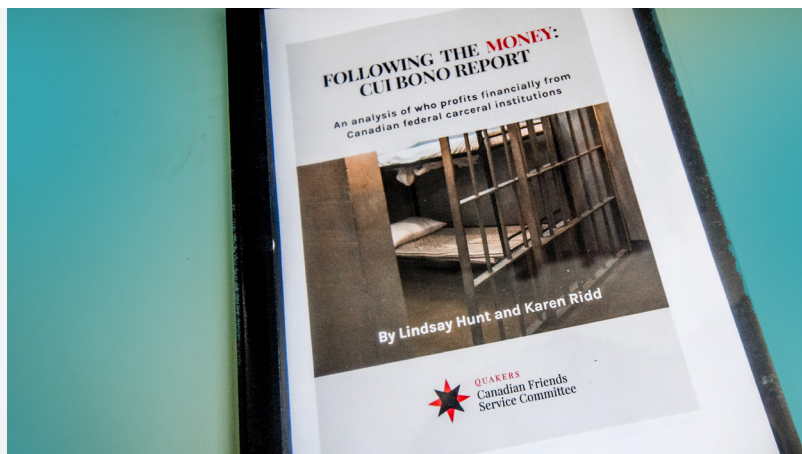


Quaker Concern

Following the money: who profits from Canada's prisons?

By Karen Ridd



One of the ways that CFSC contributes to social change is through researched reports that shine light on issues of injustice. In December, we published *Following the money: cui bono report*. It's an analysis of who benefits financially from Canadian federal carceral institutions. I want to tell you about the report, and about the surprising experience of writing it.

Part one: words a researcher does not want to hear

"Karen, your figures are out. They're out by a lot. About \$1.5 billion."

\$1.5 billion? *Billion*?! So began my conversation with Neil Telles-Langdon, a fellow researcher. It was about a week before the deadline to publish the *Cui bono report*, and just 10 days before my co-author Lindsay Hunt and I were set to present our findings at the National Restorative Justice Symposium. To say that I was horrified is beyond an understatement.

My colleague Lindsay is meticulous. And we'd checked and re-checked our data many times. It was only out of a commitment to make *absolutely* sure that our numbers were accurate that I'd enlisted an outside researcher to go over the data one last time. And he said our figures were way off. Instead of Correctional Services spending \$3.6+ billion on outsourced contracts in 2024, the number was closer to \$2 billion.

How could this be? We were using figures that are

publicly available on the Open Government website (<https://open.canada.ca>). Open Government is set up for transparency. It shows how the government spends taxpayer dollars. Our methodology was simple, and solid. How could we have gone so wrong?

The three of us met to get to the bottom of this. Neil ran the figures again, to show us what he'd found... and he came up with a very different result.

What?! He ran them again: different figures. Lindsay ran them: different again. We enlisted the help of CFSC's Sandra Wiens. Another different outcome. We now had seven different figures, sometimes within minutes.

"The carceral system doesn't rehabilitate, it doesn't make us safer, and it enriches private corporations."

In short, the problem was not us, or our research. The problem was that, while promising transparency, the Open Government website actually gives wildly varying numbers.

Where is the accountability? Repeated efforts via phone and email to find someone in government who could provide an explanation came up empty-handed. Unfortunately, it seems that "Open Government" might more accurately be called "Misleading Government."

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Our latest resources

We've put out many new resources since our last issue of *Quaker Concern*:

