

**Report on KAIROS Elements of Justice Intergenerational Gathering,
Held October 24 - 27, 2013
North Vancouver Outdoor School - Squamish Nation Territory, BC**

By Ruth Walmsley (Vancouver Monthly Meeting)

KAIROS is a Canadian ecumenical justice initiative comprised of 11 church groups, including the Religious Society of Friends. I was fortunate to be able to attend the KAIROS Elements of Justice Intergenerational Gathering last October, which I found to be a very rich and inspiring experience. My participation in the Gathering was enabled by a CFSC Individual Grant.

Approximately 125 people participated, including a large percentage of youth and aboriginal people, from every part of Canada, as well as a guest from a refugee camp in Kenya. While there were only two Quakers in attendance (myself and Maxine Kaufman-Lacusta, also of Vancouver), many of the other KAIROS member churches were represented, including United, Anglican, Presbyterian, Mennonite Central Committee, Lutheran and Catholic.

The theme “Elements of Justice” drew inspiration from the basic elements of earth, water, air and fire, and the fact that the health and integrity of these building blocks of nature are under siege, threatened by governments and corporations; by undemocratic laws and destructive, unsustainable economic practices.¹ Representatives from the Squamish Nation welcomed us to the site, which was located in the heart of 400+ acres of pristine rain-forest, along the banks of the Cheakamus River - teeming with spawning Chum salmon - and giant red cedars, some as old as 2000 years!

One of the primary objectives of the gathering was to build alliances between Euro-Christian and Indigenous peoples in order to build more effective movements for social and environmental justice. One of the keynote speakers, Sylvia McAdam, a Cree lawyer who teaches law and human justice at U of SK, spoke to us about how the Conservative Government’s Omnibus Bill 45 inspired her, along with three other women, to found the Idle No More movement exactly one year ago. She showed a 15 minute video: Aaron Huey: America’s native prisoners of war http://www.ted.com/talks/aaron_huey.html which documents the experience of the Lakota people living on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, which she described as “ground zero of native issues”. She commented that “when you steal, when you dispossess a people of their land, you create poverty. It is not our fault.”

Sylvia shared what she called the “hidden history” of the “Sugar Beet Policy” in the Canadian prairie provinces. Three generations of her family were what were known as “Grab-a-hoe” indians, forced to work in the beet fields for almost no pay. From five years of age she was forced to work in the beet fields, never completing even one year of elementary school. Her people were subjected to chemical sprays from

airplanes which caused their skin to peel. Interestingly, Sylvia, her parents and grandparents (with the exception of one grandfather), were “hidden children”, who escaped being sent to residential school.

Sylvia left us with the following recommendations for moving forward:

- Remove the Indian Act
- Restore the 3 elements of Nationhood: Land, Language, Culture
- Honour Treaties, Indigenous sovereignty - the right to self-determination
- Education in support of decolonization, anti-racism, anti-oppression
- DO NOT BE SILENT
- Re-tell to story of Turtle Island - remove the “veil of innocence”
- Support <http://www.idlenomore.ca>

Another keynote speaker was Caleb Behn, a First Nations law student who is raising awareness about the epidemic of hydraulic fracturing taking place on his ancestral Dene Fort Nelson territory in Northeastern BC. Caleb invited and challenged the churches to truly stand in solidarity with 1st Nations peoples, particularly around water issues, which he described as “the unified war-cry of our times”. Filmmakers Fiona Rayher and Damien Gillis are producing a film about Caleb and Fracking called Fractured Land <http://fracturedland.com/the-film/>

Brenda Sayers, a member of the Hupacasath 1st Nation on Vancouver Island, shared with us the story of how her people came to take the Conservative government to court to challenge the Canada-China Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (CC-FIPA) - a reckless investor deal that would expose Canada to unlimited risk from costly lawsuits in secretive tribunals and undermine the rights of our democratically elected governments for the next 31 years! ⁱⁱ In August 2013, the Federal Court of Canada dismissed the application by the Hupacasath 1st Nation for a review of CC-FIPA, and charged the band \$110,000 for legal fees. The Hupacasath have agreed to appeal the judge’s ruling but must raise \$90,000 to move forward. Please see <https://leadnow.netdonor.net/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1694&ea.campaign.id=19897&ea.tracking.id=donate-single> for information on how to contribute to their legal fund. It is imperative that KAIROS member churches do everything possible to get the word out about the importance of financially supporting the Hupacasath in moving forward with their appeal and hopefully taking it to the Supreme Court of Canada - this small First Nation from Vancouver Island may be all that is standing between Canada and CC-FIPA!

We heard from Cameron Gray, a youth organizer with Leadnow.ca, an independent youth-driven, social-media oriented advocacy organization working to build a stronger democracy that protects our environment, creates economic opportunity while increasing equality, and guarantees that everyone receives the care they need. ⁱⁱⁱ He spoke to us about using social media to do story-based campaigning and messaging.

He commented that transformation and social change is effected by a change in narrative; who has the right to speak? Social media gives people across the world the means to communicate and speak out publicly. He emphasized that messages must be combined with an ACTION that brings people together.

We also heard from various other youth - indigenous and non-indigenous - about using art to tell stories which support the movement toward social and environmental justice.

On a personal note, I found it very inspiring to be in community for 4 days with this amazing group of hopeful, faith-based people, who share not only my passion for social and environmental justice, but also a deep sense of the sacredness and inter-connectedness of all creation.

The group I am most involved with in my daily life is BROKE-Burnaby Residents Opposing Kinder Morgan Expansion,^{iv} which is not a faith-based group. This presents me with an opportunity to continually stay grounded in an awareness of the core values I bring to this work as a Quaker and person of faith, and to share them within my group and beyond. I connected with many other people, some in my region, who are all working toward similar goals.

ⁱ <http://www.kairoscanada.org/get-involved/elements-of-justice/>

ⁱⁱ <https://leadnow.netdonor.net/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1694&ea.campaign.id=19897&ea.tracking.id=donate-single>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://leadnow.ca>

^{iv} <http://burnabypipelinewatch.ca>