

Letter of concern to Prime Minister of Canada re: Burch Church

From: Mennonite Church Canada

September 1, 2000

Rt. Hon. Jean Chretien
Prime Minister of Canada

It is with utmost urgency that Mennonite Church Canada, representing over 250 congregations, and Mennonite Central Committee Canada, the inter-Mennonite relief and development agency, appeal to you for immediate action to defuse the violent situation currently evolving in Esgenoopetitj/Burnt Church, New Brunswick.

As a peace church, a community of the Christian faith committed to biblical understandings of non-violence and the example of Jesus Christ, our desires for a non-violent resolution to this conflict are deeply rooted.

We are shocked by the television images of violent clashes on the waters of Miramichi Bay. We have also received information since the fall of 1999 from Christian Peacemaker Teams, a programme of Mennonite and other faith groups, who are present in Burnt Church and report increasing use of aggressive tactics by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. It is clear from our experience worldwide that the use of force will not resolve the kind of conflict underlying the present situation.

We recognize that the legal, economic and moral issues surrounding this crisis are complex. The hopes and fears of all the people of the region must be taken into consideration. At the same time, the government has the power to reduce the potential for further injury or loss of life by altering its course of action. We appeal to you for immediate action to halt the aggression demonstrated toward Mi'kmaq fishers and their community at Esgenoopetitj/Burnt Church by federal authorities. We encourage you to redouble your efforts at negotiating an end to the immediate crisis.

From long and direct involvement with aboriginal communities we know that similar conflicts over resources and land threaten to boil over in other parts of this country. We urge you, therefore, to adopt and promote a vision for an equitable sharing of resources between First Nations and the larger Canadian society which will render such violent clashes obsolete. We commend to you the government's own report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples released in 1996 as a source for the implementation of such a vision.

Respectfully yours,

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Mennonite Central Committee Canada

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