

ACTION PLAN FOR

working in solidarity

with Indigenous peoples
in Canada



PART 1

Vision, Goals, and Process

This action plan is in two parts:
Part 1: Vision, Goals, and Process
Part 2: Implementation Plan, 2019 – 2021

This action plan was developed during 2018-2019 by a small team of Inter Pares staff in consultation with all staff, board of directors, and some Indigenous allies who shared their expertise. Inter Pares would especially like to honour and recognize Viola Thomas for her wisdom, guidance, and patience as she accompanied Inter Pares through this process. Viola is from the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc people of the BC interior and has extensive experience of working with Indigenous governance and civil society bodies, including 7 years at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

“The beliefs and attitudes that were used to justify the establishment of residential schools are not things of the past: they continue to animate much of what passes for Aboriginal policy today. Reconciliation will require more than pious words about the shortcomings of those who preceded us. It obliges us to both recognize the ways in which the legacy of residential schools continues to disfigure Canadian life and to abandon the policies and approaches that currently serve that hurtful legacy.”



Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada¹

1 *Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy, Volume 5.* Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press. 2015. Page 4.



Introduction

Inter Pares is a social justice organization working with local activist organizations around the world to support peoples' struggles for peace, justice, and equality.

Founded in 1975, Inter Pares collaborates with organizations in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Canada to globalize equality. We provide support through funding, advocacy, and learning exchanges. Inter Pares is a feminist organization and uses a non-hierarchical co-management model with consensus-based decision making. The Inter Pares office is located on unceded Algonquin territory of the Anishinaabe people.² The board members and donors of Inter Pares are spread across the Indigenous lands known as Canada.

Rationale for this Action Plan

This action plan was initially inspired by the 2015 Calls to Action of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. In 2016 Canada finally officially adopted and promised to fully implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.³ In 2019, *Reclaiming Power And Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* was launched.⁴ All three of these documents compel us to act. Canada is in a period of Indigenous renaissance, and in society we see a groundswell of popular support for Indigenous rights. Together, this context inspired Inter Pares to engage deeper and more intentionally on Indigenous rights and in collaboration with Indigenous people, as articulated in this action plan.

A human-rights approach to structural change is fundamental to all of our work, and there are distinct imperatives when working on Indigenous Rights. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples notes that Indigenous peoples globally have faced historical and ongoing violations rooted in colonialism, which have led to dispossession, exploitation, and oppression.⁵ The ongoing abuse, denial, and extinguishment of the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples through Canadian government policy and systemic racism demonstrates the need for structural change. Collective action is needed to bring about decolonization and support the healing and resurgence of Indigenous communities and Nations, as well as the fulfillment of their aspirations.⁶ This work towards structural change must be grounded in a permanent

2 For more information on the Indigenous territories within Canada, please explore the *Indigenous Peoples' Atlas of Canada*: indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca

3 un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html

4 mniwg-ffada.ca/final-report

5 un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

6 "According to expert in Indigenous research methodologies Margaret Kovach, the purpose of decolonization is to create space in everyday life, research, academia, and society for an Indigenous perspective without its being neglected, shunted aside, mocked, or dismissed." Source: *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls*. Volume 1a. 2019. Page 78

commitment to ending the violence committed against Indigenous peoples, which includes genocide, forced sterilization, murder, and rape. This work must also contribute to Indigenous people's agency. As noted in the Final Report of the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls*, "...solutions do not rest only within human or within Indigenous rights instruments, and neither do they rest only in governments. Addressing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQA people requires new solutions as conceived, driven, and managed by those affected."⁷

Inter Pares believes that all people living in Canada have a collective responsibility to uphold the spirit and intent of the foundational treaties. We also have a responsibility to implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the Calls to Action of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, and the Calls for Justice from the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. Unlike other regions where Inter Pares works globally, our work in Canada is a collective struggle in which we are directly implicated. We live and work in a society in which racism and sexism is deeply entrenched. Many of the Inter Pares staff and board live as members of the dominant culture. Others bring lived experience of racialization and other forms of marginalization. As such, it is vital that we each bring to this work self-awareness, and an understanding of our backgrounds and how differential relationships to individual and social privilege will change our relationship to the issues addressed in this policy and to each other in relation to it.