- Indigenous Peoples' human rights joint statements from the UN in Geneva: <https://QuakerService.ca/EMRIP2025>
- Joint statement from multiple Quaker agencies calling for immediate action to end genocide in Gaza: <https://QuakerService.ca/GazaGenocide>
- Submission with our peace and social justice priorities in advance of Canada's budget: <https://QuakerService.ca/Aug2025Budget> and our review of the budget after it came out: <https://QuakerService.ca/Budget2025>
- Inspiring short podcast on the perseverance and partnership that led to the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*: <https://QuakerService.ca/UNDeclarationPodcast>
- Pro-vax vs. anti-vax: a story about disagreeing better: <https://QuakerService.ca/VaxStory> (this story is a bonus video to close our series of tips for better conflicts and disagreements: <https://QuakerService.ca/Tips>).
- The latest report on what Quakers across Canada are doing to advance truth and reconciliation: <https://QuakerService.ca/ReconciliationReport2023>
- A statement on the astonishing amount Canada is spending on its military: <https://QuakerService.ca/MilitarySpending>
- A statement on the need for Canada to show more peacebuilding leadership: <https://QuakerService.ca/PeacebuildingLeadership>
- A joint call for more careful consultations on Canada's artificial intelligence strategy: <https://QuakerService.ca/AIConsultation>
- CFSC's Annual accountability report for 2025: <https://Report.QuakerService.ca>

Newest posts for Psychology Today

- **Does your rage change the world?** This post looks at evidence about the relationship between anger and social change activism.
- **Feeling unheard? Here's how to bridge gaps in everyday chats** This post discusses some of the ways that conversations can get muddled and how to hear each other.

<https://QuakerService.ca/PsychologyToday>

Take action

There are several opportunities to write to elected officials today, if so led. These including calling on Canada to: follow its legal obligations and stop exporting arms to human rights abusers (yes, this is still happening), investigate Canadian complicity with the genocide in Gaza and begin to bring accountability, and support a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI) and a Prince Edward Island demonstration project for GLBI.

For more information on each of these topics, plus possible wording for your letter, see:

<https://QuakerService.ca/TakeAction>

All year long we're sharing new weekly episodes of Lisa explaining what life is actually like in prison and in an Indigenous Healing Lodge: <https://QuakerService.ca/Unshackled>



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. Contact us to switch to a digital subscription.

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Canada needs a museum to promote peace by Chris Houston

Over the past year, we've partnered with the Canadian Peace Museum, with the dream of seeing it opened to the public. The museum will increase peace education opportunities for everyday people, contributing to CFSC's long-term goal of educating about how peace needs to be continually built. The museum will also bring increased awareness of nonviolent methods as viable alternatives to war. The following reflections are from the Museum's Executive Director, Chris Houston.

We're living through what Uppsala University has described as "a historically high number of [violent] conflicts."¹ In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. taught that peace means not only an absence of war or fear but "the presence of justice."² Since then, peace scholars have continued to define positive peace. It includes human health, democracy, equitable and inclusive communities, and good relations with neighbours.

Many compounding factors drive the increasing global levels of violent conflict. The climate crisis raises demand for resources, putting groups in tension and driving more forcible displacement. Increasing wealth inequality, misinformation, and failing systems are enabling and fueling rising authoritarianism, including in the United States. Canada dropped five places in the Global Peace Index in 2025, ranking joint 14th. There has also been an increase in hate crimes and prevalence of xenophobia and anti-refugee sentiment in Canada.

Museums represent a powerful way to get information to people. Most people don't consider newspapers to be reliable. Only 33% find television credible. Yet, 86% of people in Canada trust museums.³ In times of decreasing trust in institutions, professionally run museums are a rare opportunity to influence positive change. In a hectic world filled with attempts to summarise complexity in one-sentence soundbites, people need museums to help them navigate nuance.

Our responsibilities at the Canadian Peace Museum are to help people understand what drives conflict and what drives peace. We want people to see the links between social justice and peace. We also need to help people understand what they can do to make a more peaceful Canada and a more peaceful world.

The museum is a registered charity that's currently fundraising to refurbish and fully staff our operations. Thanks to the generosity of our local community, there's an 8,000 square foot building in Bancroft,

Ontario that we fully own. The gift of this two-level building on 1.4 acres of land means we have passed the biggest milestone in the launch of the museum.

Our contracted team has a wealth of experience designing and managing museums on almost every continent. Our exhibits will centre peacemaking, environmentalism, and fair and equal societies. We will highlight the positive and negative contributions that Canada has made to peacefulness. We will inform people about the thousands of years of groups finding ways to resolve differences, peacefully coexist, and collaborate on Turtle Island and elsewhere.

