



## Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

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*So great is the hurry in the spirit of this world, that in aiming to do business quickly and to gain wealth the creation at this day doth loudly groan. ~ John Woolman, 1772*

Dear Friends,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Tar Sands Working Group of Canadian Friends Service Committee. We were appointed in October 2009 to undertake follow up work noted in minutes 57 and 72 (enclosed) from Canadian Yearly Meeting sessions last summer.

Development of the Athabasca oil sands (aka “tar sands”) in northern Alberta is continuing at a frantic pace with several massive new developments announced early this year. The oil sands represent the second largest oil reserve in the world; this oil is extracted only at a huge environment, health and social cost. The issue is complex; some communities are seeing unprecedented economic gains and the social fabric of much of Alberta is intimately intertwined with the industry. Yet the degradation of the land, the danger to the Athabasca River water basin and the ecosystems that depend on it, the significant contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and the serious threats to the health, social structures and well being of the people who live and work nearby raise profound ethical questions.

In May 2009, Dana Bush, a Calgary Friend, represented CYM on a KAIROS delegation of church leaders to the tar sands. Following her report to CYM last summer, Friends called for a moratorium on new land leases and requested an independent, comprehensive health study into the impact of the tar sands on the health of those who live and work in the region. The CYM minute states “it is clear that the degradation of the land, water, social structures and well-being of all life in the region requires, at minimum, a pause ...There is a need for much deeper consideration of the immediate and long term consequences of this activity. Are there not less damaging ways to meet our energy needs (including reducing them)?”

CYM asked that Monthly Meetings deeply consider the issue and offer guidance to CFSC on how to move forward with this concern. We are bringing this matter to your attention now.

### **In this package, you will find:**

- a copy of Dana Bush's report;
- a copy of the CYM minutes concerning the tar sands;
- a Kairos paper entitled “A Christian Response to the Tar Sands” which frames the concerns in a faith-based context;
- a list of further resources to facilitate your Meetings' discussion and discernment about the way forward.

As the issues are myriad and multifaceted we have included a wide variety of resources on the resource list from industry web sites to independent video documentaries. The website and animated trailer from the documentary

*H<sub>2</sub>Oil* provides an accessible overview of the situation, as does the industry produced video clip *To Love or Not to Love the Tar Sands*. Several of the video clips as well as a CBC timeline highlight the struggles of First Nations communities of Fort Chipewyan and Fort MacKay, located downstream of the mining pits and tailings ponds. Dr. Schindler's report on water contamination questions the sufficiency and accuracy of government regulation and industry monitoring while the Oil Sands Developers Group "facts" page presents industry's response to some of these concerns. Bishop Bouchard's letter is a carefully considered and loving call to honour the integrity of creation in the Athabasca water shed and the *Scientific American* article argues that renewable energy sources are a viable option for the future. The questions that these sources raise range from specific details of oil sands operations and safety to larger questions of whether oil sands development is compatible with our overall vision of a just and peaceful society.

**We ask that Meetings arrange a time to consider way forward for Friends in witnessing to the issues that the tar sands pose.** You may wish to make the core resources available to members and attenders to read and ask a couple of Friends to coordinate a time to discuss the issues. You may wish to show some of the video resources at such a learning meeting, or a meeting in advance of a discussion meeting.

We offer the following two queries to use as a part of your discernment, if useful to you:

- *What concerns me most about the tar sands development?*
- *What role should Friends play in addressing these concerns?*

**We ask that you provide us with your thoughtful consideration on this concern no later than 1 June 2010, so that a report with recommendations may be prepared and presented at CYM. Please email your response to [cfsc@cfsc.quaker.ca](mailto:cfsc@cfsc.quaker.ca)**

We encourage Friends to contact us with questions that arise during your discernment process. The status of the oil sands development is changing rapidly and we are aware that new information is constantly becoming available. The resource list we have included with this mailing is far from exhaustive and we would be pleased to help your Meeting access any further information it needs. We welcome your comments and feedback on an ongoing basis.

In her report, Dana urges us to consider that "the oil sands serve as an icon of our society, a window into our decisions and our values. However, there is a risk that if we focus our attention on the oil sands, we will miss the bigger questions. The use and development of the oil sands is a symptom of our problems, not the root problem."

Friends, how are we called to witness?

In Friendship,



Sarah Dick  
Clerk, Tar Sands Working Group of CFSC