



Public Service Alliance of Canada
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION



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- National Indigenous Peoples' Circle

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Our Union Voice is a publication of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Representing 215,000 members, PSAC is one of Canada's largest unions and is affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress and internationally to Public Services International.

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EDITORIAL

Canada is grappling with what truth and reconciliation means. We have faced several ugly truths over the last few years. We have mourned with the families of hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We have watched this government promise to end long-term drinking water advisories — and then break that promise. We have experienced collective shame and outrage as the existence of mass graves at residential school sites across Canada were confirmed.

These are horrible, unjust realities and not much has been done to change them. You don't have to look farther than the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action — after seven years, only 14 have been completed.

Sure, there has been some progress. Canada named its first Indigenous Governor General, Mary Simon. National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a statutory holiday. And British Columbia is now the first province where Indigenous communities have authority over their own child and family services — a crucial step towards self-determination.

But this is not enough. The reconciliation process has been slow. Too slow.

Truth and reconciliation require action. It is not about having good intentions — it is about making real change. It is about reflecting on how our institutions and we as individual settlers, including myself, have contributed to upholding the status quo. It is about coming to terms with the horrible legacy of colonization and working to correct the inequity that it has created.



Photo: MIV Photography

It is not enough to simply acknowledge the wrongs of the past — we must actively work to make it right.

As your union, we recognize that we need to do better. PSAC has often put human rights at the forefront, but we cannot escape the reality that our structures were built on a colonialist past. We know we must change this. We are re-examining our practices, our collective agreements, and our policies. We are striving to become more inclusive, more equitable and more accountable.

This edition of *Our Union Voice* is a snapshot of some of the work we are doing. We have a lot more to do, and it will take some time for us to get it right. We also know part of that work is listening to and following the lead of Indigenous communities, leaders, and members.

We all have a role to play in mending the fabric of reconciliation, collectively and in solidarity. I hope you will be inspired to join us.

In solidarity,

Chris Aylward, National President

Sign up today for federal bargaining strike training

Throughout this round of bargaining, the federal government has shown they're not prepared to support workers who've been here for Canadians day in and day out.

They want federal public service workers to accept a pay cut as the cost of living is at record highs, they've refused our proposals for better work-life balance, and flat-out rejected our calls for mandatory training on anti-racism, harassment and Indigenous issues.

We need to be prepared to escalate our fight for a fair contract, up to and including taking strike action if necessary. That's why PSAC is holding strike training for members across the country.

Learn more and sign up for in-person or virtual training sessions and the self-paced, online strike training course.

psacafpc.ca/strike-training



Indigenous artist **Georgina Metzler** describes this issue's cover art: "The star quilt is a sacred item among many First Nations peoples, which represents honour and respect. The star quilt is being mended, with 14 stitches to represent the 14 Calls to Action that have been fulfilled. But to reach reconciliation, the star must be completely fixed by addressing all 94 Calls to Action."

Reconciliation at the heart of everything we do

Working towards truth and reconciliation is an important priority for PSAC, and we are taking steps toward fulfilling this commitment at the bargaining table, through education and political action.

At our national convention in 2022, we committed funding to push the government to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, including the calls related to missing Indigenous children and burial information in order to redress the legacy of residential schools.

All our work on Indigenous issues is guided by discussions with our National Indigenous Peoples' Circle (NIPC) representatives.

Continuing to learn and teach Indigenous histories, realities and solidarity

Following a convention resolution, PSAC will now offer the advanced course 'Unionism on Turtle Island' in every PSAC region. Facilitated by an all-Indigenous team, the course links historical events to the current-day conditions lived by Indigenous peoples, debunks myths and stereotypes, identifies ways to be an effective ally and develops concrete measures for reconciliation and solidarity actions. It is open to Indigenous members and non-Indigenous members.

PSAC's education program also includes other courses intended to advance reconciliation for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members.

