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October 2017

Dear Honourable Member:

Welcome back from your well-deserved summer holiday. You have much work in front of you this fall, and all Canadians are looking to you to provide informed leadership on many difficult files.

The United Church of Canada would welcome the opportunity to share with you our insights and perspective on matters that come before the House. As a national church with more than 3,000 congregations from coast to coast to coast and extensive, long-standing relationships with many global partners in every region of the world, we have on-the-ground experience that could be valuable to you as you seek to make wise and well-informed decisions on behalf of all Canadians.

We have been deeply involved in areas of justice, peace, sustainability, and reconciliation, and seek to work together with you on these or other topics in which we have expertise. Allow me to give you three examples of areas where we can provide insight.

A key area of engagement for us is reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada. We were one of the churches that ran Indian Residential Schools, and later in the Sixties Scoop some of our members adopted First Nations and Métis children. The United Church has been compelled to confront the racism and colonial mentality that have shaped us as individuals and as a church. We have been on a path of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples for over three decades, a path we know will continue to define us for many years to come. Along the way, we have learned much from Indigenous leaders in our church, from our mistakes, and from the progress we have made together on the road toward right relationship. As Canada seeks a new relationship with Indigenous peoples, rooted in equity, mutuality, and respect, we would be pleased to share our experience and learnings with you.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission identified the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework of reconciliation and asked the government, churches, and the corporate sector to implement it as such. We are currently engaged in such a process within our own structures. This fall, Bill C-262, a private member's bill seeking to harmonize Canadian law with the Declaration, is expected to come for second reading. We ask you to support this bill, which also establishes both a 20-year plan for implementation and a reporting process to ensure transparency and accountability.

Looking abroad, another key area of interest to the United Church is working to support efforts for a just peace for Israel and Palestine. Through my recent visit to the region, I witnessed and heard from long-time partners of the "impossible moment" they are facing. They assert that now is the time for strong international leadership to prevent further devastating bloodshed, before hope and the opportunity for a just and peaceful resolution is lost. We ask you, as a member of Parliament, to bolster Canada's role as an international broker for peace by intensifying and accelerating "international and regional diplomatic efforts and support aimed at achieving, without delay a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the

Middle East” (United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334). United Church members across the country are ready to support you in this task.

The United Church of Canada supports self-determination for both Palestinians and Israelis. Working with both Palestinian and Israeli partners in the region we support non-violent efforts to promote an end to the occupation through a just and negotiated resolution, in accordance with international law and relevant UN resolutions.

Through our Unsettling Goods campaign, the United Church seeks to contribute to creating the conditions for peace by advocating for economic action focused on products from or companies supporting illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories—settlements whose very existence contravenes international law. This campaign sometimes gets confused with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which directs economic and other sanctions at the whole state of Israel. We are not part of the BDS movement. However, we do hold strong commitments to democratic rights and freedoms, which include the right of citizens to engage in constructive critique and non-violent action directed at both Canadian as well as foreign governments.

We also want to work with you to help bring Canada into compliance with its obligations under international law with regard to labelling settlement products sold in Canada. Such labelling would allow Canadian consumers to make ethical choices about their purchases. The United Church encourages Canada to exclude products made in illegal settlements from beneficial treatment under CIFTA, and to provide regulations for Canadian retailers that would require them to label goods from illegal settlements differently from products made in Israel. All 28 countries in the European Union have introduced such guidelines and requirements, which are also being considered by other governments.

Another area in which we have several decades of experience is with welcoming refugees to Canada and helping them become independent, contributing members of our country. The worldwide refugee crisis remains a vexing problem for all governments globally, and as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder, the United Church would gladly share our experience, concerns, and expertise with you. For example, we continue to be concerned about refugees who present themselves at a Canada–U.S. border post seeking to make a refugee claim in Canada. With limited exceptions, they are denied access to the Canadian refugee system and immediately returned to the United States. As a member of Parliament, we ask that you work to ensure that Canada withdraws from the Safe Third Country Agreement, given that the U.S. asylum system and immigration detention regime fail to meet required international and Canadian legal standards.

On these three topics, and many others, I feel The United Church of Canada can provide valuable insights and resources for your work. We have a strong network of partners on the ground, across Canada, and throughout the world. Please feel free to contact Communications Coordinator Paul Russell at prussell@united-church.ca or by phone at 416-231-7680, ext. 2060, and he will put you in touch with the appropriate senior church staff member.

Sincerely,



Jordan Cantwell (The Right Reverend)
Moderator/Modératrice
The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada