

WATER, RIGHTS, RECONCILIATION

***Rights...Who has them?
Who doesn't?***

Reconciliation is the road to action

"Truth, Reconciliation and Education"

Unifor Education Conference

May 11—13, 2018

*In order to understand what reconciliation
could be like, we have to understand the long
and hard journey that brought us here...*

It is incumbent upon all of us to make reconciliation based on recognition work for all. And when we rise to this challenge, and work to turn the page on the darkest of chapters in our country's history, Canada will be all the stronger for it. The stage is now set.

Reconciliation is a process of mending broken relationships.

What will your act of reconciliation be?

Water—the source and sustenance of all life— has become a source of catastrophic conflict and destruction.

Indigenous peoples share an ethos for living in harmony with nature. They take pride in their respect for mother earth and her resources. The capacity of the Indigenous to develop as individuals and as a people is based on the relationship between themselves and the land as well as between one individual and another in their customs and in unwritten laws. When this relationship is destroyed, their identity and continuity as people is threatened, and crisis ensues.

Water is Life

Bodies of water, big and small, sustain life. Fresh water is the most abundant resource given to humankind and other life forms. Water is necessary for the survival of all living organisms on Earth. But now it has become an expensive commodity. Our bodies are made up of about 60% water and we cannot survive more than a few days without it. Still today, clean running water is only a luxury for most Indigenous on Canadian land.

Canada, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, is also one of the most water-rich. Access to sufficient, affordable, and safe drinking water and adequate sanitation is easy for most Canadians. But this is not true for many Indigenous persons. Substandard drinking water on Indigenous land is a historical problem that has not significantly improved with time. The

Clean Running Water is a Luxury

An estimated 20,000 Indigenous people living on reserves across Canada have no access to running water or sewage. In addition, more than 100 water advisories are routinely in effect, with some Indigenous living under advisories for nearly 20 years.

water supplied to many of these communities known as reserves is contaminated, hard to access, or at risk due to faulty treatment systems.

After seven years of listening to powerful testimony from survivors of residential schools across Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report in June 2015. The commission also disseminated its 94 Calls to Action to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation.”

Get out a glass. Turn on the tap. Drink. It’s a simple ritual for most Canadians. But for the nearly half million residents living on reserves, their water may be laced with mercury, arsenic, uranium. Reconciling promises means clean drinking water for all.

The Right to Water

To begin, water is a **basic human right**; it is a prerequisite for realizing all other human rights, including the right to life itself.

Canadians possess a constitutional right to water, a legally enforceable right that is being violated for many Indigenous living on reserves.

The United Nations has declared that water and sanitation are human rights. Yet many Indigenous communities are deprived of their human right to water. Communities lack adequate sanitation, sewage treatment and drinking water services. And many communities face health and economic problems because of industrial exploitation.

Troubled Waters in First Nations Communities

Drinking water quality is strictly governed for most Canadians by provincial, municipal and territorial laws and regulations. The Canadian government regulates water quality for off-reserve communities, but has no binding regulations for water on the Indigenous reserves. Most Canadians do not struggle to enjoy their rights to water and sanitation. In stark contrast, Indigenous Peoples living on reserves experience an astonishingly different reality.

Provisions of safe drinking water for Indigenous living on reserves are managed at the federal level where they are overseen by the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) Department.

There is huge variation in the management of drinking water across Canada, and currently there is no federal legislation on drinking water standards.

Absence of Regulations

A primary contributor to this disregard is the legal discrimination that exists related to the regulation and protection of drinking water for Indigenous reserves. Provincial and territorial regulations governing safe drinking water and sanitation, which operate to protect the health of most Canadian residents, do not extend to Indigenous reserves unless you are a federal worker working on the reserves.

It is not surprising that this unbalanced system of regulations has led to disparate outcomes in access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Compared to other Canadians, Indigenous homes on the reserves are 90 times more likely to be without running water. The

lack of access to safe drinking water has adverse physical and psychological effects. The federal government recognizes that the incidence of waterborne diseases is several times higher in these communities, then in the general population. Adverse health effects associated with inadequate water structure include elevated rates influenza, whooping cough and problems related to skin infections, eczema and psoriasis.

Types of Drinking Water Advisories Include:

Boil Water Advisory (BWA): Issued as a preventative measure when the water in a community's water system is know or suspected to have disease-causing bacteria, viruses or parasites that can cause waterborne illness; or when water quality is questionable and boiling will remove the contaminant from the water.

Do Not Consume (DNC): Issued when a community's water system contains a contaminant, such as a chemical, that cannot be removed from the water by boiling. The water should not be used for: drinking; brushing teeth; cooking; washing fruits and vegetables; making infant formula or other drinks, soups or ice cubes; for bathing infants and toddlers; or for pets. It may continue to be used for domestic purposes such as showering and bathing.

Do Not Use (DNU): Issued when the water system contains contamination that cannot be removed by boiling and consumption of the water poses a health risk; exposure to the water when bathing could cause skin, eye or nose irritation.