Advancing reconciliation through bargaining

Bargaining is another important aspect of our work towards reconciliation. PSAC represents many Indigenous members working for Treasury Board and federal agencies, the three territorial governments, and other northern public services in Indigenous public administration, policing, and private sector employers.

At the table, we are negotiating paid leave for Indigenous cultural traditions, ceremonies and practices, leave for Indigenous languages training, access to elder counsel in health benefit plans, and anti-harassment and anti-racism plans for the workplace.

This round of bargaining with Treasury Board, PSAC is also calling for mandatory training on Indigenous history that aligns with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action #57 and a bilingual allowance for workers who speak an Indigenous language.

Contributor: Louise Laporte

Reach out to your nearest PSAC regional office to learn more about courses intended to advance reconciliation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous members. Learn more at psacunion.ca/education

National Indigenous Peoples' Circle: Healing and advancing Indigenous rights

David Martin vividly remembers the traumatic stories that his mother, aunt, and uncles told him about their experience in the residential school system. And he is certain that anti-Indigenous racism continues today.

“

Systemic racism still exists against Indigenous peoples, and hopefully, with knowledge, there will be change. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of PSAC have a big role to play.”

– David Martin

An Inuk community member from Nunatsiavut Labrador, David wanted to be a part of that positive change, which motivated him to join PSAC's National Indigenous Peoples' Circle (NIPC).

NIPC was created in 2003 to provide a unified voice for First Nation, Inuit and Métis PSAC members. Since then, they have played a crucial role in growing Indigenous involvement in the union, advancing Indigenous rights and seeking justice.

The Circle has done important work, from organizing the National Indigenous Peoples' Conference, to working on issues such as Bear Witness Day and Shannen's Dream for culturally-based education for First Nations children. The Circle has also provided

valuable input into major PSAC campaigns such as Still Thirsty for Justice, Illunnata campaign for food security, and partnered with the National Human Rights Council Indigenous Working Group and artist Jaime Black to create the red dress pin honouring, mourning and raising awareness about the national tragedy of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women.

Jill MacNeill is a Tsimshian community member living on Lax Kxeen (Prince Rupert, B.C.) and also a NIPC member.

“

The work that we do with NIPC is important to help heal relationships, address injustices, and move toward a healthy post-colonial union, workplace, community, and society.”

– Jill MacNeill

NIPC has a lot of work on the horizon. With the ongoing tragedy of unmarked graves around residential schools across treaty and unceded lands, PSAC passed a resolution at our national convention to host a healing circle for NIPC members. Led by knowledge-keeper Tina Vincent, this healing circle is an opportunity for members to build solidarity, share lived experiences and priorities for Indigenous members.



NIPC is also reviewing a number of resolutions impacting Indigenous members that were passed at convention and will provide input and guidance to PSAC's leadership on how to implement these resolutions. In addition, NIPC is directly involved in consultations on PSAC's Anti-Racism Action Plan as we work towards building a truly anti-racist union.

“

For PSAC to successfully address injustices and act in the spirit of reconciliation, it is imperative to listen deeply to what we have to say.”

– Jill MacNeill

Contributor: Matthew Brett

WATER IS A HUMAN RIGHT



1



2

1 - Chad Simon, NIPIY Committee Member, Samson Cree First Nation, Maskwacis, Alberta
2 - PSAC supports the Grassy Narrows River Run, Toronto, July 2022

Still Thirsty for Justice: Clean water is a human right

Judy DaSilva has spent over 20 years fighting the effects of mercury poisoning and other ongoing threats to her community's water. For the grandmother and community elder from Grassy Narrows First Nation, it's a matter of justice and cultural reclamation. Most importantly, it's a question of the survival of her people.

When PSAC partnered with Grassy Narrows to launch the Thirsty for Justice campaign seven years ago demanding access to clean water in all First Nations communities, it was one of more than 100 First Nations that did not have access to safe water for drinking, cooking and bathing. At the time, the federal government promised to end all long-term drinking advisories by 2021.

