

Fast for Indigenous Human Rights September 13 – October 28

*This is the kind of fast I long for!
Loose the bonds of injustice
Let the oppressed go free...
Then your light shall break forth as the dawn
and your healing spring up.
You shall be called repairer of the breach
The restorer of streets to live in!*

☞ Isaiah 58 ☞



Invitation

*With eyes set on the God of the oppressed,
with hearts attentive to Indigenous “calls to action,”
we invite the church and all peoples of conscience
to hunger for justice;
to join us in a rolling fast for
Indigenous Human Rights and Bill C-262.*

Fasting is a cry to God, and a summons to those in places of authority to do right on behalf of the oppressed. Fasting is not principally about abstaining from food and turning inwards. It's about hungering for justice and extending out with compassion in our public relationships... seeking reparative action that will benefit all because it can restore the covenant of which we are all a part.

The **Fast for Indigenous Human Rights** begins on **September 13th** – the 10 year anniversary of the adoption of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* at the United Nations General Assembly. It will continue for 46 days (1 day for each article of the Declaration) until **October 28th**... in around the time in which 2nd reading of Bill C-262 will take place.

- Individuals, faith groups, and community circles can **sign on to the fast here** goo.gl/bgyGvq
- Everyone is welcome to join for a day, a week, or more.
- Please note that your name is public; that is intentional in order to inspire others who are hungering for justice, and to raise awareness and courage in the many who will be watching.

During these days of fasting for Indigenous Human Rights, we are urging individuals and groups to **organize actions in support of Bill C-262**. Here are some possibilities – *all of which allow you to participate whether you are able to fast or not*:

- Invite friends and co-workers to sign the petition for Bill C-262 at www.adoptandimplement.com
- Visit your Member of Parliament and ask them to support Bill C-262

- Organize a creative public witness at your MP's office (e.g., vigil, sing-in, sit-in or office party).
- Write a prayer, poem, or song for justice, and share it on social media
- Create a nonviolent street demonstration for Bill C-262
- Write articles of the Declaration on busy sidewalks with 'street chalk'
- Host a postcard writing party at your home (and remember, you don't have to have make any snacks because you're fasting! For free postcards see www.commonword.ca/go/1283)
- Pray. Listen. Pray some more. And the Spirit will give you ideas beyond what you can ask for or imagine.

Please share what you are doing on the *Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights Facebook page*. This will hearten others and help build the movement! See www.facebook.com/pfirCanada

For, Not Against: The Posture of the Fast

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada held its national hearings, it often reminded the gathered community that “we are in this together.” For reconciliation to happen we all need to step up and do our part. But there's more. We all need to see one another *as together*. Be we Indigenous or Settler, young or older, Liberal, Conservative, NDP or Green, people of faith or no faith, we are fundamentally connected and interdependent. Cree scholar, Jeffrey Ansloos puts it like this:

“...the imbalance of violence [in Canada] must be countered by a re-establishing of relations.... [all] must be seen as inextricably connected as kin, with the restoration of our relationships as a sacred order” (2014).

This fast is ultimately a call upon the Government of Canada, a call to those with political power to do right and support the adoption of the Declaration through Bill C-262. Our Members of Parliament have a special responsibility because this is a federal matter that they are privileged to cast their votes on. The rest of us citizens don't have that opportunity. But this fast is not being offered in a posture of protest over-against those in power, over-against the government or any one political party. The fast is being offered *for* the government and *for* all the parties. “We are in this together.”

- We are praying *for* God to move on behalf of the oppressed.
- We are praying and going hungry *for* the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples.
- We are praying *for* Settler Canadians to stand up for political change that can make for a better Canada.
- We are praying *for* the Church to live out its peacemaking word by embodying solidarity for Indigenous rights.
- And we are, above all, praying *for* the Government of Canada to honour their promises (see below) by supporting Bill C-262; an action that can bring structural healing to Indigenous-Settler relationships in these lands.

