

# Touchstones of Hope: History of the Movement & Process & Principles of Reconciliation

Inquiry Respecting the Treatment,  
Experiences and Outcomes of Innu  
in the Child Protection System

February 17, 2023 | Presented by **Jennifer King**



First Nations Child & Family  
Caring Society of Canada

Société de soutien à l'enfance  
et à la famille des Premières Nations  
du Canada

# Overview

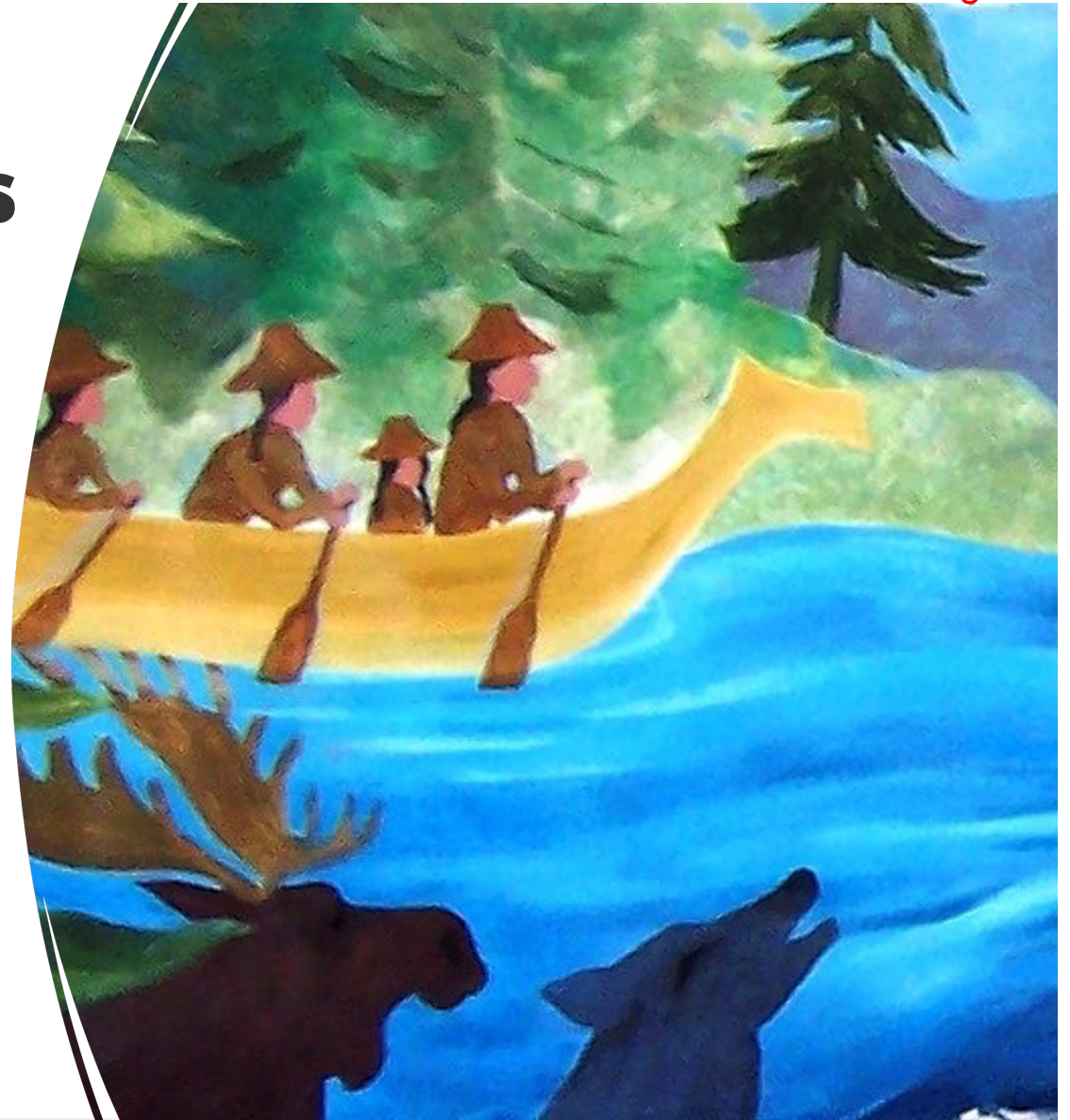
- History of Touchstones of Hope
- Principles of reconciliation: holistic approach, culture and language, structural interventions, non-discrimination, self determination
- Phases of reconciliation: truth-telling, acknowledging, relating, restoring



# What is Touchstones of Hope?

A **process** and set of **principles** for **meaningful reconciliation** and collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in a variety of contexts.