We have a wide range of objects related to local and global peacemaking. Our collection includes hundreds of newspapers and books, as well as artefacts from organizations such as the UN Refugee Agency, PeaceWomen Across the Globe, and Canada Post.

The cost of fully renovating our building to museum standards may take years to fundraise, so we'll most likely open the space in phases as funding allows. Currently we're frugally using the funds we have to renovate some of the lower floor.

While not yet functional as a museum, our site already hosts a community food garden. Local nonprofit groups use our building for events and storing food. We host our own events, including our annual *Stories of peace* award ceremony.

The majority of our board are people with lived experiences relevant to the museum. Our advisory board includes people with strong links to museums, humanitarianism, ethics, and academia. We've also benefited from the advice of countless people in the peace movement, and the International Network of Peace Museums.

We're proud of, and grateful for, the support of CFSC. That support includes advice, plus financial support towards the cost of setting up the museum.



Chris Houston is the co-founder and Executive Director of the Canadian Peace Museum.

Chris is a newspaper columnist, and faculty at the University of Toronto's Global Health Education Initiative. You can learn more at

CanadianPeaceMuseum.ca. For footnotes from this article read it online at QuakerConcern.ca

The power of coalition: recent webinar on Indigenous Peoples' human rights

By Jeremy Vander Hoek



Advancing Implementation

Have you ever tried to learn more about a complicated subject, only to find yourself stuck? When we turn to social media or web searches, we might be pointed to the angriest voices, not because their information is accurate, but because it's attention grabbing. A search for information on Indigenous Peoples' human rights is like this. It can easily lead to misinformation. It can present human rights as a zero-sum competition, where when one group has their rights respected, another group must lose out. This is false. Respect for the human rights of one group helps safeguard the human rights of all.

We've found working together with partners to be one of the best ways to address misinformation. That's why, decades ago, we helped found the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Coalition). The relationships we've developed in the Coalition sustain our work. They strengthen not only our research and learning, but also our advocacy. They allow us to share perspectives and expertise directly with policy makers and the public.

One of our recent projects serves as an excellent example of the value of this collaboration. In November we hosted a webinar with the Coalition entitled *Advancing implementation: The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada today*.

Implementation is the process by which Indigenous Peoples practice their rights, and by which Canada fulfills the commitments in the *Declaration*. For as long as Indigenous Peoples have existed, they've been exercising their inherent rights. Canada has much catching up to do. In 2021, it made the bold proclamation that it would commit to implementation of the *Declaration* through legislation. The *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* became law.

As you can imagine, this is a complicated subject. It can be confusing. Yet we were able to host nearly 100 attendees eager to learn more. Our webinar panel gave an account for why implementation is important, and how it has been going since the passage of the Act.

Kenneth Deer of the Haudenosaunee External Relations Committee shared first. He started with the inspiring story of Chief Deskaheh of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Over a century ago, Chief Deskaheh went to Geneva to advocate for his nation at the newly formed League of Nations. Despite being denied entry, he demonstrated perseverance and tenacity in the face of oppression. He represents just one example of how Indigenous Peoples have participated in international diplomacy for generations. The story Kenneth shared grounded our conversation. The *Declaration* is not a new human rights agreement that gives anyone special rights. It's part of a long history of Indigenous Peoples advocating for what they've always known they deserve—the same rights as all other Peoples.

Chief Francis of the Tsilhqot'in National Government shared an excellent example of this. He explained his Nation's victory in court. Indigenous Nations, like all other Nations, have collectively governed land for generations. This case was the first in Canada where the government recognized Aboriginal title held by the Nation to that traditional territory. Chief Francis also spoke more broadly about the importance of inherent land rights elaborated by the *Declaration*. The agreement his Nation signed with Taseko Mines Ltd. is an example of how implementation, and the protection of land rights, are possible.