Background

The violation of Indigenous human rights in Canada is not a thing of the past. It continues today, evidenced in

- the lack of clean drinking water for more than 120 Indigenous communities
- inequitable funding for the education of Indigenous children (First Nations children on reserve receive 30% less funding per student than public school children)
- a third non-compliance order issued by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to the Government of Canada to stop racially discriminating against First Nations by underfunding child welfare on reserves (2016)
- the exceedingly high number of Indigenous children in care (across Canada, 40% of children in care are Indigenous)
- 5-7 First Nations youth suicides for every non-Indigenous youth
- the inordinately high number of Indigenous women and men in prison (1 in 4 inmates are Indigenous)
- the approval of mega-projects and the extraction of resources from traditional lands for corporate and State gain without Indigenous peoples' free, prior, and informed consent (e.g., Site C Dam, Kinder Morgan pipeline)
- decades old land claims issues that await just, fair and prompt resolution
- ongoing disregard for Indigenous self-determination and Treaty relationships

Attentive to past and present Indigenous rights violations, and deeply aware of the systemic harm that it's caused for generations of Indigenous peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has called upon the Federal Government to

- “fully adopt and implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*” (Call to Action #43)
- and “develop a national action plan” to achieve the goals of the Declaration (Call to Action #44)

According to the TRC, the principles and minimum standards set forth in the Declaration are essential for the survival of Indigenous families, peoples, cultures and traditions, let alone a renewed nation-to-nation relationship. It is “the framework for reconciliation” (Final Report of the TRC, 2015).

The Government of Canada has stated that they support the Declaration “without qualification” (May 2016) and they have repeatedly promised to adopt and implement it (2015; 2016; 2017). **Bill C-262** is an Indigenous Human Rights Bill crafted by Romeo Saganash – a residential school survivor and Member of Parliament (NDP) – that can help Canada do what it has publicly committed itself to. Bill C-262 provides a legislative framework that

- affirms that the *Declaration* has legal application in Canada
- calls for a national action plan to be created by the Federal Government and Indigenous representatives to work on matters of implementation
- calls for a yearly report on how progress is being made.

It is not an overstatement to say that Bill C-262 could be the most important piece of legislation to ever come before the House of Commons (*to learn more about it, please see www.adoptandimplement.com*). Bill C-262 is not going to fix everything, but it presents us with

an opportunity to bring significant structural healing to our fractured, colonial relationships; an opportunity, in the words of Senator Murray Sinclair, to address Canada's legal war against Indigenous peoples; an opportunity to mend the broken covenant between Indigenous and Settler peoples and the very lands we share. *But we need to act – and soon.*

2nd reading of Bill C-262 is happening this fall. Will we have the collective courage to rise up and put the powers on notice? Will we take action to ensure that the promises of the Government are acted upon...that good, well-meaning rhetoric becomes life-giving, actualized reality?

Many are praying that we will. Many are organizing and hosting workshops and teach-ins on the Declaration; many are writing postcards to their Members of Parliament in support of Bill C-262, spreading the word through social media and planning large-scale marches to help mobilize citizens and move the powers in good ways.

What more can we do?

In times like this – a potential kairos moment, an opening for societal change – some turn to fasting. Done with a contrite spirit, fasting can be a powerful spiritual act. *And it also has profound political capacity.* An embodied call to action, fasting is a cry to God (the “Prime Minister of Prime Ministers”, if you will) and a summons to those in places of authority to do right on behalf of the oppressed (see Isaiah 58). Fasting is not principally about abstaining from food and turning inwards. It's about hungering for justice and extending out with compassion in our public relationships... seeking reparative action that will benefit all because it can restore the covenant of which we are all a part.

Therefore,

with hearts emboldened by

- the witness of ancient ones who fasted to transform the ways of whole nations, even their death-dealing laws and legislation (see Daniel 9 and Esther 4);

with bodies heartened by

- the lived testimony of contemporaries who have starved themselves for right relations (see Steve Fobister Sr. of Grassy Narrows First Nation, the Muskrat Falls hunger strikers, and Kristen Henry)

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