



KAIROS Week of Action

OCTOBER 10-17, 2010

The Land, Our Life: Indigenous Rights and Our Common Future

God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."

Then God said, "I've given you every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth and every kind of fruit-bearing tree, given them to you for food. To all animals and all birds, everything that moves and breathes, I give whatever grows out of the ground for food."

Genesis 1:26, 29-30. Translation: The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language

The Land is Our Life

Out of its immense richness, the Earth feeds and sustains all that lives upon and within it. Humans, though, dig deep in search of wealth. We remove mountaintops for coal, turn ponds and lakes near gold mines into toxic dumps, drill the ocean bed for oil that we cannot contain once it starts to flow, and rip up miles of boreal forest to obtain bitumen that we turn into usable oil.

Resource extraction creates wealth and provides jobs. Oil and mining companies help build schools, hospitals, and community centres. But what are the costs? And are the decisions about these projects always made as responsibly and well as we would hope?

One huge concern is the impact on local ecosystems, and the people who depend on them for their living in ways beyond extracting mineral wealth. Fishers in the Gulf of Mexico fear for their livelihoods in the wake of the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion. In Nigeria, farm fields and fishponds have been polluted and rendered useless by leaking oil pipelines. Food security, or as it is being increasingly understood, particularly by Indigenous peoples, food sovereignty, is threatened.

According to Via Campesina, a global movement of those who depend on the land, food sovereignty is "the RIGHT of peoples, countries, and state unions to define their agricultural and food policy Food sovereignty organizes food production and consumption according to the needs of local communities, giving priority to production for local consumption." While food sovereignty is most closely linked with the struggle against free trade, seed commodification, and agricultural dumping, it is also clearly affected by resource extraction.

The Land Under Threat

In Canada, Indigenous peoples' foodways are threatened by oil



SARA STRATTON

Suncor tar sands plant on the banks of the Athabasca River.

and gas exploration. The Alberta community of Fort Chipewyan, which benefits from the tar sands, has expressed serious concerns about and is seeking full and open scientific studies on the industry's impacts on water, fish and wildlife. The community told a 2009 delegation of church leaders that many were afraid to eat game and fish which looks and tastes different than it did before the expansion of tar sands production. Elders from Fort McKay, which is much closer to Fort McMurray, spoke of the industry's physical encroachment on their traplines.

The tar sands industry points out that only 20% of available bitumen is mined, and that the rest will be removed via *in situ* extraction. Touted as being much more environmentally responsible than mining, *in situ* extraction still raises many



questions. Some of these apply to its potential effects on the aquifer that sits underneath the boreal forest, but others involve the impact of physical infrastructure such as wellheads and pipelines on the migratory patterns of wildlife, on which Indigenous people depend for food and income. This is a well-documented issue with conventional oil exploration, something that Alberta's Lubicon Cree know well. 17-year-old Dawn Seesequon recently related:

My grandmother and mother have a trap line of their own on which they go hunting and snaring but it is rare that they will bring any rabbits, moose, deer, prairie chickens, or even bears back home...With all these roads, semis, loud machinery, and cutting down of the forests, wildlife has been scared. This has affected our way of life. Simply because our tradition is to hunt and bring home moose meat, chicken, and rabbit for the family to feast on and to make moose and squirrel hide to sell and get money in exchange.

How will the tar sands affect wildlife? KAIROS staff crossed over a trapline enroute to an *in situ* tar sands plant, and could not help but reflect on the experience of the Lubicon and what might lie ahead for that trapline's owner.

The impact of the tar sands is not just limited to the immediate area. *In situ* extraction depends on massive quantities of natural gas, piped in from the Arctic. The end product will be carried to ports in northern BC, en route to a final Asian destination, via a pipeline that crosses the traditional territory of several First Nations.

The Gitga'at, centred in Hartley Bay, have expressed concern about the industry's impact on their food supplies. Their territory includes a coastline rich in sealife, upon which they depend for food. Ha'eis Clare Hill of the Gitga'at recently told *New Internationalist* magazine that his people rely on the sea for "salmon, clams, cockles, halibut, seaweed — those are huge parts of our diet. We have local food at least five or six times a week." And, he says, this would all be threatened by the supertankers that will dock on the coast to load up oil for transport to China:

It's so huge, I can't even think about it. Food-wise it would be horrendous. The ships will create huge waves, taking away the sands on the shore so our clam beds and all the shellfish will be affected. Ballast dumping will mean invasive plants. It will scare off the whales. And that's even before there's an accident.