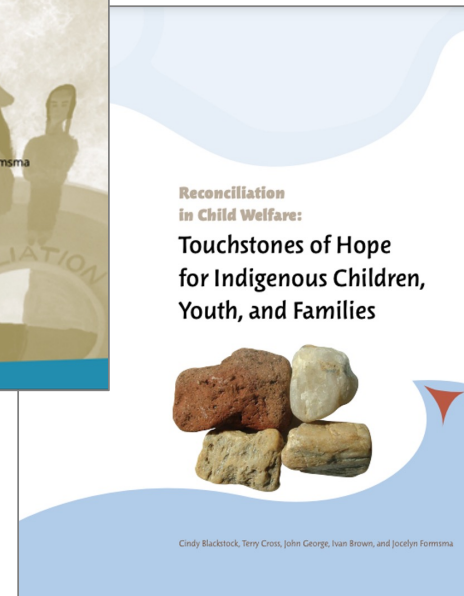
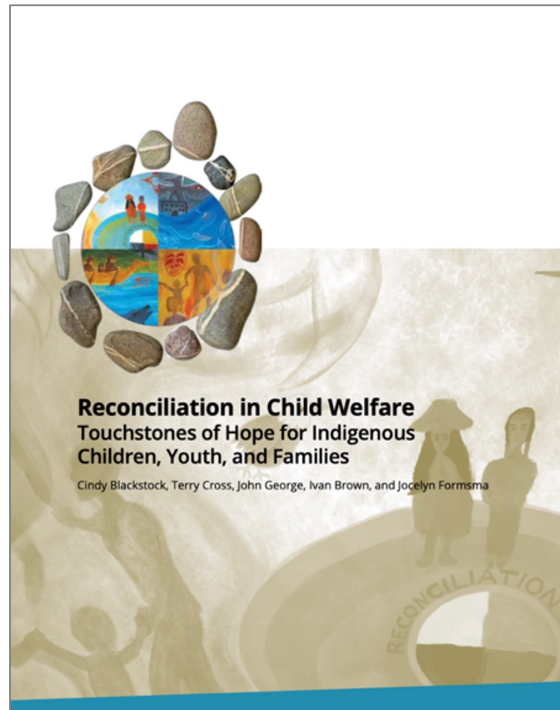
Has been used in child welfare, workplace environments, child and youth engagement, research, education, and more.



Touchstones of Hope is **a philosophy**. It's not a program. It's not an event...It is about weaving fundamental principles, principles our Elders and young people and families have been talking about for centuries, into the actual work of reconciliation in various settings and contexts.

- Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director, Caring Society





In October 2005, approximately 200 Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders in child welfare gathered on the territory of the Six Nations of the Grand River (in Niagara Falls, Canada) for a historic event called *Reconciliation: Looking Back, Reaching Forward — Indigenous Peoples and Child Welfare*.

# Principles of Reconciliation



Culture and Language  
Holistic Approach  
Structural Interventions  
Non-Discrimination  
Self Determination





In many Indigenous cultures, stones are referred to as “grandfathers,” as they are the silent witnesses to the lives of generations of peoples who pass before them.

A touchstone is a high standard against which we measure other things. Applied to reconciliation in child welfare, **touchstones are the high standards and values that guide action** in each of the four phases of reconciliation.

-From *Reconciliation in child welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous children, youth, families*, 2006, p. 7

(v) self-determination – that the Innu, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and Government of Canada are working in various ways to better partner and better reflect Innu culture and language in the current child protection system, and towards reaching the common objective of the Innu assuming responsibility for child protection;

(vi) culture and language – child protection policy and practice need to reflect Innu culture and make every effort for Innu children and youth to maintain their language and culture, as child protection policy and practice are most effective when they reflect, value, preserve and promote the intrinsic and distinct aspects of Indigenous cultures;

(vii) holistic approaches – child protection approaches reflect the reality of the whole child, the importance of preserving the continuity of relationships and recognizing the child is shaped by the child's culture, spirituality and social customs, environment, social relationships and specific abilities and traits;

(viii) structural interventions – preventative actions which aim to address risks which tend to cause Innu children and youth to be involved in the child protection system with the objective of reducing the number of Innu children and youth that become involved with the child protection system; and

(ix) non-discrimination – Innu children and youth receiving child protection services should not receive inferior services because they are Indigenous, and are entitled to, in accordance with the law, receive services substantively equal to services provided to non-Innu children and youth that are responsive to their needs, and the unique cultural context of their experience;

Terms of Reference for the Inquiry

The Touchstones principles are defined and brought to life by those involved to reflect the unique context of the Nation and communities.



