

INTERFAITH COALITION *for* TREATY RIGHTS

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett,
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations

The Honourable Marc Miller,
Minister of Indigenous Services

May 27, 2021

Dear Ministers,

We write on behalf of the Interfaith Coalition for Treaty Rights based in Halifax, Kjiptuk, Nova Scotia, the traditional and unceded territory of Mi'kma'ki. Our coalition is extremely concerned about the potential for violence as the Sipekne'katik First Nation undertakes to exercise its Treaty Rights for a Moderate Livelihood Fishery out of Saulnierville on June 1st, just a few days away. Last fall at the invitation of the Grandmothers, members of this coalition were invited to participate as allies in ceremonies on the wharf at Saulnierville. Our support has been requested again.

We understand that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has declared that such a fishery will be illegal since it is outside of the commercial licensed fishing season. We support the Mi'kmaw right to fish on their own terms and do not wish to see the RCMP and DFO Officers intervening with arrests and confiscation of lobster pots or boats.

Under the 1752 Peace and Friendship Treaty, the Mi'kmaw peoples were promised the right to fish and trade. Their rights, as you know, have been tested in court and upheld. We understand that we are all Treaty People in Mi'kma'ki. We are aware that, since being contacted by Indigenous persons, the United Nations has requested a report on this matter from the Government of Canada.

We understand that Sipekne'katik First Nation has requested that the issue of their fishing rights be discussed and negotiated Nation to Nation, rather than with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and its Minister, the Honourable Bernadette Jordan. Therefore, we respectfully request that you, Dr. Bennett together with Mr. Miller, take that request very seriously and ensure that the Mi'kmaw fishers and their allies are protected from illegal arrests by RCMP and intervention by DFO Officers.

We are perplexed as to why the government has persisted in ignoring the request to negotiate nation to nation and has insisted upon deferring the matter to DFO. This action is clearly not helpful for Crown-Indigenous relations, being disrespectful of both the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as the report of the Commission on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

In view of the potential for violence, we wish to know what measures you have taken on behalf of the Government of Canada for the protection of all concerned on June 1st and beyond. As people of faith who support peace and justice, we urgently request your support for the Mi'kmaw to exercise their treaty

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rights to fish on their own terms and your action to avoid unnecessary arrests and violence. We would welcome the opportunity to speak directly with you through a Zoom conference to further expound on this matter and to seek answers from you.

For your further information, we attach a document outlining the concerns and principles under which we act. We believe that this is a spiritual matter and, as requested by the Grandmothers, we pray for the Treaty Rights to be upheld, for peaceful resolution of this dispute with the Government of Canada and for the safety and protection of all. We pray too for wisdom, understanding and a genuine commitment to justice for you both as Ministers of the Crown.

Yours sincerely,

The Reverend Margaret Sagar,
Minister of United Church of Canada

The Reverend Norman Horofker,
Minister of the Universalist Unitarian Church of Halifax

The Reverend Victoria Byrne,
Priest of the Diocese of NS and PEI, Anglican Church of Canada

Ms. Linda Scherzinger,
Halifax group of KAIROS Canada, Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Copied to:

The Honourable Justin Trudeau,
Prime Minister

Mr. Kody Blois,
MP Kings-Hants