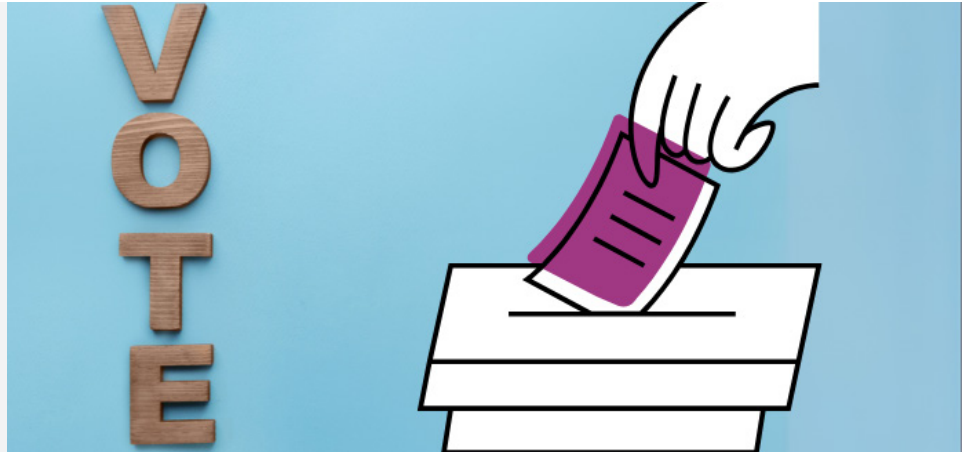


# Quaker Concern

## Bringing peace into politics: why Canada's next government should adopt a peace lens

By Mel Burns



As the Canadian federal election approaches, we're offered a crucial opportunity to rethink not only the outcomes of our political system but also the lens through which we shape public policy. At a time of growing social division, global insecurity, and domestic challenges, many Canadians are looking for leadership rooted in something deeper than partisanship. That is why we call on our next government to adopt a peace lens.

This call is not as idealistic as it might first appear. Canada already applies a specialized lens—Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)—to assess how policies affect different groups of people. GBA+ encourages decision-makers to consider gender and other intersecting identity factors (such as age, race, ability, and income) to support inclusive and equitable outcomes. This analytical tool has become a standard part of government planning, ensuring no policy is created in a vacuum. It's time to build on that progress by adopting a peace lens, which complements and expands on the ethical intent of GBA+ with a focus on fostering a culture of peace across all levels of society.

### What is a peace lens?

A peace lens would ask: does this policy foster peace—within individuals, among communities, and in our institutions? It would guide decision-makers to consider how proposed laws and programs affect not only physical security but also emotional wellbeing,

interpersonal relationships, and the structures that govern our society.

Canadian Friends Service Committee offers a powerful definition of peace that can serve as a foundation for this lens. We believe peace flows through three interconnected levels:

1. Inner peace—attitudes, beliefs, and habits conducive to peace.
2. Interpersonal peace—peace in interactions with other people.
3. Structural peace—political and social structures that support peace.

A peace lens would incorporate these three levels into a holistic framework for policy analysis. It would prioritize long-term wellbeing, restorative practices, and harm prevention, over reactive or punitive approaches. Much like GBA+, it would not be a rigid formula but a way of thinking that promotes conscious, compassionate governance.

### Why now?

This proposal comes at a time when the world desperately needs more peace-oriented leadership. The climate crisis demands global cooperation, not competition. Polarization, both political and social, is fraying the fabric of our communities. The rise in hate crimes, mental health challenges, and public

*Continued on pg 6*



## 2025 federal election kit

This issue of *Quaker Concern* is all about Canada's federal election happening later this month. We hope this special issue will inspire you to ask peace and social justice questions of candidates seeking election. You can find our full nine-page election kit at: <https://QuakerService.ca/Election>

## Statement on US-Canada trade war

The US has initiated a trade war with Canada. It's very unclear what the ultimate plans of the US administration are. The deep uncertainty that Canadians are facing—whether to interpret rhetoric about annexation as a US negotiation tactic or a deeper threat—is resulting in a range of feelings and experiences such as fear, anger, and betrayal.

At Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers), we are clear that, as in all wars, this situation will create mostly losers. It will cause great suffering to almost all while further enriching a very few.

We call for continued relationship building with the US. We urge dialogue and diplomacy. We support acts of compassion—a form of bravery that resists simple narratives and refrains from demonizing the other side or distancing from them. We acknowledge with thanks and hold in the Light all those in the US who are practicing noncooperation and otherwise protesting this trade war and other harmful government policies.

We are disturbed by the voices we hear within Canada loudly proclaiming the need to strengthen the military as a means of defence against invasion. Such thinking is not surprising given the militarism that pervades every aspect of Canadian culture from film and video games to history textbooks. This thinking is completely unrealistic, outdated, and dangerous.

As we've explained elsewhere, civilian-based defence and related techniques of active nonviolence are viable ways for nations to defend themselves. They don't require killing. We urge Canadians to learn more about active nonviolence.

We urge Canada to engage in nonviolent resistance focused on justice and peace. Rather than just

pointing fingers at the US, we join with the many voices calling the federal and provincial governments to use this as a moment to reflect on Canadian policies.

In this challenging moment, Canada can reassess, change course, and build more equitable, environmentally sustainable, and resilient economies that don't leave people behind. Canada can use the urgent need to reduce dependency on US trade as an opportunity to prioritize investments in human rights and social justice.

Keep reading this statement and our four proposed actions: <https://QuakerService.ca/TradeWar>

## You're not just you: how others shape your true self

You might be used to thinking about yourself as someone you control, or as someone whose unique way of being human you have to discover. Our newest post for *Psychology Today* explores these two ways of understanding ourselves. It then offers a third way that may be more counter-intuitive. It shares findings about how we're deeply interconnected with each other and don't think, believe, or act in isolation. At a time of growing societal division and distrust, rediscovering our mutuality matters!

<https://QuakerService.ca/TrueSelf>

## 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 the work described here possible. CFSC issues tax receipts for donations over \$10.

Read current and past issues online at [QuakerConcern.ca](http://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](mailto:Info@QuakerService.ca)

🌐 [QuakerService.ca](http://QuakerService.ca)

📱 [@CFSCQuakers](https://www.facebook.com/CFSCQuakers)

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# Genocide via jail cells: the injustice of Indigenous mass incarceration in Canada

By Karen Ridd



Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge for women. Photo: Correctional Service Canada / Service Correctionnel Canada

Not only are Indigenous people massively over-represented in the Canadian carceral system, they're also more likely to be kept in maximum security. People are classified as candidates for maximum security depending on three factors:

1. Do they pose a high risk to public safety?
2. Are they a high risk to escape?
3. How much supervision or control do they require in the institution?

If an incarcerated person is considered high for factors one and two or for factor three, they're kept in maximum security. This means that there are people being kept in maximum security not because they're a risk to the public, nor because they're at risk to escape, but simply because they're "hard to manage."

It's important to unpack this. Correctional officers are told explicitly that an incarcerated person should be rated high on factor three (and kept in maximum security) if:

1. "The inmate displays special needs or sociocultural factors indicating a requirement for special intervention on an ongoing basis (Indigenous inmate, woman inmate, etc.)"
2. For Indigenous offenders, Correctional Officers are instructed to "provide an analysis of their history of mental health concerns, suicidal ideations, and/or self injury within the context of their Indigenous social history."

It's clearly a violation of human rights to use gender and/or Indigeneity as "proof" that someone should be imprisoned under more rigorous conditions. It is unjust to use an Indigenous person's social history against

them. A social history is supposed to acknowledge the harms of colonialism and be used to mitigate against harsh treatment.

Moreover, there is significant proof that keeping someone in maximum security compounds the trauma of incarceration, leading to the very behaviours (self-harm, suicidal ideation, etc.) that then keep them under maximum security. This vicious circle makes it virtually impossible for Indigenous people who are incarcerated to get out of maximum security.

## What is the impact of maximum security?

A profound impact of being kept in maximum security is its effect on mental health. In 2020 Health Canada estimated that 73% of men and 79% of women who were federally incarcerated met the criteria for one or more current mental disorders.