As a feminist organization, Inter Pares is compelled to support initiatives that address the harms caused through the gendered oppression within Canada's colonial experience. Through centuries of colonialism, patriarchal models of social control have been enacted against and imposed upon Indigenous communities. As *Dawn Memee Lavell-Harvard and Jennifer Brant* wrote:

"In a country where the tragedy of more than twelve hundred missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls has been denied, obscured, or simply ignored by those with the power and resources to prevent the appalling rates of violence (not to mention the fiduciary responsibility and legal obligation to do so), the personal is indeed political. Simply being born Aboriginal and female, in a nation built on the oppression of Indigenous peoples, and the subjugation of women, engenders the very real likelihood of being subjected to the most severe forms of violence and becoming yet another homicide statistic, even without engaging in so-called high-risk activities."⁸

Psychological, physical and sexual violence against Indigenous women have been used as tools by the Canadian state (through police forces, residential schools, etc.) to attack and wipe out Indigenous Nations. State authorities inflict trauma on Indigenous women

7 Ibid. Page 221

8 *Forever Loved: Exposing the Hidden Crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada*. 2016. p.1 (introduction)

through decades of coerced apprehension of Indigenous children from their mothers, into the child welfare system, as well as through imposed removal of Indigenous women from their communities to give birth in urban centres distant from their home communities. Violence from authority figures in residential schools and structural racism experienced by Indigenous men has led to intergenerational trauma that manifests in violence against Indigenous women. Gender diversity has been a particular target of Canadian colonial violence, through attacks on the dignity and identity of two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual individuals. Further, “colonization also gave rise to racist and ethnocentric ideas that continue to dehumanize Indigenous women and make them targets of violence.”⁹

Intentions of this Action Plan

As Part 1 of the action plan, this document outlines Inter Pares’ vision, goals and process for working in solidarity with Indigenous peoples in Canada. We, the staff and board of Inter Pares, hope that this document will guide us through current and future iterative implementation plans (Part 2 of the action plan), as we continue on a path of learning. Our implementation plans outline specific steps we will take to help support the movement for healing, justice, reconciliation and decolonization in Canada, as well as steps we will take to build connections between Indigenous activists in Canada and activists internationally.

In keeping with our feminist praxis, this work will be grounded in a solidarity approach and we will work to become allies. For Inter Pares, being an ally means taking the lead from local leadership, and not imposing our own leadership.¹⁰ We will be guided by the leadership of progressive, egalitarian Indigenous activists and groups who have the support and respect of the local community, while also being attuned to those whose voices are not given prominence. Through collaborations with Indigenous communities, we will work to infuse our approach to social justice with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, particularly in relation to land rights and women’s leadership.



Inter Pares has been involved in collaborations with Indigenous communities in Canada and internationally throughout our history. These collaborations take place in several ways: some involve the work of Canadian coalitions of which we are members; in some cases we have facilitated international exchanges; in other cases we have collaborated directly with Indigenous organizations.¹¹ The scope of Inter Pares’ direct collaborations with Indigenous communities has varied, and it is our hope that this action plan will

⁹ *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls*. Volume 1a. 2019. Page 313

¹⁰ Dr. Lynn Gehl expands on the concept of allyship in her *Ally Bill of Responsibilities*: lynngehl.com/uploads/5/0/0/4/5004954/ally_bill_of_responsibilities_poster.pdf

¹¹ Examples of Inter Pares’ past collaborations with Indigenous communities can be found in Annex 1, which is currently being updated and is available upon request.

provide us with the direction to be more coherent and intentional in our solidarity work with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

We intend, through ongoing education activities, to cultivate informed and culturally competent staff and Board, who are able to interact with Indigenous communities in ways that are respectful of protocol, and rooted in an understanding of Indigenous struggles for justice. Through our work of facilitating dialogue, we intend to build relationships with Indigenous-led movements in Canada, and to foster more connections between Indigenous communities in Canada and our international work, where relevant and mutually beneficial. We intend to create spaces for dialogue where experience of seeking justice, addressing colonialism and genocide in Canada and in other regions of the world can be shared.