Even the alternatives to fossil fuels can threaten food sovereignty, and Indigenous peoples' right to make decisions about their own territories. Efforts to "offset" the greenhouse gas impacts of our extraction of and reliance on fossil fuels include the construction, often on Indigenous lands, of large-scale renewable energy projects such as wind farms and African palm plantations, massive hydro-electric dams, or huge mono-crop plantations of trees to act as carbon sinks for greenhouse gases. These activities also undermine efforts to meet the Millennium Development



Ivonne Yanez of Accion Ecologica talks to a community member about oil exploration in Pitayacu, Ecuador.

Goals of eradicating poverty and extreme hunger, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

Naty Atz Sunc of KAIROS partner CEIBA in Guatemala says of such projects: "We are two times victims of climate change. We're victims of the actual impacts of climate change and victims of the 'solutions' to climate change." These projects are not true alternatives to our dependence of fossil fuels. They are being implemented in the same way as any other resource extraction mega-project: without consultation. And the impacts are the same: displacement of Indigenous communities and threatened livelihoods.

Restoring Right Relations

Why is this a question for us? Because, as we are reminded in the passage from Genesis, the Earth was created with enough for all, and as human beings, we were given the responsibility to participate in the care of all creation. Yet our actions can have the opposite result and in fact work against God's vision that all be fed. We must be mindful of such teachings at this time of year, when we mark International Food Day. We must be mindful also of God's commandment, lived out through Jesus' ministry, to participate in an equal sharing of wealth and to treat each other with justice — what in some Indigenous traditions is known as right relations.

One way to begin to live in right relationship is to enter in covenant with each other. Globally, we have done this with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, arrived at in 1948. In 2007, after more than 20 years of discussions and consultations, the United Nations also recognized the particular suffering of the world's 370 million Indigenous people who are among the world's poorest, most marginalized, and most vulnerable. The UN's adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was one step in the recognition of Indigenous peoples' right to determine their own future, and to protect the land on which they depend for their livelihoods and well-being.

Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand all voted against the Declaration, although Australia and New Zealand have since endorsed it. In the March 3, 2010 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada signaled that it would move towards endorsement of the Declaration "in a manner fully consistent with Canada's Constitution and laws." This has yet to happen, despite the opinion of more than 100 legal scholars and constitutional experts that the Declaration "is consistent

with the Canadian Constitution and Charter and is profoundly important for fulfilling their promise." At a time when Canada, through the 2008 Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools and the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, seeks to rebuild its relationship with Indigenous peoples, one concrete step forward would be to endorse and implement, without conditions, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

WHAT DOES THE UNDRIP SAY ABOUT INDIGENOUS RIGHTS, RESOURCE EXTRACTION, AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY?

Article 20:1 "Indigenous peoples have the right ... to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities."

Article 26:2 "Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired."

Article 29:1 "Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination."

Article 32:1 "Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources."

Article 32:2 "States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources."

This year, KAIROS invites you and your church to join us on Canada's continuing journey towards right relationship with Indigenous peoples, taking the time to reflect on these relationships and to see how we can begin to rebuild them. We hope that you will engage in public witness to ensure that Canada understands and endorses the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Most importantly, we hope that all of us will seek the Declaration's full implementation in our life as a nation.

What Can You Do?

Participate in the KAIROS Campaign for 2010-2011: **The Land, Our Life: Indigenous Rights and Our Common Future.** Major events include:

OCTOBER 16 (WORLD FOOD DAY): Make the issues highlighted in this resource the focus of your church service on October 10 (also Thanksgiving Sunday) or October 17.

- Copy and use the bulletin insert provided on p.4 of this resource.
- Reflect on the stories and issues highlighted here in your sermon or homily.
- Circulate the KAIROS petition calling on Canada to endorse and implement the UNDRIP (included in this resource and available on the KAIROS website). Ask folks to circulate the petitions in their communities as well.