Additionally, being in maximum security reduces one's likelihood of achieving parole. If a person is not paroled, then they're released at the end of their full sentence. This means that there is no graduated entry into society, no support upon release, and therefore a greater risk of recidivism. An Indigenous person kept in maximum also has less chance to spend time at a Healing Lodge.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* affirms that Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination (Article 3), and the "right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, **legal**, economic, social, and cultural institutions." (Article 5, emphasis added). One way that this right to respond to harm and wrongdoing through Indigenous-led justice-making is manifested in Canada is via Healing Lodges.

Continued on next pg

## *Genocide via jail cells* continued

### Healing Lodges

In Canada there are ten Healing Lodges—six run by Indigenous Peoples and four run by Correctional Services Canada, in prisons. The six Lodges run by Indigenous Peoples receive 1/3 of the total government funding set aside for Lodges, while the other four receive 2/3!

Correctional Services Canada limits access to Healing Lodges to people with “minimum security” designation (or occasionally, for women, medium). Given the extreme over-incarceration of Indigenous people in maximum security, this means that few have the opportunity to serve time at a Lodge. Indeed, only 2% of Indigenous people behind bars are currently serving sentences at Indigenous-run Healing Lodges. This is a woeful under-utilization of a powerful alternative to traditional incarceration. It’s also a cynical avoidance of Indigenous rights.

**“It’s clearly a violation of human rights to use gender and/or Indigeneity as ‘proof’ that someone should be imprisoned under more rigorous conditions.”**

### How did we get here?

It is well accepted, now, that Canadian governments have used a variety of methods in an attempt to enact genocide on Indigenous Peoples. The extermination of the bison, broken treaties, forced relocation to reserves, the Wolseley Expedition’s “Reign of Terror” against the Red River Metis nation, Indian Residential Schools, the 60s Scoop, the Millennial Scoop, and now mass incarceration: these are all manifestations of a similar, horrifying trajectory.

Vicki Chartrand, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Manitoba, traces this lineage clearly, writing that, “From the 1830s into the 1960s, the rates of Indigenous incarceration in the penitentiaries remained low, averaging from 1% to 8% of the prison population...” but that, “The penitentiary silently displaced reserves and residential schools... With penal advances and expansion acting in tandem with the receding of formal colonization practices, the prison took over as the new expression of colonialism.” Prisons are the new Residential Schools.

Canadian Friends Service Committee opposes the

ongoing colonial injustices that the Canadian carceral system inflicts on Indigenous Peoples. We therefore invite you to raise these important issues to your candidates during this election season, calling for politicians to work to undo these racial injustices, and to increase support for Indigenous-led justice-making.

### Questions for candidates in the election

Canadians are incarcerated at unequal rates. According to Justice Canada, 9% of people incarcerated federally Canada are Black, and 33% are Indigenous. Black people make up 4% of Canada’s population, and Indigenous people are 5%. What would your government do to address the conditions in both the Canadian legal system and broader society that lead to these disturbing statistics?

*Call to Action 31* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Final Report* urges Canadian governments to “...provide realistic alternatives to imprisonment for Aboriginal offenders and respond to the underlying causes of offending.” Healing Lodges provide an alternative that has proven to be highly effective. But Correctional Services of Canada has been reluctant to send people to Healing Lodges, so they are significantly underused. If you and your government were to be elected, what would you do to fix this problem?



**Karen Ridd** is CFSC’s Transformative Justice Program Coordinator. For the notes to this article read it online at [QuakerConcern.ca](https://www.quakerconcern.ca)

## *Economic turmoil and a federal election: what’s next for Canada?* by Sandra Wiens

**T**he 2025 federal election is well underway with voting day coming up on Monday, April 28<sup>th</sup>. It’s been a chaotic several months. The US-initiated trade war, threats of annexation, and the election in Canada all happening so quickly initially alarmed me. But after reflection, I also see that an election and a new government in Canada presents an opportunity. Together we can question the status quo and centre priorities that are good for all.