Vision

These vision statements are an aspirational description of the change that Inter Pares would like to see in Canada.

Inspired by the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, this is an articulation of what we are working towards, in order to help guide the organization's actions and directions. Inter Pares is committed to the deep work and long-term collective action that is needed to help make this vision a reality.

We seek:

An end to discrimination against Indigenous peoples.

As a non-hierarchical organization, Inter Pares believes deeply in egalitarian relationships, and honours the diversity of Canada's peoples. A core element of advancing reconciliation is increasing opportunities for non-Indigenous Canadians and Indigenous peoples to get to know each other, develop friendships, engage in cultural exchanges, deepen relationships of solidarity and good neighbourly relations, and collaborate to address common challenges.

Self-determination and power sharing in the management of the affairs of Indigenous peoples.

We want to see Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians coexisting peacefully and respectfully in Canada. This coexistence should be governed by laws and decisions that are consistent with the principles enshrined in treaties and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Protection and promotion of Indigenous culture and languages.

This thriving will entail a resurgence of Indigenous languages, cultures, governance systems, and other aspects of Indigenous life. Adequate public funding should be allocated to this process.

Indigenous sovereignty over land and resources, including equitable distribution of wealth derived from land and resources.

Inter Pares' vision is that there will be political will in favour of, and broad social acceptance of, the redistribution of power and land needed to enable Indigenous communities and Nations to thrive economically, politically, socially, and culturally. Inter Pares recognizes that for Indigenous peoples, land is life. We want to see serious advances made in the restitution of lands and re-assumption of decision-making power and jurisdiction over land, internal affairs, and social services by Indigenous peoples, through mechanisms developed collaboratively between Indigenous peoples and Canadian governments. Adequate resources should be allocated to this process.



Goals & Areas of Action

Through this Action Plan for Working in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples in Canada, Inter Pares' goals are to:

1. Nurture programmatic links with Indigenous movements and activism, particularly feminist Indigenous struggles;
2. Support Indigenous resistance and resurgence;¹²
3. Encourage Inter Pares' supporters and the public to get involved in the movement for Indigenous rights and decolonization.

Inter Pares will work towards these goals through three mutually reinforcing, non-sequential, and ongoing areas of action. They are:

Relationship-building



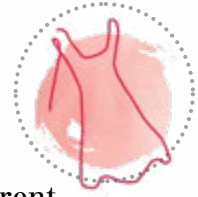
Approach all of our collaborations with Indigenous activists, communities and Nations with a grounding in our collective ancestral histories and cultures, with awareness of the privileges that we hold, and with understanding of where each of us comes from and of our personal histories.

Create respectful and solidarity-based connections and alliances between Inter Pares and Indigenous activists, communities and Nations, as well as with Indigenous movements. For work in various parts of Canada, Inter Pares will seek to create links with the local Indigenous nation(s) and follow local protocols for collaboration and public gatherings.

Build relationships with other Canadian organizations seeking to advance reconciliation.

¹² “The ideas of ‘resistance and resurgence’ are important to a decolonizing approach. “Resistance” refers to the diverse strategies Indigenous peoples and nations use to resist colonialism. To Indigenous Peoples, resistance is not just mass mobilization, armed conflict, and protest. It encompasses a broad range of strategies and activities that promote decolonization, Indigenous ways of life, values, knowledge, and broader political goals. Indigenous resistance includes “everyday acts of resistance” that embody individuals and communities living by their traditional teachings, despite overwhelming pressure from the dominant society not to do so. As a related concept, “resurgence” is the increase or revival of an activity or of ideas. For Indigenous Peoples, this involves increasing or reviving traditional land-based and water-based cultural practices that existed long before colonization and will continue to exist long after, as well as the revitalization of languages and cultural practices that have been under attack.” Source: *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls*. Volume 1a. 2019. Page 78

Programming



Support the agency of Indigenous activists, communities and Nations, as well as with Indigenous movements, in addressing the root causes of current inequalities.

