



Indigenous involvement necessary in responses to police violence

June 23, 2020

Two weeks ago, Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), the peace and justice arm of Quakers in Canada, released a joint statement (<https://quakerservice.ca/racism>) in response to the death of George Floyd in the United States and the subsequent public actions to speak out for the critical need to address systemic racism.

Today, we state our ongoing and deepening concern in light of multiple recent reports of assaults and killings of Indigenous people in Canada at the hands of police. CFSC is horrified and heartbroken over the police killings of Chantel Moore in Edmundston, and Rodney Levi near Miramichi, over the span of 8 days. In recent months there have also been killings of Indigenous youth by Winnipeg police. Videos have emerged recently of beatings of Indigenous people by police in Fort MacMurray, Winnipeg, and Kinngait, Nunavut.

The two New Brunswick killings have been referred to Quebec's Bureau des enquêtes indépendantes, which investigates cases where civilians are seriously injured or killed in police operations. However, it remains unclear whether Indigenous people will be included in this review. Wolastoq Grand Council chief and elder Ron Tremblay has called for an Indigenous-led investigation. A second elder, Wolastoqey culture and language teacher Imelda Perley, said about the police investigations to the CBC, "I don't like things done about us without us."

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms Indigenous peoples' right of self-determination. Canada supports the *UN Declaration* without qualification. Indigenous peoples' human rights must be respected, including their involvement in such reviews and also in the national dialogue to address decolonization and systemic racism in policing and other institutions.

We acknowledge both Prime Minister Trudeau's and New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs' expressions of deep sadness at the New Brunswick deaths and the clear naming of the existence of systemic racism in Canada. Premier Higgs has met with Chiefs to discuss the issue and future meetings are scheduled. It is critical that Indigenous recommendations with regard to how to move forward are supported. It is egregious that a motion in Parliament last week that acknowledged systemic racism in policing and proposed immediate actions to address violence did not succeed. This reminds all of us of the depth of work before us.

CFSC strongly urges federal, provincial, and territorial governments to work with Indigenous peoples in fully responding to all these acts of extreme aggression including death. Canada, as a modern-day settler state, must own responsibility for the ongoing harms caused by racism and colonialism. We remain committed to the challenging work of decolonization, which includes vigorously opposing racism irrespective of whom it targets. The long-term action required to decolonize and abolish racism targeted at Indigenous people will contribute to overcoming all racism, since no one will be free from the threat of racism until all are freed from it.