case it's helpful to know that there are people who are just as thoughtful as you are who make different interpretations. Any time you find yourself laughing off someone else's beliefs as ridiculous, chances are high that you simply haven't figured out the reasons behind their thinking, behind what they like to focus on and to ignore.

Importantly, our preferred interpretation of this or any scene will never be totally independent. We want to interpret the scene in ways that we imagine will keep us in good standing with whatever groups we belong to (which provide us care, safety, and social status). This means a whole culture—a whole network of other peoples' previous assumptions and ideas—props up the interpretation we settle on.

Continued on next pg

Interpretation continued from previous pg

And these cultures are ever-shifting. For example, one review found that interpretations of events as harmful have expanded over time. So today, for better or worse, far less severe instances, and a wider range of events, get interpreted as abuse.²

Thanks in part to the internet, it's easy to find thorough-seeming arguments for any interpretation whatsoever. Of course not all of these will be factually correct, but the ready availability of well-argued incorrect positions explains part of what's going on with many bitter societal conflicts. It's not all bad though. Different interpretations can also give us cause for humility, encouraging some healthy questioning of our own certainties.

The truth is, much of the time we just don't know which interpretation is correct, and it's useful (although uncomfortable) to admit it. In particular when we have very little information to go on, like the single event here (knowing nothing about what my conscious intentions are, what I plan to do with the picture, if I take lots of pictures like this with different people in them or if I have a pattern of only taking pictures of people who wear glasses, or people grocery shopping, or women...), it's very easy to make an interpretation that is both not that useful in understanding the situation, and impervious to correction.

Any attempt I make to counter your interpretation might even be rejected as further evidence of my defensiveness and bias. That's what's called a Kafka trap, where a claim of innocence is held up as more proof of guilt.

You say, "Cameras and guns are both pointed at targets, so it's obvious you were expressing an unconscious murderous tendency."

I reply, "I didn't want to kill her though."

You counter, "Of course you would deny that you wanted to kill her. That's exactly what happens when you force your murderous desires into your unconscious!"

To address destructive conflicts and build understanding, it helps tremendously if we can define our theory about what's happening specifically enough that we can have a conversation about exactly what we mean and do not mean.

What would be better still is if we're so precise that we can test our theory and try to prove it false, not just look for ways to seem to support it (again, we can readily go online and find evidence that seems to support anything we want to believe, so this isn't helpful), or only interact with those who agree with us.

For a real world example of the problems I've discussed here, consider a short open letter published in *Harper's*.³ The letter was interpreted as everything from "a simple statement... the kind of thing people say to each other in their sleep"⁴ to being full of hateful "dog whistles."⁵

Building understanding across divides isn't easy, but it can be done. If you're interested in practicing, join Trevor and me for the next round of free online workshops.



Matthew Legge is CFSC's Peace Program Coordinator. Find out more about the Are We Done Fighting? workshop series and register at <https://quakerservice.ca/register>

1. Mind Field, "Artificial Intelligence," February 1, 2017, <https://youtu.be/qZXpgf8N6hs>
2. Nick Haslam, "Concept Creep: Psychology's Expanding Concepts of Harm and Pathology," *Psychological Inquiry* 27(1), 2016.
3. For a blog post I wrote about the letter, with links to it and to a counter-letter, see: Matthew Legge, "'Cancel Culture' Letter: 7 Tips from the Debate," *Psychology Today*, July 9, 2020, <https://bit.ly/391DHEP>
4. Noam Chomsky quoted in Isaac Chotiner, "Noam Chomsky Believes Trump Is 'the Worst Criminal in Human History,'" *The New Yorker*, October 30, 2020, <https://bit.ly/35V9PrF>
5. Emily VanDerWerff, Twitter, July 7, 2020 <https://twitter.com/emilyvdw/status/1280580388495097856>

Stay Connected



Sign up for our E-News by entering your email at quakerservice.ca or mailing us the form on page eight.

Follow us on social media



@CFSCQuakers

What's next?

This was the topic of discussion at our Advisory Group meeting in October. Monica Walters-Field (an advisor to the project) asked us the important question, "How do we take our learnings and reflections and bring them home?" What are concrete steps that can be taken? What does "bringing it home" mean to each of us as individuals? Will participants in the series do anything differently in the future?

I'd like to share a story about something that happened to me several years ago. It falls into the realm of "bringing it home." First, a little history: In 2005 I became a certified Trainer in Restorative Justice Practices. From 2005-07, I facilitated circles for youth residing in custody programs and taking part in community based extra-judicial sanctions. In 2006 I became a certified member of the provincial Critical Incident Response Team specific to youth justice. There was a segment at the end of that training that involved the concept of congruency. We were given a test to measure the consistency between our behaviour at work and at home.