Encourage and facilitate collaborations and solidarity relationships between Indigenous movements in Canada and internationally facing similar challenges.

Increase the awareness and understandings of non-Indigenous Canadians and of our counterparts to the struggles for Indigenous social justice in Canada.

Education



Build staff and board's awareness of historic and current patterns of domination, racism, and oppression in Canadian society. This includes building knowledge of Canadians' shared history, including the residential school system and its legacy, and ongoing Indigenous rights violations.

Develop the necessary skills to interact in a culturally competent way with Indigenous people. In this context, cultural competency entails developing an understanding of the context and traditions of diverse Indigenous peoples and communities we are working with, including protocols and ceremonies, and the ability to base relationship-building on this understanding.

Support relationship-building and reconciliation between Inter Pares supporters and Indigenous peoples in Canada.



Process

As a feminist organization, our work places high importance on good process as well as results.

Having clarified our vision and identified our goals, this section outlines our process for implementation.

Principles of Process

Inter Pares' feminist approach seeks to challenge systemic inequality, unjust power systems, discriminatory laws, policies and programs – at local, national, regional and global levels. Intersectionality¹³ entails recognizing that multiple aspects of identity and oppression (such as class or race) play out in people's lives and are experienced in an intersecting way: for instance, Indigenous women do not experience racism and sexism separately and distinctly, these oppressions combine to create a different experience than Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women face. Intersectionality also challenges us to consider gender, gender identity, and gender expression along a spectrum instead of in binaries (woman/man, femininity/masculinity). Adopting an intersectional approach allows us to identify and address complex contexts, and formulate strategies that are grounded in oppressed people's realities. Agency is an individual or group's ability to make choices, and to transform those choices into desired outcomes. Feminist agency includes principles of autonomy, choice, empowerment and meaningful engagement. Agency allows us to recognize that individuals are experts and knowledge holders in their own right.

Process by Area of Action

Relationship-Building

In order to act in a way that is supportive of our stated vision and goals, we must nurture Inter Pares' relationships and collaborations with Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations.

¹³ Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. It “addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discriminatory systems create background inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes, and the like.” Kimberlé Crenshaw, Gender-Related Aspects of Race Discrimination, Background Paper submitted to the Expert Group Meeting on Gender and Racial Discrimination, Background Paper U.N. Doc. EGM/GRD/2000/WP. 1 (Zagreb, Croatia, 2000) at 8.

This relationship-building will be based upon:



- learning from the leadership of progressive, egalitarian Indigenous activists and groups;
- common cause and solidarity;
- supporting the agency of people most affected by issues.

Programming

In order to act in a way that is supportive of our stated vision and goals, we must foster a deeper alignment with Indigenous struggles and activism through our social justice programming.

This programming will prioritize collaborations which:



- challenge systemic inequality, oppression and discrimination;
- connect with existing themes of Inter Pares' work, enabling us to expand our program areas and explore new relationships;
- are grounded in grassroots work whenever appropriate;
- contribute to movement building;
- promote better understanding of Indigenous issues among non-Indigenous Canadians and/or our counterparts.

Education

In order to act in a way that is supportive of our stated vision and goals, we must deepen our collective awareness of Indigenous histories; the legacies of colonialism, including residential schools; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; treaties; Indigenous rights and Indigenous teachings.

This education must:



- target staff, board, donors and the general public;
- include discussion-based and experiential learning opportunities;
- include the ongoing monitoring of issues as they evolve.



Conclusion

We recognize that the projects of decolonization, healing, and attaining justice may take a long time to come to fruition, and so Inter Pares' efforts must be long-term as well.

The expected outcome beyond the lifespan of the 2019-2021 implementation plan (Part II of this action plan) is an integration of these visions and priorities into Inter Pares' work that will continue. We anticipate that we ourselves, as individuals and as an institution, will be changed through this Action Plan by shifting our worldviews and understandings of our country, and that these new understandings will enrich and deepen our programming, our institutional priorities, and our own lives.

