



**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO CALL TO ACTION #48
FROM THE TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMISSION
March 29, 2016**

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) is the national association of Evangelical Christians in Canada. We are pleased to respond to the Calls to Action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in June 2015, particularly to Call to Action #48, which asks faith groups in Canada to “formally adopt and comply with the principles, norms, and standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for reconciliation.”

The focus of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is primarily on the nature and dynamics of government and state relations with Indigenous peoples, and much of what it addresses is not directly relevant to churches or communities of faith. However, faith groups are being asked by the TRC to affirm and support the guiding principles and norms of the document, as well as some of its main assertions, as a framework for reconciliation. These principles include the:

- Recognition that Indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all people to be different, to consider themselves different and to be respected as such
- Affirmation that all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind
- Reaffirmation that Indigenous peoples should be free from discrimination of any kind
- Recognition of the historic injustices faced by Indigenous peoples as a result of colonization and the dispossession of their lands, territories and resources
- Affirmation of the right of Indigenous families and communities to retain responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child

In effect, the Declaration reiterates the rights that are taken for granted by most people in Western societies. It has had a powerful impact in Indigenous communities in affirming and supporting their sense of identity and rights in relation to non-Indigenous societies. While they recognize that the Declaration is not a legally binding document, they appreciate that it sets international legal norms and expectations, and can be used as a tool to fight discrimination and marginalization.

For over 20 years the EFC has formally recognized the need for reconciliation with Indigenous people in Canada, many of whom can be found in our own constituent communities. The EFC's participation in the work of reconciliation began in 1995, when Elijah Harper called together Indigenous and non-Indigenous religious leaders for a Sacred Assembly, to listen to one another, and to establish the call for reconciliation.

The statement that arose out of the gathering, called the Reconciliation Proclamation, affirmed that "Creator God reigns supreme over all things," that "the starting point for healing and reconciliation lies in personal communion with Creator God," and that "reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians must be rooted in a spiritual understanding of land as a gift from the Creator God."

By adopting the Reconciliation Proclamation in 1995, we committed to:

- Continuing the process of healing and reconciliation with Aboriginal Peoples, by providing the forums and supports needed to heal the wounds created in the past;
- Becoming stronger advocates for justice and reconciliation in current and future public affairs, and to hold our governments accountable for implementation of just policies; and
- Developing a program of education and action on issues relating to land rights, self-government, economic development and racism.

Re-energized by the work of the TRC, we are committed to a process of learning and collaboration with our affiliates and Indigenous leaders within our affiliate denominations, churches and organizations. We will be exploring what it means for us as a broad evangelical community to embrace and enact the principles outlined in the UN Declaration as a framework for reconciliation.

As was the case with our affirmation in 1995 of the Sacred Assembly Proclamation, this response to the TRC's Call to Action is part of an ongoing journey of learning and reconciliation. It will not be the conclusion. We invite all people in Canada to learn with us as we walk in humility with the Indigenous peoples in this land.