

AN INVITATION TO MOVE TOWARDS A WATER JUSTICE AGENDA

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PEOPLE'S WATER CAMPAIGN
WATER FOR LIFE—NOT PROFIT

This Invitation to Move Towards Water Justice begins with the premise that the climate crisis emerges out of a rupture in the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, and that this rupture was caused by colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy. The oppression and exploitation of both humans and nature for the private wealth of a global minority currently threatens the conditions that make life on Earth possible ([see discussion paper 'Moving Towards Racial and Social Justice and a Reciprocal Relationship with Nature is Necessary to Survive the Climate Crisis'](#)). Our Invitation hopes to create a conversation on how we can work together at the intersection of water security and racial and socio-economic justice. Can we mobilize more people into demanding that governments take the actions necessary for humanity to survive the climate crisis? Wellington Water Watchers convened a group of people (authors listed above) to begin to frame this Invitation in a way that would both challenge and welcome. The group humbly built on millennia-old prophecies made by the spiritual elders of the Four Directions. As the late Leon Shenandoah (Tadodaho, Onandoga, Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy) put it at a 1993 United Nations conference:

“It is prophesied in our Instructions that the end of the world will be near when the trees start dying from the tops down. That's what the maples are doing today. Our Instructions say the time will come when there will be no corn, when nothing will grow in the garden, when the water will be unfit to drink...We were instructed to carry a love for one another and to show great respect for all beings of the earth...In our ways, spiritual consciousness is the highest form of politics...We must live in harmony with the Natural World and recognize that excessive exploitation can only lead to our own destruction. We cannot trade the welfare of our future generations for profit now...We must stand together, the four sacred colors of man, as the one family that we are, in the interest of peace.”

This Invitation takes as its starting point five sets of questions about our individual and collective relationships with water, asking:

- 1. Do you feel that your relationship with water has been ruptured? If so, how do we move toward healing this relationship and do justice to the fact that water is life?** We might start with...
 - a better understanding of where our drinking water comes from and in which watershed we live
 - a better understanding of the water used to produce the food we eat, the products we use, and where that water comes from
 - a better understanding of who takes care of the water that gives life to us and of who will take care of the water that gives life to future generations
 - a move towards the rights of water and all of nature in our work to protect water

2. Do you think that decolonization is integral to your work to protect water? If so, how do we move toward ensuring that the right to clean water access is equitably distributed across Canadian society, particularly among First Nations? We might start by...

- recognizing the inherent treaty and human rights of Indigenous peoples to water and land
- understanding local histories of indigenous dispossession of land and waterways and recognizing water colonial governance as an injustice
- insisting on the co-governance of water with Indigenous peoples of Ontario and the local communities who live in the same watersheds
- recognizing ceremony as a respectful way to initiate practices and policy of water governance

3. Do you feel that the government puts profit before people? If so, how do we ensure that water is never treated as a commodity but as a gift and as life? We might begin by...

- working to declare water a public good and common heritage
- working to prohibit the commodification of water
- prohibiting the privatization of public water utilities and all water sources
- questioning the need for extractive industries that disturb, pollute, contaminate and, destroy groundwater and surface waters, particularly and disproportionately in Indigenous communities and communities of color
- making the full costs of environmental protection and waste management the responsibility of those who produce these costs
- centering the social well-being of the many rather than the economic wealth for the few

4. Do you want to be part of a more integrated water campaign that links together various racial and socio-economic injustices? If so, how do we center the intersection of water security and racial and social justice in our work? We might begin by...

- recognizing that access to clean drinking water is a result of long histories of colonialism that deny this right to others
- recognizing that our unequal access to resource is also the result of white privilege
- recognizing that human rights and social and economic justice must become central in our environmental work through the building of coalitions and the practicing of thoughtful allyship

5. What implications, if any, does reflection on these questions have for us as individuals, as a community and to organizations in which we are a member? And do you know (or are you) a pivotal water leader who needs greater support?

You are invited to engage in any of the following activities:

- reflect on these questions as an individual
- start a conversation with family, friends, or coworkers about these questions
- invite Wellington Water Watchers to host and facilitate a conversation about these questions with your organization or in your community

Wellington Water Watchers is convening people who are interested in working towards an agenda for water justice. Contact us to share or get involved with the next phase in this collective journey.

Email us at

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