With inequality, cost of living, and poverty rising at alarming rates, now is a great time to question candidates and their political parties on these pressing issues. With tariffs, the trade war, and looming job losses, income security for people in Canada should be of utmost importance in this election.

*Continued on next pg*

## *Economic turmoil* continued

### **What is GLBI?**

Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI), would offer cash payments to people who earn less than a set threshold. As people earn more, payments would be gradually reduced until they were no longer needed. GLBI would be available (or guaranteed!) to any Canadian, but only if their income fell below the threshold. This would address poverty in a practical way, allowing people to have enough income to live with security and dignity.

**“The richest 0.02% of Canadians now posses more wealth than the bottom 80%... Given the wealth that exists in Canada, poverty seems to be a policy choice.”**

### **Why is this important now?**

I think it has escaped no one that we're experiencing hardships in Canada, and they aren't being felt equally. We're in what people call a polycrisis—multiple crises at the same time with cumulative effects that worsen each other: cost of living and income inequality, housing affordability and homelessness, food insecurity and stress, and more. According to StatsCan, income inequality is at the highest level ever recorded. Wealth is being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Oxfam Canada found that the richest 0.02% of Canadians now posses more wealth than the bottom 80%! No, that shocking number is not a typo.

In January a groundbreaking report detailed that 80,000 people experienced homelessness in Ontario last year. Indigenous people represent almost half. This is a systemic failure that goes far beyond housing. Food insecurity is also on the rise. More than a quarter of households in Nova Scotia, PEI, and Saskatchewan are food insecure. The growing cost of living, inflation, and economic uncertainty all contribute to this.

Food insecurity is an indicator of bigger problems. If households are compromising on food, it's likely they're doing so on other essentials. The problem is so acute that in the past six months, three cities (Kingston, Mississauga, and Toronto) have declared states of emergency related to food insecurity. This is an issue too big for food banks to solve. We need political will to acknowledge the real drivers of the problem and implement coherent policy proposals.

Given the wealth that exists in Canada, poverty seems to be a policy choice that has been allowed to go on for too long. More than ever, many Canadians are just a paycheck or two away from falling into poverty—with no safety net to catch them. Can you imagine a time when you or some you love could have had a better experience if they'd had access to a GLBI?

### **GLBI as the solution?**

Yes and no. GLBI is not a panacea or the solution to these many structural problems. But it can provide a foundation to create greater equity. Money not only helps provide for our needs, but having sufficient amounts mitigates worry—especially amongst those who are more vulnerable. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health estimates that mental illness and mental health problems cost the Canadian economy over \$50 billion each year in healthcare, lost productivity, and reduction in health-related quality of life. Government investments in mental health today mean a substantial savings in the future.

Policies and programs—including cash transfers—that help alleviate poverty introduced during an individual's childhood have the greatest capacity to improve mental health outcomes. A recent report explains that poverty is one direct and immediate cause of mental health problems. Addressing poverty, it explains, is “not only imperative on moral and human rights grounds, but on the basis of cost and efficiency as well.”

### **What will you do?**

Troublingly, the major party platforms have already indicated that fiscal restraint and austerity is on the horizon. And they promise new funds to dramatically increase military spending. These dollars will have to come from somewhere, and often this means cuts that affect the services that many of us rely on.

If you can, vote! We also encourage you to reflect on the issues that matter most to you and to engage with your neighbours, Friends, community, candidates, and the party leaders. Let them know what you want to see from our elected representatives. Accountability only comes from society holding our leaders responsible for the promises they make today, and every day after the election.

**Sandra Wiens** is CFSC's Government Relations Representative in Ottawa. For the notes to this article read it online at [QuakerConcern.ca](https://www.quakerconcern.ca)

## *Bringing peace into politics* continued from pg 1

distrust of institutions is not coincidental—it's symptomatic of systems that fail to understand positive peace.

Canada is well-positioned to take on this challenge. With a strong international reputation for diplomacy, peacekeeping, and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, we have values (in theory) that must now be applied more consistently and intentionally in practice.

