

REFLOATING THE CANOE: A KAIROS STATEMENT ON TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION CALL TO ACTION 48

Gitxsan hereditary chief Ray Jones, Co-Chair of the KAIROS Indigenous Rights Circle and Indigenous representative on the Board of KAIROS, offers the metaphor from his language of "refloating" or "righting the canoe" as an image for Canada's work towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. This image is both hope and challenge for us, a compelling picture of what we strive towards as real possibility for a shared future.

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives is eleven churches and religious organizations working together for ecological justice and human rights. We stand in the rich legacy of ecumenical justice coalitions, including Project North and the Aboriginal Rights Coalition, whose commitment to the rights of Indigenous Peoples stretches back over forty years. We come together as a collective public voice and as a movement of people of faith and conscience across the country. We are Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in shared commitment to right relations.

Invited by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) to transform our relationships, we reflect on our journey with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, a journey linked to three commitments: principles, advocacy, and relationships.

Principles

The churches that today are united as KAIROS saw the First Ministers' constitutional conferences on Aboriginal and Treaty rights as a *kairos*ⁱ moment - a time to address injustices, recognize rights, and "establish a new covenant with Indigenous people in Canada." The churches' historic 1987 *A New Covenant* pastoral statement was built on the same principles, norms and standards as the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which was developed with Indigenous Peoples over a more than 20 year process and adopted by the United Nations in 2007.

In *A New Covenant*, the churches acknowledged that prior to the arrival of Europeans, self-governing and self-reliant Indigenous nations and cultures had thrived in what we now call Canada. Through that statement, the churches recognized Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination, the right to be distinct peoples, and the right to a land base that enabled not only the development of a sustainable economy, but languages and cultures as well. *A New Covenant*, and the ecumenical work that led to its adoption,



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Canadian Catholic Organization for
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Canadian Conference of
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Canadian Religious Conference
Christian Reformed Church in
North America (Canada Corporation)
Evangelical Lutheran Church
in Canada
Mennonite Central Committee
Canada
The Presbyterian Church in Canada
The Primate's World Relief and
Development Fund
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
The United Church of Canada

Membres

Assemblée annuelle canadienne
de la Société religieuse des Amis
Conférence des évêques
catholiques du Canada
Comité Central Mennonite Canada
Conférence religieuse canadienne
Développement et Paix
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au Canada
L'Église presbytérienne au Canada
L'Église réformée chrétienne en
Amérique du Nord
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L'Église Unie du Canada

Le fonds du Primate pour le secours
et le développement mondial

310 Dupont Street, Suite 200
Toronto Ontario
Canada M5R 1V9
tel: 416.463.5312
toll-free: 1.877.403.8933
fax: 416.463.5569
www.kairoscanada.org

mark for us the beginning of KAIROS' commitment to the principles, norms and standards of the *UN Declaration*, a commitment that continues today.

Advocacy

Through campaigns and education, partnerships and political advocacy, KAIROS and its precursor coalitions have urged governments, in Canada and around the world, to realize the rights affirmed in the *UN Declaration*. This includes campaigns on land rights, Treaties, equity in child welfare and education, protection for Indigenous women and girls, and the critical standard of free, prior and informed consent. A number of KAIROS member churches worked actively with Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations to see the *UN Declaration* adopted. Once adopted by the UN General Assembly, KAIROS advocated for its endorsement by Canada, including through a mass campaign. Launched in September 2010, that campaign led up to *Roll with the Declaration*, a cross country art, education and action initiative with banners depicting commitment to the *UN Declaration* that were created in churches and communities and were linked together on Parliament Hill in common witness on June 20, 2011. Our commitment to advocacy to see the *UN Declaration* implemented continues today.

Relationships

Committing to key principles and a program of advocacy is important, but it is also what we say and what we do in relation to each other that reveals who we are. KAIROS' long commitment to justice for Indigenous Peoples has changed from working for to working with Indigenous Peoples, and includes the challenge of resetting our own relationships within the KAIROS community. This faithful task is not complete. It will be a long journey. But we are committed to unlearn and relearn, to shift power, and to change ways of working until we better embody the nation-to-nation relationships to which our principles and advocacy attest. We strive to show common cause with Indigenous Peoples all over the world, including through our relationship with global partners. We have taken steps across the organization to better embrace self-determination in our strategic directions and decisions. We make mistakes. We strive to learn. We deepen relationships. And, we keep going.

An important recent step involves exploring the question of Indigenous representation on the Board of KAIROS. Currently, the Board has welcomed two Indigenous representatives from the KAIROS Indigenous Rights Circle to be present at Board meetings. This is one of several initiatives we are taking as we consider together the meaning of resetting the relationship, a commitment that continues today.

In June 2015, with the release of the 94 Calls to Action, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada presented Canada's churches and religious organizations in

KAIROS with another *kairos* moment. By urging us, in Call to Action 48, to comply with and implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the TRC affirmed the decades of work done and provided the encouragement to continue working together towards right relations. We welcome the hope and challenge issued by the TRC and we covenant, in humility and gracious hope, to continue our contribution to righting and refloating our shared canoe.

On behalf of the KAIROS Board and KAIROS Indigenous Rights Circle:

Joanne Jefferson, Co-Chair, KAIROS Indigenous Rights Circle

Ray Jones, Co-Chair, KAIROS Indigenous Rights Circle and Indigenous Representative, Board of KAIROS

Rev. Desmond Jagger-Parsons, Chair of the Board of KAIROS

Pamela Peters-Pries, Vice-Chair of the Board of KAIROS

ⁱ *Kairos* is a word from ancient Greek meaning “a propitious moment for decision or action.” It stands in contrast to the word *chronos* which is usually understood as ordinary time. For Christians, *kairos* is often interpreted as being “in God’s time”.