Yet here we are in 2023 with roughly 100 advisories still in effect. The federal government may have finally agreed to fund a long-overdue mercury care home in the community, but in the short time since our last campaign, two former Grassy Narrows chiefs have passed away far too young with mercury poisoning being a significant factor in their causes of death.

To this day, Grassy Narrows community members are still fighting for fair compensation for the harm caused by decades of mercury poisoning, an end to mining and logging on their territory, and support for the way of life they had before industry poisoned their land, water and community.

"Our way of life was robbed from us, and we're fighting to get that back. To give the younger ones a chance to be ok," says Chrissy Isaacs, a mother and grandmother in the community.

At the same time, across the land, countless others — many PSAC members — are also still fighting for access to clean water, one of the most basic human rights.

That's why PSAC launched the Still Thirsty for Justice campaign in 2022, calling on the federal government to follow through on its promise to fund critical infrastructure and protect communities from threats to clean water.

In some cases, as in Iqaluit, crumbling and poorly maintained infrastructure is resulting in contamination crises. In other communities, corporate pollution of land and water systems are posing a dangerous threat to communities' water security.

Then there's the question of water advisories. The federal government likes

to paint a rosy picture of its progress. But the reality is that federal advisory lists do not cover communities who are not part of the public system, like 80% of the Samson Cree Nation, who rely on wells and cisterns for their water supply. They do not account for many communities who have been on repeated short-term water advisories for decades. The real numbers far exceed the official count.

The understanding that 'water is life' is sacred to many Indigenous communities — and it's true for all of us. The federal government has had more than enough time to end the water crisis and provide Indigenous communities with greater control over their water, lands, and resources — all crucial steps on the path to reconciliation.

It's time for Trudeau's government to fulfill their commitment. PSAC will continue to add our voice to that of Indigenous communities fighting for access to safe, clean water.

Contributor: Laila Malik



Read the water stories of PSAC members, learn more and add your voice for water justice at stillthirstyforjustice.ca



As a kid growing up in an Indigenous community, we did not have running water. We had clean water from the well, that we hauled every day, for thirsty animals, to mop the floors, and to wash dishes. It was difficult, and today I turn off the water to brush my teeth and reduce shower time because I learned to not take it for granted. Our well water was clean. Many communities have to boil their often brown water just to bathe. Clean water is a human right. It's time Canada treated everyone humanely. The time for clean water is now, broken promises are unacceptable."

Dana Kelly, PSAC Prairies member



FOOD JUSTICE FOR ALL

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN COMMUNITIES MUST LEAD IN DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS TO FOOD INSECURITY.

HUNGRY FOR JUSTICE

JOIN THE ILLUNNATA CAMPAIGN

HELP END FOOD INSECURITY ACROSS INUIT NUNANGAT AND NORTHERN COMMUNITIES.

HUNGRY FOR JUSTICE

Learn more about the causes of food insecurity plus get access to educational resources, a social media toolkit, a gallery of photos, and send a letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau demanding an end to northern food insecurity all at illunnata.ca, available in English, French, and Inuktitut.

Illunnata campaign underscores realities of northern food insecurity

Choosing between medication and groceries is no choice at all. Yet, residents in northern communities across the country make unthinkable decisions like this every day as they live with disproportionately high rates of food insecurity.

In Nunavut, 79 per cent of children live in food insecure households. In northern Ontario and northern Manitoba, 70 per cent of on-reserve households face food insecurity. Over 50 per cent of the population of the three Northern territories are Indigenous. When compared to the rest of Canada, where a much lower average of 12.7 per cent of households are food insecure, this glaring disparity makes the need for urgent action impossible to ignore.

Launched in 2022, PSAC's Illunnata campaign means "all of us" in Inuktitut. Because all of us deserve food security.

The causes of northern food insecurity are numerous and complex, but the high cost of food is a major factor. A box of rice in Toronto costs \$6.99, but the same box in Iqaluit costs \$10.19 (after the \$6.27 subsidy). A carton of juice costs \$4.49 in Toronto, but three times as much in Iqaluit (\$12.79 after a \$1.94 subsidy).