We live on land initially shaped by Indigenous worldviews that, like the Quaker perspective, emphasize interconnectedness, balance, and relational responsibility. Embracing a peace lens would be an act of alignment with these teachings and not an imposition of something new.

### **Policy implications of a peace lens**

- **Justice reform:** A peace lens would move us toward restorative justice practices that focus on healing rather than punishment. Instead of expanding prisons, we would invest in community supports that prevent harm and rebuild trust.
- **Foreign policy:** Our diplomatic efforts would be measured not just by trade deals or military alliances but by contributions to global peacebuilding, disarmament, and climate justice.
- **Education:** Curricula would include social-emotional learning, conflict resolution, and the skills of dialogue. Students would be equipped with peaceful habits of heart and mind.
- **Housing and income:** Recognizing that economic insecurity fuels stress, conflict, and instability, policies would prioritize adequate housing, living wages, and the reduction of inequality—all essential for structural peace.
- **Reconciliation:** A peace lens would affirm that true reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples isn't a box to check. It's an ongoing process of building relationships through truth, equity, and mutuality.

### **A Quaker perspective: Spirit-led peacemaking**

Quakers have long advocated for peace, not as a vague ideal but as a spiritual and practical commitment. Friends believe that through the grounded inner life of the individual—through listening, reflection, and discernment—flows a commitment to peace in all interactions and systems. This approach aligns with CFSC's understanding of a culture of peace and counterbalances the cynicism that often pervades

political discourse. A peace lens rooted in this worldview invites us to see the humanity in others, to practice nonviolence, and to build systems that nourish the common good.

Adopting a peace lens would not require every Canadian to become a Quaker—but it would draw from a rich tradition that sees peace not as passive or utopian, but as active and urgent.

### **Making peace a ballot box issue**

In this election, voters can demand more from their leaders. We can ask our candidates:

1. Are nonviolent strategies for addressing conflict adequately emphasized and resourced within Canada? How can we do more?
2. How will you integrate the lessons of GBA+ and extend them through a peace lens?

These are not abstract questions. They're about the world we want to live in. Peace isn't the absence of conflict. It's the presence of justice, empathy, and right relationship. By making peace an explicit priority in policy development, Canada has the opportunity to lead by example, both at home and abroad.



**Mel Burns** is CFSC's Peace Program Coordinator.

## *Speaking truth and reconciliation to power this election* by Jeremy Vander Hoek

**P**inciple nine of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report *What We Have Learned* states: "Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources." On the eve of an election, voters have a unique chance to urge Canada to live into this principle. We have the power and the opportunity to build political will and advocate for the investment of resources referred to.

Consider the Indigenous Peoples whose territory you live on. Look at their websites, social media, and other networks. What are their policy priorities? How might you bring these to the candidates running in your riding? At the end of this article, I'll pose some general questions you can ask.

*Continued on next pg*

### **Truth and reconciliation Calls to Action**

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions' *Final Report* and 94 *Calls to Action*. This anniversary is a unique opportunity to highlight these *Calls*. When was the last time you looked at them? Now is a great time to become familiar (or familiar again). Choose one or two to investigate. They're a powerful lens through which to reflect on the platforms of the parties seeking election.

If you're not sure where to start, look at *Calls* 2, 9, 19, and 30. These are sometimes dubbed the four "legacy *Calls*." They advocate bold action to address the legacy of colonial inequality in child welfare, education, health, and justice.

### **Calls to Justice**

It's also been six years since the *Final Report* of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which includes *Calls to Justice*. The Assembly of First Nations' recent *Progress Report* urges action on these *Calls*. We can be part of the push for real change here, especially during an election.

Read through the *Calls to Justice* and consider how you might ask your candidates about them. *Call* 4.5 is for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI) to address the links between poverty and violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. You can read more about GLBI on our website and in Sandra's article.

### **Missing children and unmarked graves**

In 2021 media coverage led many Canadians to learn for the first time about unmarked graves at former residential schools—an issue that Indigenous Peoples have known about for decades. A report was released in the fall, aimed at ensuring the respectful and culturally appropriate treatment of unmarked graves and burial sites of children at former residential schools. Rather than make recommendations, the report identified legal, moral, and ethical obligations, many directed at the federal government.