Next, legal scholar and professor Naiomi Metallic offered her expertise on the *Declaration*. She pointed

Continued on next pg

to the ways in which Canada's courts are increasingly citing the *Declaration* in their decisions. Some judges have recognized that because of the 2021 legislation, the *Declaration* is now part of Canada's positive law. In other words, this international *Declaration* has become the law of the land in Canada. Her conclusion is that the courts are creating more space for the use of international law and Indigenous law, and for their coexistence with Canadian law. This inclusion benefits us all.

Professor Sheryl Lightfoot continued the conversation with an overview of the global cooperation that continues to thrive between Indigenous Peoples around the world. Her role as the North America member of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) gives her a unique vantage point. She shared numerous examples of how implementation of the *Declaration* is moving forward globally, despite remaining challenges. Sheryl concluded by celebrating the important work of the international Indigenous networks that helped draft the *Declaration* and continue to sustain implementation around the world today.

“Respect for human rights for one group helps safeguard the human rights of all.”

Finally, Grand Chief Edward John expressed his admiration for the *Declaration*, pointing out that it articulates both rights and responsibilities. Article 25 is the example he highlighted. It states that, “Indigenous Peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their lands, territories, waters... and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.” He explained that these distinctive relationships come from Indigenous Peoples' teachings. His Nation's teachings repeatedly emphasize his People's responsibility to all things and to each other. Human rights are both a way to protect his spirituality and a call to action to advocate for future generations.

This webinar wouldn't have been possible without our moderator, Lea Nicholas Mackenzie. Her guidance through the conversation drew connections between each of the panelists and provided clarity on a complicated topic. Her opening remarks summarized the webinar excellently. She reminded us that the

Declaration represents a great achievement for Indigenous Peoples' human rights—not only as a tool for advocacy, but also as an articulation of the rights Indigenous Peoples have always had. She also challenged us to keep our focus on the implementation of these rights. As each of the panelists noted, implementation is the fundamental next step that Canada must continue to strive for.

This article is just a quick summary of a much richer conversation. I'd encourage you to watch the webinar:

<https://QuakerService.ca/AdvancingImplementation>



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

A note from CFSC's General Secretary

Recently, more and more people have been telling me their desire to avoid the news. It's a sentiment I can understand. Images of violence and oppression are everywhere. For some, this can be immobilizing. Last week, my friend and colleague Jane Orion Smith reminded me, “Well, as the General Secretary of Service Committee, you don't have that option.” She's quite right.

Watching videos of Buddhist monks on a *Walk for peace* that has garnered a great deal of attention lately, I found myself deeply moved. They showed such commitment to their task. And the faces of people who lined the streets to see them pass looked moved too.

Later, I stumbled across a Maya Angelou quote, “My wish for you is that you continue. Continue to be who and how you are, to astonish a mean world with your acts of kindness. Continue to allow humour to lighten the burden of your tender heart.”

The world indeed is mean. Acts of kindness are needed on all sorts of levels. CFSC's website QuakerService.ca shares many resources in all of our program areas offering suggestions for engagement. And have a look at the monks: <https://dhammacetiya.com/category/activities/walk-for-peace>

Jennifer Preston is CFSC's General Secretary.

Moreover, if we hadn't caught this problem, someone might, in the future, have pointed out that our data was incorrect and used that to invalidate our conclusions, without realizing that it was the government dataset that's the issue, not the research.

Fortunately, Lindsay had saved our original dataset, and we could go ahead with publishing our findings. You can access the full report at <https://QuakerService.ca/CuiBonoReport> (now including an appendix addressing the issue of a lack of government transparency in spending).

Part two: the findings

In a capitalist society, many decisions are driven by the goal of increasing profit margins. Although in Canada the carceral system is a public one (unlike in the United States, where some prisons are privatized), many of the services that our prisons and jails rely on have been privatized.

The goal of CFSC's transformative justice work is to enact the Quaker commitment to penal and prison abolition by "moving the needle" nationally towards transformative justice. At CFSC we're aware that we need a range of approaches to reach people. We try to keep in mind common human values identified by Shalom Schwartz (<https://QuakerService.ca/values>). Consequently, one argument that we decided might reach people who are less convinced by humanitarian ideals is to critique the carceral system through a lens of fiscal responsibility. We decided to research and analyze cui bono or who benefits (financially) from incarcerating people in Canada.