Food insecurity is compounded by other factors, including the lasting effects of colonialism, climate change, household financial hardship, and inadequate food supply distribution systems. Meanwhile, existing policies to prevent northern food insecurity don't address root causes like lack of employment opportunities, cost of living, poverty, access, and availability of traditional foods.

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, or ITK, a non-profit that protects and advances the rights and interests of Inuit in Canada, has developed a food security strategy to end hunger and advance Inuit food sovereignty. They hope to secure a sustainable food system that ensures access to affordable, nutritious, safe and culturally preferred foods. Through Illunnata, PSAC aims to add more voices to their calls to action.

The campaign was also made possible with contributions from PSAC North, the Nunavut Employees Union, the Union of Northern Workers, the Yukon Employees Union, and PSAC Ontario.

Contributor: Jeffrey Vallis

“ It gets tough trying to figure out where to get our next meal. From time to time the fridge, freezer & cabinets get bare, and relatives ask you for food, but you can't share any because there isn't really anything to make. With prices only getting higher, will the hunger last longer? Not many foods are fresh & yet we still pay a lot for expired items because there isn't any other option.”

Gloria, Pond Inlet, NU

Bargaining victory for Indigenous PSAC members on Treaty One

Bargaining teams and union members can play an enormous role in advancing truth and reconciliation in the workplace. Indigenous members from PSAC DCL Local 55602 on Treaty One territory in Winnipeg experienced this firsthand. They won breakthrough improvements in their most recent round of bargaining with their employer, the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD). PSAC members at CAHRD provide important services to Indigenous families, including quality adult education and daycare facilities.

Along with negotiating important gains for workers with an improved wage scale and new language protecting workers against harassment, their bargaining team also secured new articles recognizing the knowledge and practices of Indigenous members.

With strong support from their members, the team fought hard to get five days a year of leave to engage in traditional Indigenous practices such as hunting,

harvesting, beading, fishing, traditional food preservation, gathering of medicines or ceremonial activities into their collective agreement.

“Our success in this round of bargaining is fully a result of the work of the bargaining team, local executive and the membership. They were involved, vocal and engaged throughout the process,” says Marianne Hladun, Regional Executive Vice-President for the PSAC Prairies region.



PSAC DCL Local 55602 members showing up for workers' rights at CAHRD



The work they do to provide education and childcare to Indigenous students is significant to the community, and a strong collective agreement ensures our members can continue to provide these services.”

– Marianne Hladun

Regional Executive Vice-President, Prairies

The bargaining team also successfully negotiated National Day for Truth and Reconciliation as a designated paid holiday. This is the kind of important work PSAC is working on across the board as we continue to push for Indigenous-specific provisions in our next collective agreements.

Contributor: Rosane Doré Lefebvre

Meeting people where they're at: A trauma-informed approach to our work

When workers turn to us for help, they are often in a state of fear and trauma, so it's important our union representatives understand what they're going through to serve them with dignity and care. They may be in 'fight, flight, freeze and fawn' mode, and workers who are dealing with workplace racism, sexism and discrimination based on other social identities may further experience chronic or complex trauma.

That's why PSAC's Anti-Racism Action Plan calls for PSAC stewards, local officers and union representatives from coast to coast to be trained with the skills and competencies needed to represent, advocate for and recognize the intersecting realities of Indigenous, Black, Asian and racialized PSAC members. Originally used in healthcare, trauma-informed engagement factors in the impact of historical injustices and colonization on Indigenous and other communities who have experienced oppression, trauma and genocide.

“Training, discussions and more awareness about trauma-informed representation are helping us to better understand how engaging in adversarial processes can cause further trauma,” says Susan O'Reilly, PSAC's Acting Director of Representation and Legal Services.



We're not social workers or psychologists, but we are learning more about how we can reduce harm to members who may have faced significant trauma in their lives while providing the most effective representation, administration and analysis possible.”