CFSC has joined with partners from other churches to explore how we can advocate on these obligations. We're focused on confronting residential school denial. Denial isn't always rejecting the existence of residential schools. It can also include denying the violence and harm that occurred within the system. How would the candidates in your riding confront this denial?

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

Did you know that Canada has an *Action Plan* on the *UN Declaration*? The plan was released in 2023 as part of Canada's *UN Declaration* legislation. Alongside Indigenous partners, an action item we advocate on is the creation of an Indigenous Peoples' human rights monitoring mechanism.

Monitoring mechanisms hold governments to account. Their role is to monitor the activities of the government to ensure that Canada is upholding human rights. In this case, the mechanism could hear cases of Indigenous rights violations and work to stop, remedy, and prevent them. As stated in the action item, this mechanism must be properly funded and led by Indigenous Peoples. How does the *UN Declaration* fit in your candidates' party platform as an essential framework for reconciliation in Canada?

### **Other questions to ask candidates**

1. Given the lack of progress on implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action*, if elected, how will you and your government prioritize fulfilling the *Calls*, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples?
2. If elected, through what concrete means would you and your government recommit to the full implementation of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' *Calls to Justice*? Which *Calls* will you prioritize?
3. If elected, how would you and your government take meaningful steps to act on the obligations set out in the report of the Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites Associated with Indian Residential Schools? How would you ensure these obligations are enacted in accordance with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Indigenous law, and international human rights and criminal law?
4. If elected, what steps would you and your government take to establish and fund an independent Indigenous rights monitoring, oversight, recourse, or remedy mechanism in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples and in accordance with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* action plan?



**Jeremy Vander Hoek** is CFSC's Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator. For the notes to this article read it online at [QuakerConcern.ca](https://www.quakerconcern.ca)

# Friends on the move



**JEREMY VANDER HOEK HAS BEEN PROMOTED** to the role of Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator. This move will allow long-time program staff person **Jennifer Preston** to move more fully into the role of General Secretary. We congratulate Jenn on taking a step back from (most) of the Indigenous rights program work after more than 25 years and we congratulate Jeremy on his new role!

Jeremy and other staff have also been hosting a free online monthly discussion group about Guaranteed Livable Basic Income (GLBI). The discussion group gives attendees the chance to chat, share stories, and ask questions about GLBI to each other and to CFSC staff. You can find out details and join the next discussion group in May by visiting our website.

**MEL BURNS, CFSC'S PEACE PROGRAM** Coordinator, hosted an online discussion session with Quaker Meetings across Canada to learn about their peace and social justice work and explore connections and ways to work together. Mel continues to offer peace education workshops in St. Stephen, New Brunswick and is

now making this available as a wider opportunity for groups interested in a given peace topic. For a list of the half-day workshops available to your group visit

<https://QuakerService.ca/Peace>

**COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR MATTHEW Legge** was on *The Last Show* with David Cooper on AM radio (and available by podcast) to discuss a blog post he wrote for *Psychology Today*. He also gave a presentation and facilitated a listening practice exercise online for the Global Compassion Coalition. Hundreds signed up and participants joined from multiple countries.

**TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM** Coordinator Karen Ridd gave a presentation on restorative justice to the Canadian Council of Churches. She also touched on similar themes in a presentation at Bathurst Street United Church in Toronto.

**SANDRA WIENS, CFSC'S GOVERNMENT** Relations Representative, presented to Toronto Monthly Meeting about GLBI, housing, and digital access and technologies.

Sandra and Jeremy also helped host an event with the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the University of Ottawa. Coalition members, embassy representatives from several countries, and other attendees gathered to watch a special advanced screening of Katsi'tsakwas Ellen Gabriel's documentary, *Deskaheh Levi General: The Quest For Justice*. After the screening attendees participated in an in-depth discussion on Indigenous international diplomacy.

Are you tired of all the stuff?  
Ask your loved ones to support justice and peace instead of buying a present for your next birthday. Tell them to give to CFSC.



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