

Justice Plenary
The Very Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne
The United Church of Canada
October 18, 2025

Madam President, General Secretary, Officers, Guests, my siblings in Christ:

Two months ago I finished a 3-year term as Moderator of The United Church of Canada. I was only the second Indigenous person to hold this role, and the first Indigenous woman to serve in this way. I am a member of the Heiltsuk First Nation from the central coast of British Columbia on the West coast of Canada. My people are survivors of physical and cultural genocide – a history I don't have time to go into today, but less than 200 years ago it is estimated that there were between 25,000 to 35,000 Heiltsuk people. Wiped out primarily by smallpox and influenza, by the turn of the twentieth century there were less than 400 of us surviving. 99.99% of our people were killed in the space of a century.

I was taken the theme of our General Assembly because: Indigenous Peoples the world over are experts in perseverance – my cousin Ayla says that endurance is the #1 underrated Indigenous value. In our workbook the strategic programme planning committee alluded to the fact there are those among our membership who felt that persevering in our witness was not the right message for 2025. There were questions raised like “Where is the optimism of our Reformed tradition? Is the world really so bleak as described in the workbook? And if yes, is perseverance really the right response?”

I thought Indigenous Peoples, the world over, have been persevering under the weight of cultural, physical, spiritual and environmental oppression for over 500 years. And yes – when you consider the world from the position of those who are made most marginal by both local and global systems of oppression, the world remains bleak – and so we must persevere in our witness. Persevering in our belief that we know how to, and must constantly be reforming our lives in order to, live in right relationship with each other and with all of God's good creation. But my Indigenous sister and co-facilitator of the Indigenous Peoples workshop, Jenne Pieter, confronted this concept as a romanticized Christian notion. That we, as Indigenous Peoples, are actually in *resistance* to oppression. And resistance is a much more active word that requires reforming and reformation, too. Because, as it says very simply but profoundly in our concept note on Covenanting for Justice: All of life is at stake here.

Many churches who have relationships with Indigenous Peoples have become very good at Indigenousizing their spaces or the ways that Indigenous cultures are highlighted in liturgies and celebrations of diversity. But far fewer have looked at decolonizing the way we do business, or how we advocate for social, political, environmental and economic changes in the world. Indigenous ideas, cosmologies, and cultures are a nice idea until it means radically reenvisioning the way in which we pursue our political, environmental, and economic goals. Then our perspectives are considered antiquated, paganistic, unrealistic, or ignorant. The truth is that Indigenous Peoples have lived for millennia in ways that are more in balance and respectful of the goodness of the whole created order. When we fight against unregulated or rampant destruction of ecosystems so that agribusiness, mining, manufacturing, or resource exploitation can be promoted in the name of 'economic growth' – it is because we know that the

earth cannot continue to tolerate an economic model that sees the world God loves as simply an ATM with unlimited withdrawals of the earth's natural resources.

Fighting against corporations, often backed by national military power – especially (but not only) in the Global South, is dangerous; a David and Goliath story that rarely has a happy outcome. Our churches should be looking at systems changes that would ensure that we could live into a future drastically revised from our current trajectory.

Our churches – especially those with significant means invested in equities, can and should be considering strategic divestments, boycotts, and shareholder activism to hold companies accountable in a world that values shareholders as the most important, if not only, constituency who should be considered. All member churches could be advocating for laws, like some countries have, that limit our use of single use plastics, but also that place regulations on manufacturing products with planned obsolescence. So much of the current mining frenzy is because we are fueling the transition to a more digital world with equipment that is designed to be obsolete instead of hardware that can be upgraded over significant periods of time – as if the world has limitless amounts of aluminum, cadmium, cobalt, lithium, gold, and other precious metals that we are increasingly reliant on to for our technology hardware needs. And we need to be advocating for the most strategic environmental changes possible. So often our churches focus on limiting air travel, when air travel only makes up 2% of our global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. How we power and heat/cool our buildings is by far the most significant use of fossil fuels – making up 27% of our GHG's, building construction contributing 14% of GHGs, and road transportation making up 12% of our GHGs. And we need to be advocating for the transformation of the carbon market to prioritize indigenous and community-led carbon contribution projects, instead of green developments with other social and environmental impacts that disproportionately affect indigenous people and other communities made marginal in the Global South.

Indigenous worldviews need to be centered in visioning for the future. Our deeply cherished understandings of the intricate webs of interconnected life in God's whole created order are uniquely placed to help us re-form and be reformed from the unbridled neo-liberal end stage capitalism that marks this period of our existence as the Capitalocene. Our cultures hold ancient wisdoms about how to mine responsibly, albeit much more slowly. Our elders know how to watch for the signs of an ecosystem in distress, or every more importantly – how to live well in the abundance of God's created order without taking more that we need. We were experts in living the story of the Manna and the Quail (Exodus 16) before colonization, and living into that way of being again is better for us and for the planet.

In the Indigenous Peoples concept paper, we uphold the idea of “doughnut economics” – which, admittedly, is a terribly un-serious name about and incredibly powerful and serious alternative vision to our global economic systems: one that does not externalize the impacts of our economies on people or the planet. The concept of doughnut economics requires that we live in withing political and environmental boundaries that create a just and safe space for humans, creating human prosperity within a flourishing web of life.

The world continues to tell the lie that capitalism is a story of supply and demand. But this is not the full story. The truth is we live in an economic system built on marketing a demand for consumer goods. We create goods, many of which no one needs, and then companies need to

manufacture the desire for those goods. What if our member churches, through this Communion and other ecumenical bodies, could use tools we already have to create a vision of basic flourishing for every person on the planet. What if we asked questions like: “What would we need in order to thrive: good quality clothing, durable and energy-efficient housing, carbon neutral public transportation wherever possible, access to ethical and long-lasting technology, and regulation of digital technologies that have outsized environmental impacts like consumer generative artificial intelligence?” What are the other questions that we would need to ask so that we could advocate for global systems that supported that vision of life.

Indigenous advocacy for an end to destructive economic and environmental systems is not only for our peoples, but for all of us – for the love of the world that God loves. This is what we mean when many of us say that all Indigenous theology is political theology – because theology without right action is not enough. Not anymore.