Suggested Action for Canadians

Indigenous people's relationship with water demands far more than a simple recognition of a right to use or drink water, and must include respect for our responsibility to make decisions for the preservation of water and its ability to sustain life. The choice to continue to ignore or undermine Indigenous peoples' right to both access and preserve water offers only the certainty of destruction of water and life which depends on it.

On March 22, 2016, (World Water Day), the new Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his government's budget, with significant funds to address failing infrastructure in First Nations communities. Projected \$4.6 billion to be invested in infrastructure over the next five years. Meeting the government's commitment will require a number of measures. Ensuring that Indigenous communities lead the processes and have the tools, money and training needed to operate and maintain systems, and recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach won't address the varying needs of different communities are among the first steps.

Latest news

On January 23, 2018, Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott announced close to 250 additional drinking water systems would be included in its commitment to clean drinking water on reserve.

Recently lifted long-term drinking water advisories

- **Cowessess First Nation, Saskatchewan as of March 22, 2018**
A long-term drinking water advisory has been lifted in the community.
This had been a drinking water advisory since February 15, 2017. The advisory has been lifted following repairs to the system. ISC will continue to work with the First Nation to ensure safe drinking water for the community into the future.
- **Poundmaker, Saskatchewan as of March 20, 2018**
A long-term drinking water advisory has been lifted in the community.
This had been a drinking water advisory since August 19, 2009. The advisory has been lifted as the water provided by the system is considered safe. Another long-term advisory on another public system in a different Poundmaker community was lifted on April 21, 2017.
- **Pauingassi First Nation, Manitoba as of March 15, 2018**
A long-term drinking water advisory has been lifted in the community.
This had been a drinking water advisory since September 24, 2014. The advisory has been lifted following the expansion and upgrading of the public water system.
- **Red Earth Cree Nation, Saskatchewan as of March 2, 2018**

**“HOW CAN THERE BE
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IS ACCEPTABLE?”**

SHOAL LAKE 40
CHIEF ERWIN REDSKY

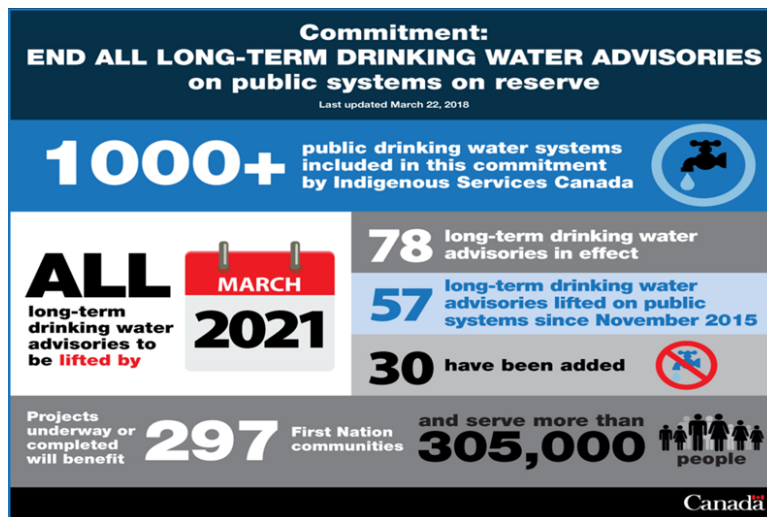
This had been a drinking water advisory since June 2016 and a long-term drinking water advisory since June 2017. The Department continues to work with the community to address their longer-term water needs.

Recently added long-term drinking water advisories

- **Big Grassy River First Nation, Ontario as of March 1, 2018**

This drinking water advisory has been in place for a period exceeding 12 months. ISC is working with the First Nation on an action plan to restore safe drinking water to the community. Lifting the advisory is projected to take place by June 2018.

As of March 28th, 2018



Financial commitment however, will not solve the water crisis alone

It is time to demand redress and correction of the way the government deals with Indigenous People.

Along with infrastructure investments, the government should remedy a range of problems that contribute to the water crisis.

These include:

- the lack of binding regulations on water quality on Indigenous reserves;
- persistent underfunding and arbitrary budgeting for water system costs, including capital, operation and maintenance costs;
- lack of support for household water and water systems;
- worsening conditions of source water; and
- lack of capacity and support for water operators.

The issue is not just one of fundamental human rights, but also one of ecological preservation for all life.

The denial of Indigenous Peoples right to water is a form of racism that attributes the loss of a traditional lifestyle as a benefit of civilization.

Unifor Activists

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) final recommendations are a call to action. Unifor asserts that the government must fully implement all of the recommendations, as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Unifor must continue to build awareness and stand together with indigenous Peoples in protecting the land and water.

Across the country, Unifor Aboriginal workers and Workers of Colour are working in solidarity to raise awareness, agitate and activate for positive change. We must support their efforts and join them in demanding respect and

reconciliation. Our drinking water and wastewater systems belong to us all. Communities, not for-profit corporations, must control water resources and services. Keeping public control of our water services and water resources is the only way to protect the earth and our rights.

Our union’s commitment to the principles of human rights and equality can only be met with the total participation and involvement of our leadership and activists alike.

In a country as wealthy as Canada, we can and we must, fulfil the promise to ensure everyone has clean water no matter where they live.

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#BoilNoMore

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