Apparently, the more consistent a behaviour score between work and home, the healthier and more balanced the person. I was pleased that I scored well on the test. I found this concept of individual congruency reminiscent of discussions about organizational policy vs. practice, which, when there's a disconnect is sometimes characterized as "do what I say, not what I do."

"All my training and involvement in restorative justice circles didn't help me."

And then something happened. Something that cracked my healthy congruency score.

Late one summer night, I received a phone call. My son and his friend had been physically assaulted at Trinity Bellwoods Park in Toronto. They were on their way home when a group of male youth began to follow them, yelling homophobic slurs and throwing garbage. Both were assaulted, but my son's friend was so badly beaten that he required medical care.

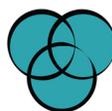
The authorities had already been notified, statements were provided, and the police investigation began.

A few days after the assault, I was driving my son to work when his cell phone rang. It was the police. They said that they may have found the perpetrators of the crime. And they asked a question: "Would we be interested in a meeting with the perpetrators, interested in a chance to speak face-to-face and talk about the impact of the assault?" It was presented as one option for consideration.

My reaction surprised me. I did not want to meet with the boys who had hurt my son—not in a few weeks, not ever! All my training and previous involvement in restorative justice circles didn't help me in this situation. Clearly, I had more work to do if I wanted to achieve "true congruency" in my life. It turned out that the police were mistaken. The young men who committed the assault were never apprehended.

Nevertheless, I learned from the incident, and it was a good lesson. When something moves from the theoretical to lived experience, it alters the personal landscape. It changes perspective. Bringing it home for me was not so simple.

We are about to move ahead with *The Only Way Forward* project, and to turn our attention to possible next steps. We will ask ourselves questions. What have we learned? How do we take this from the macro to the micro? How do we make this personal? Are we going to do anything differently? Can we bring what we have learned into our own community? How do we bring it home?



Nancy Russell is CFSC's Criminal Justice Program Coordinator. Find out more about this work at <https://quakerservice.ca/justice>

90 YEARS  **QUAKERS Canadian Friends Service Committee**

We're go!

To celebrate our 90th anniversary we're hosting monthly talks all year long so that you can get to know some of the Friends who make CFSC what it is. Details at: <https://quakerservice.ca/GetToKnowThee>

Friends on the Move



As travel remains impossible, we continue to create virtual opportunities for our many supporters to gather, connect, and learn together. CFSC's Clerks host a weekly Meeting for Worship via Zoom (contact us for details), and we delivered major online series *The Only Way Forward* and *Are We Done Fighting?* discussed earlier in this issue.

We hosted a screening of *Free Trip to Egypt*, followed by discussion of how personal contact can help in bridging divides.

We helped organize and were part of a series of webinars on Indigenous rights (you can view videos of all six sessions on Pendle Hill's YouTube channel: <https://bit.ly/3qFZyYF>)

We hosted our long-time partners Dan and Mary-Lou Smoke for an evening of storytelling, songs, and learning. (You can listen to their radio show *Smoke Signals* on Sundays from 6:30-8:00 pm Eastern online at <http://RadioWestern.ca>)

Jennifer Preston and associate member Paul Joffe presented

virtually to staff of Environment and Climate Change Canada, discussing the *UN Declaration*, with a focus on climate change and sustainable development. Jennifer also presented to Hamilton Meeting about reconciliation and local actions.

We also welcomed two new staff to our small team: Dalya Eidda, taking over from Tasmin Rajotte in the role of Administrator, and Stacy Halloran, serving as CFSC Finance Assistant while Megan Shaw is on maternity leave.

✓ Yes! I support a just & peaceful world.

All donors receive our newsletter *Quaker Concern*, which provides information and analysis of CFSC projects and concerns.

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____

Donors will receive an income tax receipt.

Check boxes to receive additional CFSC materials:

- E-Newsletter
- Quaker Concern* by email
- CFSC's planned giving kit

Be a sustaining donor

Pre-authorized monthly gifts (from your bank account) reduce administration and are easy to set-up or change at any time.

Yes, email me sign-up forms!

Yes, mail me sign-up forms!

Cheque or money order

I/we would like to contribute:

\$500 \$250 \$100 \$50 Other \$ _____

Mail form to: CFSC, 60 Lowther Ave, Toronto, ON M5R 1C7

Note: One-time or monthly donations can also be made at quakerservice.ca/support