

June 7th, 2017

To: Boards of Directors, Social Justice Committees, United Church Congregations,
Toronto South East Presbytery

From: West Hill United Church First Nations Study Group, 62 Orchard Pk. Drive,
Toronto, Ontario M1E 3T7

Subject: **Petition to the House of Commons calling the Government of Canada to
correct failures in the Treaty Relationship with Indigenous Peoples**

Greetings,

The First Nations Study Group at West Hill United Church is pleased to report that the Justice and Global Issues Team of Toronto SE Presbytery has decided to co-sponsor the attached petition to the House of Commons calling the Government of Canada to correct certain injustices and failures to honour the treaty relationship with Indigenous Peoples of Canada.

The Team asked our Study Group to write a cover letter with the petition and offer suggestions as to the steps you might take with respect to it. This letter will do that here (see below) but first a few words about the thought behind the petition.

We see the petition as but one of many positive steps the United Church of Canada and Toronto SE Presbytery have taken as part of the healing and reconciliation process with Indigenous Peoples. While we are critical of certain failures of the Government of Canada to honour both the letter and the spirit of the treaties, we acknowledge that the current government has affirmed the principle of a nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples. We do not diminish the importance of that development for it is a positive one, but treaties are made between equals. Equality cannot be expressed just in words but must exist in things Canadians take for granted, such as clean drinking water, safe housing, quality social services, and education. It is not the responsibility of Indigenous Peoples alone to alert the government to its failures to live up the treaties and the obligations they imply; it is also incumbent on everyone in Canada, as treaty people, to call our government to account when our country is not living up to its side of the treaty relationship.

There has never been a better opportunity than now to take such action. If you are in fundamental agreement with us on these points and the petition itself, we would ask you then to consider the following steps.

1. Hold a discussion and vote to co-sponsor the petition and notify the Justice and Global Issues Team and the West Hill First Nations Study Group of your decision;
2. Within your congregation and networks of friends, gather signatures and return the signed petitions to the First Nations Study Group at West Hill United Church, 62 Orchard Pk. Drive, Toronto, Ontario M1E 3T7;
3. Write your Member of Parliament to request a meeting on the issues raised in the petition and urge him or her to ask the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs to provide specifics on immediate actions to address them;
4. Develop a petition of your own if you prefer to address these issues in your own way. (See Petitions at the House of Commons website for the rules.)
5. Take steps to connect with Indigenous People in your community. Go to a Pow Wow, Drum Social, speak-out or similar gathering.

We would be delighted to send you an information kit containing the press clippings and sources for the facts referred to in the petition. And finally, don't hesitate to contact us if you would like to talk about this initiative and ways we can work together on it. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Ruth Gill

Ruth Gill,

Co-convenor, West Hill First Nations Study Group

ruthkathgill@gmail.com

WE the undersigned residents and citizens of Canada, in recognition of our duties and responsibilities as treaty people, call upon the government to turn its good intentions into deeds and immediately correct the following injustices and failures to honour the treaty relationship:

1. While the previous government in 2007 promised 25,000 indigenous owned homes within 10 years, fewer than 200 have been built even though Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada underspent by \$900 million what Parliament authorized in the 2015 – 2016 fiscal year.
2. As of October 31, 2016, there were 133 drinking water advisories in effect in 90 First Nations Communities across Canada, excluding British Columbia.
3. On Jan. 26th, 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that the child welfare services provided by the Canadian Government to 163,000 First Nations children and their families fail to meet the standard of government services available to all other children in Canada.
4. Suicides among First Nations youth (aged 15 to 24) are five to six times higher than for non-aboriginal youth in Canada. In July of 2016, the *Wapekeka* First Nation asked Health Canada for funding to thwart a youth suicide pact. Health Canada refused. On January 8th, 2017, two children in the community took their own lives.
5. While Prime Minister Trudeau promised to lift the 2% cap on annual funding increases for First Nations programming on reserves, a report from the Canadian Press dated June 16, 2016, shows that this needed funding has not yet begun to flow. These funds are urgently needed for education, housing, water, health and social services on First Nations reserves and communities.

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