# Culture and Language, Holistic Approach

- Culture is ingrained in all child welfare theory, research, policy, and practice. There is no culturally neutral practice or practitioner.
- Different ways of knowing and being in the world lead to different priorities and different ideas about “good” policy and service delivery.
- Worldview and culture are different.
  - Worldview = lens through which you acquire knowledge and understand the world (Anishinaabekwe scholar Dr. Kathy Absolon).
  - Culture = the diverse expression(s) of a shared worldview.
- The inquiry itself reflects a worldview about how to gather knowledge and identify what needs to change.



# Culture and Language, Holistic Approach cont.

- Holistic approach = part of an Indigenous worldview.
- Holistic approaches to child welfare reflect the reality of the whole child, preserve the continuity of relationships, and recognize the child is shaped by their culture (including traditions, spirituality, and social customs), environment, social relationships, and specific abilities, and traits.
- Effective child welfare services take a lifelong approach to making decisions, and give due consideration to both short- and long-term impacts of interventions.
- Holistic approach requires attention to structural interventions.
- Are we holding caregivers accountable for things they can't address or change?
- Codifying risk at the level of families causes harm - we (social workers, society) know what the actual risk factors are and fail to act.



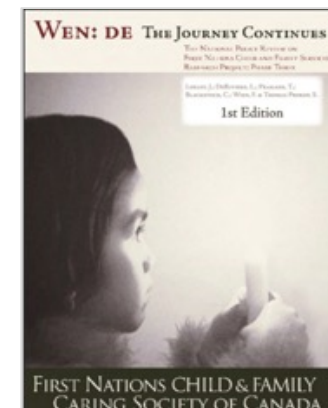
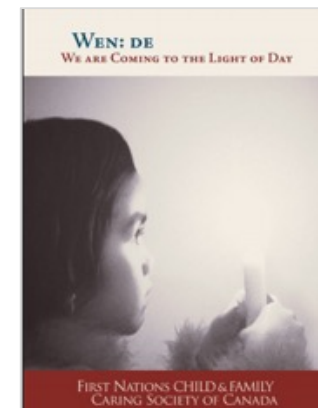
# Structural interventions

- **Without redress of structural risks, there is little chance that the number of Indigenous children and youth in care will be reduced.**
- Structural risks are factors that place people at risk that are largely beyond their ability to control such as poverty, poor housing, historical disadvantage, and inequitable access to services.
- What do we know about the reasons First Nations kids go into care? First Nations data: Child welfare IS poverty, poor housing, addictions, mental health, and family violence (FN/CIS-2019).
- Inequities have a direct impact on child well-being (PAHO, 2019).
- Cindy Blackstock: If you're not dealing with the drivers of the overrepresentation, it doesn't matter if it's provincial jurisdiction or First Nations jurisdiction, it's a system built on quicksand.
- Example: Research on needs-based funding for First Nations child welfare, Institute on Fiscal Studies and Democracy.



# Non-Discrimination

- Indigenous peoples have a right to equal access to resources and services that are responsive to their needs and the unique cultural context of their experiences.
- Case for First Nations kids at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, filed 2007 = the background against which the Touchstones principles were articulated, inequities in the United States also.
- Why was the complaint filed? Federal government failed to implement evidence-based solutions despite agreeing with the findings.
  - Joint National Policy Review: completed in 2000, pegged shortfall in child welfare funding, especially for prevention services, at 22% compared to children off-reserve.
  - Wen:De Reports: completed in 2005 when the federal government was running a surplus budget in the billions. The reports pegged the shortfall in child welfare funding at \$109 million per year.



