

Decolonizing the Pursuit of Climate Justice



GIVE IT UP FOR THE EARTH!
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In the face of multiple crises, some would argue that we must “pick one” and focus there. The thing is, everything is connected. All of it. Not least of which is the honouring of Indigenous rights, the decolonization of our systems and structures, and the attainment of climate justice.

What is decolonization?¹

Decolonization is not a metaphor.² As Christians, decolonizing means rejecting Terra Nullius and the Doctrine of Discovery as a justification for colonial occupation of land in the name of extractive industries that exacerbate the climate emergency. An anti-colonial approach to climate justice rejects colonial capitalism, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples off their ancestral lands for corporate extractivism, and embraces the land from a position of right relationships with Indigenous peoples, each other, and ourselves.

Why is decolonization important?

Decolonization is important as a refusal to replicate systems of oppression and domination within the green economy and governance system that we are uplifting as the alternative to non-renewable exploitation.

Taking action

Indigenous land defenders, Indigenous-led climate justice initiatives, and Canadian youth, continue to call for churches, people of faith, and faith-based organizations to ground commitments to climate action in decolonizing, in the very literal sense of rejecting the expropriation of Indigenous lands for resource extraction and upholding Indigenous self-determination on their traditional territories.

This is just one of the ways that the principle of “free, prior, and informed consent,” as outlined in United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration) and enshrined in Canadian law through Bill C-15, must be operationalized and implemented in Canadian law and policy.

Fundamentally, the achievement of climate justice in Canada (and in Canadian engagement internationally) requires that we prioritize Indigenous autonomy, transform our economic and social structures, and create space for the voices of those who have been traditionally marginalized and continue to be particularly vulnerable to the climate crisis.

For individuals and communities, this starts with learning about and building relationships with the Indigenous communities on whose traditional territory we live, work, and play. For organizations, it includes following the lead of Indigenous-led movements. And for governments, it means taking action to reduce emissions while also promoting equity, resilience, and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

¹ This text, “What is decolonization?” and “Why is decolonization important?” was written by Sophos Slessor and Katarina Kuhnert for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada’s National Task Force on Carbon Neutrality. Their writing also informed “Taking action” and is shared here with the permission of the authors.

² E. Tuck & K.W. Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor.” 2012. <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630> .