DECEMBER 5: Join KAIROS in a Day of Drumming for Indigenous Rights. Perhaps you joined us in ringing your bells for climate justice last December ... this year, signal your church community's commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by hosting public drumming at your church after the service. More info and a way to sign up will be available on the KAIROS website!

JUNE: Nationwide Community Action on Indigenous Rights! Check your email and the KAIROS website for information on a national community-based event we're planning to coincide with the presentation of the KAIROS petition. We will be inviting your participation in activities beginning in January 2011, leading to a high point in June. You can participate no matter where you live!

ALL YEAR LONG: Learn More About Indigenous Rights and the Impacts of Resource Extraction. Visit the KAIROS website to download or order the following resources, and use them to hold an event in your church:

- **Connecting the Drops** — Video account of the 2009 KAIROS Church Leaders' delegation to the Athabasca tar sands. With footage from flyovers of the projects, time in the community of Fort Chipewyan, and reflections from participants. DVD, 20 minutes. \$5.00.
- **In Peace and Friendship: A New Relationship with Aboriginal Peoples** — a series of workshops that you can conduct in your own church or community. \$14.00.
- **Indigenous Peoples and Oil and Gas Development: Respecting Rights, Minimizing Risks, Maximizing Benefits** — Policy Briefing Paper, 12 pp, free: <http://www.kairoscanada.org/fileadmin/fe/files/PDF/Publications/PolicyBriefing18-09-10-25-IndigenousOilGas.pdf>

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The Land, Our Life: Indigenous Rights and Our Common Future OCTOBER 10-17, 2010

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives is a church-based social justice movement encouraging faithful ecumenical response to the call to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Our members deliberate and take action on issues of common concern, such as Indigenous rights and ecological sustainability.

These issues are deeply connected. Here in Canada and in countries like Nigeria and Guatemala, oil and valuable minerals are mined on Indigenous lands, creating jobs and wealth but also damaging local ecosystems. In some cases, peoples’ ability to feed themselves from the land is compromised. And in many cases, the affected communities believe that they have not been properly consulted and did not consent to the development of their lands.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007, enshrines the right of Indigenous peoples to make decisions about the development and use of their lands, and the resources within them. Canada and the United States, alone in the international community, continue to oppose the Declaration, although the U.S. is reconsidering its position and the government of Canada has recently said it would move towards endorsement. Now, as Canada has formally apologized for the residential schools system and launched the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, one concrete step in rebuilding relations with Indigenous peoples would be the unconditional endorsement and implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This year, KAIROS invites you and your church to join us on Canada’s continuing journey towards right relationship with Indigenous peoples, taking the time to reflect on these relationships and to see how we can begin to rebuild them. We invite your participation in our campaign for 2010-2011: *The Land, Our Life: Indigenous Rights and Our Common Future*. Please visit www.kairoscanada.org to find out how you can participate.

OPENING PRAYER

Creator God,
from you every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.
You have rooted and grounded us in your covenant love,
and empowered us by your Spirit to speak the truth in love,
and to walk in your way towards justice and wholeness.
Mercifully grant that your people,
journeying together in partnership,
may be strengthened and guided to help one another
grow into the full stature of Christ,
who is our light and our life.
Amen.

(Anglican Council of Indigenous People)

CLOSING PRAYER

We believe that creation is a gift of God,
an expression of our creator’s goodness.
We believe that we are part of this creation,
called to be good stewards of God’s earth.
We believe that the resources of our
land, waters and air are precious gifts
to be cherished and shared.
We believe that there is a rhythm to God’s creation;
when we ignore the beat, we damage the earth.
We believe that we are called to care for each other;
when we are out of tune with our neighbour,
we lose the song in our heart.
We believe that God’s grace abounds
and that we can work together to make all things new.
Amen.

(CAFOD/Annabel Shilson-Thomas; adapted from Affirmation of Faith of the Pacific Women’s Consultation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation)

OCTOBER 16
WORLD FOOD DAY

THE LAND, OUR LIFE: INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND OUR COMMON FUTURE
WWW.KAIROSCANADA.ORG