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1 June 2018

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

The United Church of Canada understands that seeking to follow Christ today calls us to work for just relationships with each other and all of creation. We hold a hope-filled vision where that is lived out not just in our personal decisions, but in the political sphere as well.

As I near the end of my Moderatorial term, I write on behalf of the United Church to express our deep concern at your government's decision to purchase the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline in the name of national interest.

One of my first acts as Moderator was to [congratulate you on becoming Prime Minister and to outline areas where I hoped we could work together](#). Foremost among them was implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, starting with adopting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation. I also expressed our hope that your stated commitment to renewed nation-to-nation relationships would provide the way forward in addressing the inequities Indigenous peoples face in housing, access to clean drinking water, infrastructure, health care, child welfare, and education.

On May 30 your government supported Bill C-262, an act to harmonize Canadian law with the UN Declaration, as it passed third reading. The United Church has consistently supported this bill, and we thank you for this action. However, in light of the Kinder Morgan decision, we cannot help but ask what this support—of the bill and of the Declaration itself—really means. Indigenous Peoples' rights to free, prior, and informed consent and to participate in decision-making are integral to the Declaration. These principles have been absent from recent discussion of the pipeline among your government, Alberta, British Columbia, and Kinder Morgan. First Nations along the path have been excluded from the conversation.

Minister of Indigenous Services Jane Philpott has said that "the engagement that's taken place...has been the most extensive in any project of its nature...[and] it's been done in the context of [Indigenous] rights." Yet the [report of the Ministerial Panel on the pipeline](#) (November 2016) concluded that "Even among those people who had negotiated benefit agreements and signed letters of support with Trans Mountain, most said that their rights were not respected and that their concerns about impacts were ignored or, at the very least, minimized." The report also acknowledged that some First Nations experienced "divide and conquer" tactics, and that there was a lack of clarity on who had the right to consent.

Such a position is not consistent with our church's—or your government's—commitment to the UN Declaration. Implementing these rights will change the way we make decisions on resource development, which can have both positive and negative impacts for Indigenous communities. It will ensure that the development that occurs on Indigenous land happens with Indigenous consent—that it does not harm the land and water Indigenous peoples rely on not just for food but for ceremonial practices, knowledge, and worldview; and that it contributes to their economic development. It will be a new way for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to be in relationship with each other.

Furthermore, we share the concern expressed these past few days by many Indigenous people and organizations concerning what else could have been done with the \$4.5 billion mobilized by the government for this purchase. How could these funds have contributed to your commitment to end boil water advisories on reserve by March 2021? How might it have helped close the education funding gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children? How might it have helped improve housing conditions, health services, and the provision of appropriate child welfare in Indigenous communities?

In this moment, we believe that working together on a nation-to-nation basis to resolve these issues is the real matter of national interest. In light of your June 21, 2016, statement that “no relationship is more important to our government and to Canada than the one with Indigenous peoples,” I urge your government to rethink its definition of national interest.

Also in my first letter, I expressed support for the stronger role that your government pledged to play in the Paris Climate Change negotiations. Since then, the United Church with a group of national organizations representing the diverse interests of millions across the country [articulated our expectation of and support for the timely, ambitious, and coherent implementation](#) of the Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change and Clean Growth. As the [Climate Action Network has stated](#), however, your government's decision to buy the Trans Mountain pipeline and related infrastructure “painfully undermines ongoing efforts to implement the Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change and Clean Growth,” as well as Canada's international commitments through the Paris Agreement to hold global warming to no more than 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts that limit the temperature increase even further.

Since February of this year many people in the United Church have sent postcards and letters to Ministers McKenna and Morneau as part of campaigns organized by [Citizens for Public Justice](#) and [KAIROS](#) asking to phase out or end fossil fuel subsidies and to make strategic investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and skills development. The federal government's commitments to phase out fossil fuel subsidies date back to the G20 summit in 2009 and are included in the mandate letters of both Ministers McKenna and Morneau. However, the Trans Mountain purchase equals billions of new dollars in subsidies to the industry. As Canada exercises international leadership as the host of the G7, Canada can and must do better in tackling climate change and improving the health of the world's oceans.

As a people of hope, we believe that seeking to live with respect in creation can provide us with life in abundance. We are committed to ongoing efforts to reduce our own greenhouse gas emissions, to accompany partners in the global South who bear the greatest burden of climate change, and to ensure a just transition for energy workers as we shift to a renewable energy economy.

We know firsthand from United Church people who work in the fossil fuel industry and are experiencing layoffs and employment uncertainty that such change will not be easy. We pledge our support to accompany them in that transition.

Please know that you and your government remain in our prayers.



The Right Reverend Jordan Cantwell
Moderator, The United Church of Canada

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