To do this, we looked for data on government expenditures. Provincial data is not readily available, so we focused on federal contracts. The federal government is required to publish the names of recipients, and the amounts of money paid out in contracts over \$10,000. (This is the data that's supposed to be available on the Open Canada website.)

Our research shows big international corporations benefitting from these contracts. One of the largest recipients is McKesson Corporation—a U.S.-based company that provides prisons with medical equipment and pharmaceuticals. The \$215 million-worth that Correctional Services Canada receives is concerning.

Firstly, McKesson is the subject of various lawsuits for its role in the opioid epidemic. Secondly, there is significant evidence of people being overmedicated while behind bars (to keep them docile), a practice that can lead people to develop addictions while inside. (Watch an eye-opening four-minute video from our series *Unshackled: wisdom from a formerly incarcerated woman* where Lisa talks about overmedication in prisons: <https://QuakerService.ca/Overmedication>)

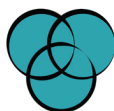
And of course, being a foreign corporation means that the profits McKesson makes are taken outside of the country, plus the corporation is unlikely to have much stake in any improvements to the justice system, or any real concern about the wellbeing of people incarcerated, or the society they will return to.

“Many of the services that our prisons and jails rely on have been privatized.”

Another beneficiary of Canadian government largesse is the Bird construction company. While Bird is at least Canadian, their knowledge and expertise could be put to better use than building prisons. Additionally, the construction of carceral spaces relies heavily on concrete, which is environmentally problematic and contributes to global warming through the production of carbon dioxide.

McKesson and Bird are just two of the corporations that benefit from government spending—to the detriment of community wellbeing and transformative change. We invite you to read the whole report, where you will also learn about prison food systems, the lack of oversight of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, and the price-gouging that incarcerated people and their families experience when trying to use phones and technology.

While Quakers might argue that the current carceral system disrespects the Inner Light of people caught up in it, it is also clear that the current system is an expensive, ineffective waste of taxpayer dollars. The system doesn't rehabilitate, it doesn't make us safer, and it enriches private corporations.



Karen Ridd is CFSC's Transformative Justice Program Coordinator.

In November 2025 I went to the Hassan Diab Support Committee's public event, *Seeking justice for Hassan Diab: almost 20 years of violated human rights*. CFSC has long supported Hassan (<https://QuakerService.ca/HassanDiab>) and continues to ask that the Government of Canada refuse any second extradition request from France. At this event I was able to meet Hassan, his family, and the community that supports him. It was a hopeful evening full of nourishing food, information, and most of all—caring. Caring for Hassan and his family as well as caring for justice and human rights.

The Support Committee invited Alex Neve (CBC Massey Lecturer and former Amnesty International Canada Secretary General) and Donald Bayne (Hassan's lawyer) as guest speakers. On the heels of speaking dates across Canada for the Massey Lecture series, Alex remarked on the connection between universal human rights and the precarity Hassan faces.

In 2023 French courts disregarded evidence of his innocence and convicted him *in absentia*, using intelligence that would not be admissible in Canada. This marks 17 years and counting for Hassan and his family, living with uncertainty and being denied the universal rights that we are *all* supposed to have. His family continues to live in a prolonged state of limbo and distress.

Donald Bayne clarified the current situation, identifying that while it should be a justice issue independent of politics, Hassan's case can be characterised by two problems: one legal, one political.

The legal problem is the reality of extradition in Canada. Unlike a court case that has an outcome and finishes, an extradition case has no finality. It can come up again and again, as has occurred with Hassan. Also, while Canada allows the extradition of its citizens, France does not. This is something that could be changed through long-needed reforms to Canada's *Extradition act*.

The political problem is one that should not exist, as politicians should not direct an independent process. Yet Hassan's case has become politicised. The evidence in the case has been ignored for emotional and political ends. His experience is best described, then, as relentless persecution. While currently Hassan remains in limbo, a change in the Canadian government is all it

would take to reactivate the case and cause a possible negative outcome, depending on the party in power.

That's a frustrating and deeply unjust reality for Hassan and his family. However, hope was present throughout the night. Care linked everyone there—and that gives me hope. Hope that support for Hassan will remain resilient and tenacious in the face of injustice. Hope that leaders in government will not allow an extradition of Hassan again.

Human rights belong to all of us collectively: to take them, use them, protect them, and—by extension—to protect each other. The responsibility to uphold human rights is ours, and it seems that failures to do so over the past decades are being felt now. Have we abdicated to our governments our responsibility for human rights? I think it has become clear that too many of us have, and by doing so, Canadians have not activated our rights but rather softened their power. Hassan Diab's case is one such example of this failure. But I am hopeful that people are also standing up for and protecting human rights. Every way that we do that matters.

As the support committee states:

It is time for Canada to take a principled stand. The government must unequivocally reject any future extradition of Hassan Diab and reaffirm its commitment to justice, human rights, and the protection of its citizens from wrongful persecution.

If you feel led to support Hassan Diab you can take the following actions:

- Visit <https://JusticeForHassanDiab.org> to join the postcard campaign urging Canada to refuse any future extradition request and reform the *Extradition act*. Email diabsupport@gmail.com to request that postcards be mailed to you (for free!).
- Send a letter to Minister of Justice Sean Fraser, to urge him to refuse any future extradition request and put an end—once and for all—to this ongoing miscarriage of justice:
<https://iclmg.ca/support-diab>



Sandra Wiens is CFSC's Government Relations Representative.



JENNIFER PRESTON AND JEREMY VANDER **Hoek** travelled to Ottawa in June to meet with members of the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Coalition was able to do significant planning for the *Advancing implementation* webinar and an upcoming symposium on the impact of important recent court decisions.

Jeremy and Jennifer then met with members of the Global Indigenous Rights Research Network in Toronto, visioning and strategic planning for the network over the next several years. It was an exciting time for all to reflect on what we have learned in previous research engagements and how we can implement this learning in future projects.

Jeremy visited Yonge Street Monthly Meeting to hear about the work of their Peace and Social Action Committee. He heard impressive stories about the relationships Friends had developed with local Indigenous Peoples to advance reconciliation and shared about the topic of paying reparations.

Jennifer presented about the history

of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* to students of Environmental Law at Concordia.

SANDRA WIENS PRESENTED ON CFSC'S WORK on Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI) in Canada at a Friendly Economics meeting hosted by Swiss Friends. She participated in *Lobby days on the hill* together with partners. Advocates met with more than 20 Members of Parliament and with Senators, helping them to understand how a GLBI demonstration project in PEI could advance economic equality by collecting the data required to implement a GLBI across Canada.

Sandra joined CUPE and Canadian Voice of Women for Peace to give a presentation: *\$150 billion on the military? Canada's reckless plan to increase military spending*. The session discussed what such a massive increase looks like and the need to redefine security as spending not on war, but on peace, people, and the planet.

CFSC was a sponsor of the *National restorative justice symposium* in November. Sandra was also able to

inform participants about *Bill S-236*, an amendment on the *Victims bills of rights*. This change will ensure that those who experience a crime are informed of all their options, which includes restorative justice. **Karen Ridd, Lindsay Hunt, and Lisa Bowden** also presented at the Symposium.

KAREN SPOKE ABOUT TRANSFORMATIVE justice at two Winnipeg churches. She also showed episodes of CFSC's new *Unshackled* series, which brings forward the voice of Lisa, who has lived experience of incarceration.

Karen is currently teaching an *Advanced transformative justice* course at Canadian Mennonite University and has used CFSC-created resources as required reading. In addition to the *Unshackled* series, Master's-level students are reading CFSC's *Cui bono* report and all students are using a draft of a soon-to-be-released compendium of alternatives to policing. The students in this class also spent a powerful two hours with Lisa, who taught them beading and reflected on her experiences inside carceral institutions and her ideas for transformative change.