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KAIROS Canada* Submission to the Arctic Policy Framework Consultation Process

February 28, 2018

Churches and faith communities have been as complicit in environmentally-harmful practices as other sectors of society. But history also demonstrates the power of religion to foster worldviews that guide people to new social, political and cultural alignments. ... we seek to engage the transformative power of faith in promoting the social, economic, cultural and behavioral transformations required to confront the challenge of climate change and to achieve sustainability in practice.

-Final message of the World Council of Churches Conference on Just Peace with Earth, Iceland, 19 October 2017

Canadian churches' perspectives on a new Arctic Policy Framework

Believing that the ecological crisis has spiritual roots, and witnessing the Arctic warming at twice the global average rate while its peoples continue to struggle with economic and social problems, Canadian churches and ecumenical movements are engaging with Indigenous peoples and religious leaders in Canada and circumpolar Arctic countries to understand and act on the crisis.

Some of the co-signers of this written submission participated in the NGO roundtable in Ottawa on February 7, 2017. We are all members of KAIROS and faith and civil society networks that hold an urgent concern about the impact of climate change on the peoples and the environment of the Arctic regions in Canada.

In order to speak to the themes identified in consultations on the new Arctic Policy Framework, we draw on –

- An historic and contemporary church presence in the Arctic. For example, there are more than 30 growing Anglican parishes across the vastness of several provinces and territories. Roman Catholic



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and Moravian church missions and parishes add to that number. We simultaneously mourn the destructive impact of colonialism manifested in residential schools and in other ways and recognize the enduring wisdom of Indigenous Peoples who have a deep and longstanding traditional knowledge of their ancestral homelands.

- A commitment to Indigenous rights as contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration is considered "the framework for reconciliation" by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Public statements by individual church denominations committed to community-controlled healing and reconciliation, in dialogue with Indigenous leaders and youth. The TRC 94 Calls to Action include all Indigenous peoples in Canada. At the same time, churches have made statements urgently calling on all to care for the whole of God's creation in this time of climate crisis and disproportionate impact on the poor.

Perspectives on Arctic Policy Framework themes

Six themes are identified in the Arctic Policy Framework consultation. We wish to emphasize the following points within those themes as reflected in the NGO roundtable held on February 7 in Ottawa and further elaborated upon in this written submission.

- Comprehensive Arctic infrastructure

Arctic peoples identify sea ice as a critical component of Arctic infrastructure.¹ As sea ice disappears and its quality and reliability are

¹ Arctic Policy Framework NGO roundtable participant, Ottawa, February 7, 2018.



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compromised, steps must be taken to mitigate the disappearance of this infrastructure that is critical to the whole of life in the Arctic.

Safe and adequate housing integrated with priorities for health and well-being is of high priority for families and communities. The high cost of living causes families living in poverty to make trade-offs between adequate food, housing, and other basic needs resulting in those needs not being adequately met.

A call for a universal service objective for broadband service that includes the Arctic regions. Arctic peoples are at a distinct disadvantage to be able to access resources and contribute perspectives when they are outside of the communications and information systems most of the rest of Canada takes for granted. Also, despite growing tourism, docking facilities and local capacity to accommodate increased tourism requires attention.

We support Indigenous peoples' calls for greater coordination and integration of all infrastructure work and funding from the private sector (especially resource companies) and government.

➤ Strong Arctic people and communities

The disproportionate resource and energy consumption of industrialized and urban centres in Canada and in the world have vastly contributed to climate change. In the process of finding ever newer sources of energy and wealth, Arctic peoples have endured forced relocations, great social and economic disparities, and now encroaching climate change on the land they have inhabited since time immemorial.

However, the limits of this resilience are severely tested. We call on the Government of Canada to invest in healing and mental health services that include wellness measurements identified by Indigenous peoples.

We commit to walk alongside Arctic peoples to acknowledge the spiritual dimensions of climate change on communities and take responsibility to



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encourage Canadian faith communities to ensure that Arctic peoples are not left to fend on their own.

➤ Strong, sustainable and diversified Arctic economies

Long-term economic development in the Canadian Arctic lags far behind that of other circumpolar Arctic countries, according to the Centre for International Governance Innovation.²

The new Arctic Policy Framework will require effective funding so as to establish and sustain economic diversification. Policy changes will be needed to enhance Indigenous training and employment.

We support Indigenous calls for greater participation in economic decisions impacting their lives. This is consistent with church responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action and their endorsement of the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights.

➤ Arctic science and Indigenous knowledge

Scientific inquiry and Traditional Ecological Knowledge belong together. TEK has already provided insight into environmental change, wildlife population monitoring, sustainable harvesting practices, behavioural ecology, ecological relationships and so much more, according to Jesse Popp of Laurentian University.³ "If you're putting a microscope on the Arctic, you must incorporate that traditional knowledge piece," says Caitlyn Baikie from Nunatsiavut, NL.

² Bob Weber, "Development in Canadian Arctic lags behind other northern regions: think tank", Globe and Mail, February 1, 2018.

³ Jesse Popp, "How Indigenous Knowledge Advances Modern Science and Technology," The Conversation, January 2, 2018

<https://theconversation.com/how-indigenous-knowledge-advances-modern-science-and-technology-89351>. Accessed on February 14, 2018.



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Recognizing the inherent wisdom present in Arctic peoples, we urge the Government of Canada to seek out and effectively support northern-led research that can guide and sustain policy and enrich policy making.

➤ Protecting the environment and conserving Arctic biodiversity

The relationship between people and the land in all its biodiversity has existed for millennia. A warming environment has already caused significant changes to migration patterns, habitats, animal health, and thus to human health and wellbeing.

Recently, scientists have discovered that melting permafrost will expose large natural reserves of mercury, a toxic heavy metal that can lead to build up on fish and animals and cause serious health problems in people.⁴

We call for effective financial resourcing to monitor and test the health of human and non-human life as exposure to and threats from mercury and other potential contaminants currently sequestered in the permafrost become imminent.

Canada's water systems are under increasing pressure. As air and water temperatures rise, the Arctic and the rest of Canada are already experiencing greater fluctuations in droughts and floods. "Water is life" – we urge the Arctic Policy Framework to take a comprehensive approach to Canada's water ecosystems.

➤ The Arctic in a global context

On January 1, 2016 the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) officially came into force. According to the UN, "over the

⁴ Craig Welch, "Melting Arctic Permafrost Could Release Tons of Toxic Mercury," Geophysical Research Letters, University of Colorado as reported in National Geographic, February 6, 2018
<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2018/02/melting-arctic-permafrost-toxic-mercury-environment/>. Accessed on February 14, 2018.



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next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.”⁵ As Canada embraces the SDGs and establishes national frameworks to achieve them, we encourage the Government to establish long-term support for Arctic peoples and environment that extends beyond government changes.

We acknowledge concerns that the melting ice means greater global interest, presence and activity in the Arctic and that new policies will be needed to protect Arctic communities and the ecosystems of the Arctic. Inuit peoples have been “flagpoles for Canadian sovereignty”⁶ through forcible removal of communities in the past – steps must be taken so that Indigenous peoples’ rights and security are not sacrificed to global and other interests.

Support must be offered to enable the effective participation of Indigenous Arctic peoples as per the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We recognize the right of Indigenous peoples in the Arctic in their relationship with the government in this new Arctic Policy Framework to be consulted in good faith through their own representative institutions in order to give their free, prior and informed consent before legislative or administrative measures affect them (Article 19).

In conclusion, we offer a concrete recommendation and a vision to animate the new Arctic Policy Framework.

We call for the establishment of a quarterly reference group representing the diversity of Indigenous Arctic peoples. This reference group would

⁵ United Nations, “The Sustainable Development Agenda,” <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/> Accessed on February 22, 2018.

⁶ Deborah Tagornak, Arctic Policy Framework NGO consultation, Ottawa, February 7, 2018.



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provide guidance and ensure a greater level of accountability to the implementation of the new Arctic Policy Framework as it evolves.

Our vision is that the new Arctic Policy Framework will cultivate in Arctic peoples themselves a sense of hope that will contribute to community and individual well-being, inclusion, and justice and equity, and, in the rest of Canada, a true sense of partnership and respect.

Respectfully submitted by,

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, with the leadership of:

- The **Rev. Aigah Attagutsiak**, St. Margaret's Parish, Anglican Diocese of Ottawa
- The **Right Rev. Mark MacDonald**, National Indigenous Anglican Bishop, Anglican Church of Canada
- **Will Postma**, Executive Director, Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, Anglican Church of Canada, KAIROS Canada Steering Committee
- **Deborah Tagornak**, KAIROS Canada Steering Committee
- **Henriette Thompson**, KAIROS Canada Indigenous Rights Circle member

** KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives (KAIROS Canada) unites ten churches and religious organizations in a faithful ecumenical response to the call to "do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). We deliberate on issues of common concern, advocate for social change and join with people of faith and goodwill in action for social transformation.*