– Susan O'Reilly

Representatives must recognize trauma responses in order to provide good guidance and support as well as cultivating patience,

strong listening skills, and validating members' experience to build trust and ensure a 'do-no-further-harm' approach. Being patient and present and holding space can be monumental in the journey for justice in the workplace.

At the same time, it's important to recognize that we all carry some form of trauma, which can be retriggered. Maintaining healthy boundaries and learning how to self-regulate and building personal coping skills while doing this work is really important.

A new course on 'Representing and Advocating Against Workplace Racism' will be rolled out to representatives in 2023. Last fall, PSAC members also had the chance to learn more about trauma-informed representation in a workshop with Myrna McCallum, a Métis lawyer who delivers training workshops and hosts “The Trauma-Informed Lawyer” podcast from her lived experience as an Indigenous woman who attended residential school.

Contributor: Dolly Ablitt



Check out Myrna's podcast to learn more about trauma, resilience, compassion, empathy, humility, boundaries, and many other skills that are needed while working with and advocating for members.
thetraumainformedlawyer.simplecast.com

Building an anti-racist union: PSAC's Anti-Racism Action Plan

In June 2021, the National Board of Directors (NBoD) adopted the PSAC Anti-Racism Action Plan which recognizes that there is an underrepresentation of Indigenous, Black, Asian, and other racialized members in leadership roles within our union. As our fight for social and economic justice at the bargaining table continues, working towards racial justice is not only linked with but is essential to our collective strength.

In order to build an anti-racist union, we need to listen to our members who have been impacted by systemic discrimination for far too long, without recourse, and without ways to share their experiences in spaces that are safe and affirming. With full support of the NBoD, we are taking concrete steps towards building inclusivity, equity and belonging in the union by examining the ways in which PSAC has upheld systems of oppression.

By incorporating principles of reconciliation, the Anti-Racism Action Plan is rooted in an intersectional and trauma-informed approach. This means examining the ways in which different forms of oppression based on an individual's identity or lived experience can shape their sense of power, resilience, and well-being. We hope that this plan will

help us identify and break down the barriers that continue to prevent PSAC members from fully participating in their union.

This anti-racism work will help us recognize the legacies of colonialism, slavery, and residential schools that are woven into the policies, structures and systems of our union. So that we can meaningfully make space for Indigenous, Black, Asian and other racialized communities to thrive.

This plan will focus on four key areas: education, representation, engagement, and political action.

We've already begun our outreach and consultation with Indigenous, Black, Asian and other racialized PSAC members and will continue into 2023.

Contributor: Shaheen Lotun



Sharon DeSousa, National Executive Vice President of PSAC

“

PSAC's Anti-Racism Action Plan recognizes the impact of systemic racism on our members.

This plan lays the foundation for the union to take the necessary steps to dismantle systems of oppression that continue to create barriers for marginalized communities in our union.”

– Sharon DeSousa,
National Executive Vice-President

The Anti-Racism Action Plan has three goals:

- To provide tools for leaders, union representatives, and all members to become anti-racist activists;
- To increase participation and engagement of Indigenous and racialized members within the union at all levels; and
- To build a framework for recourse processes rooted in a trauma-informed and anti-racist approach.

Input from our members will be crucial to the success of this plan and will help pave the way for us to build a stronger and more inclusive union.

Visit psacunion.ca to hear Sharon DeSousa discuss the Anti-Racism Action Plan, and what it means for members.

PRINCIPLES OF RECONCILIATION

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada believes that in order for Canada to flourish in the twenty-first century, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canada must be based on the following principles:

1

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.

2

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as the original peoples of this country and as self-determining peoples, have Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected.

3

Reconciliation is a process of healing of relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.



4

Reconciliation requires constructive action on addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Indigenous peoples' education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare, the administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity.

5

Reconciliation must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

6

All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.

7

The perspectives and understandings of Indigenous Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers of the ethics, concepts, and practices of reconciliation are vital to long-term reconciliation.

8

Supporting Indigenous peoples' cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential.



9

Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources.

10

Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Indigenous rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Indigenous peoples to Canadian society.