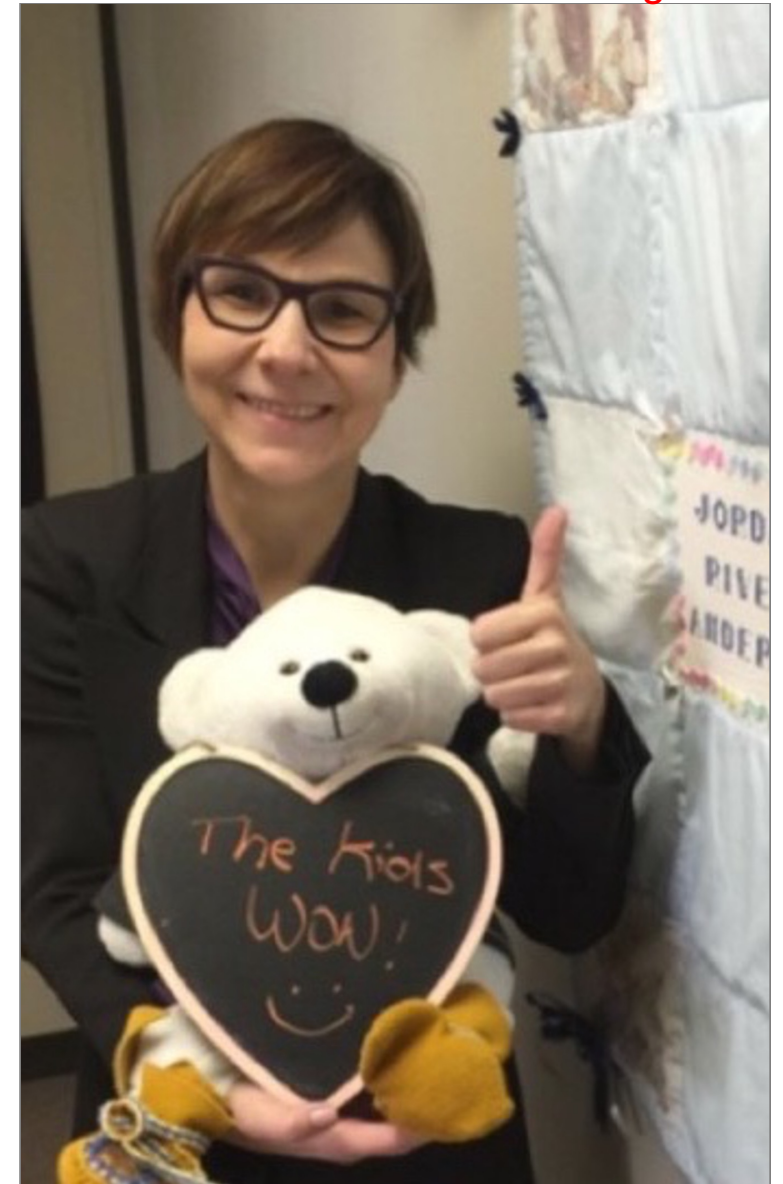


# Non-Discrimination

In January 2016, the Canadian Human Tribunal ordered Canada to immediately stop its discrimination, reform the First Nations Child and Family Services Program and fully implement Jordan's Principle.

***Similar to the Residential Schools era, today, the fate and future of many First Nations children is still being determined by the government.***

**2016 CHRT 2 para. 426**





# Self-Determination

- Indigenous peoples are in the best position to make decisions that affect their communities and lead the development of laws, policies, research, and practice.
- Since 2006, self-determination has been recognized in Canada and internationally as a fundamental principle in First Nations child welfare and an inherent Indigenous right.
- *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, 2021.*
- Why then do so many policies, practices, and operational realities stay remain the same?

# Process of Reconciliation

## Truth Telling

Telling the story of child welfare as it has affected Indigenous children, youth, families and communities.

## Restoring

Doing what we can to redress the harm and making changes to ensure it does not happen again.



## Acknowledging

Learning from the past, seeing one another with new understanding, and recognizing the need to move forward on a new path.

## Relating

Working respectfully together to design, implement, and monitor the new child welfare system.

# Truth Telling: *Open exchange about child welfare in the context of colonialism*

## Colonial tactics

- Take territory/land: disrupt traditional economies, food sources
- Deny sovereignty: disrupt leadership and governance
- Attack legitimacy of thought: worldview, language, spirituality
- Take the children
- 1949, Dominion of Newfoundland joins Canada
- **Bilateral agreements** between the province and Canada excluded the Innu
- 1960s, education by the **Catholic School Board** under the provincial system
- 1978, provincial child protection is applied to Innu communities



# ***Acknowledging: Affirming and Learning from the past and embracing new possibilities for the future***

## **Inquiry into the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System Established**

“With the release of the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into the treatment of Innu children and youth in care, we can now consider that this long-awaited Inquiry has officially begun. It is an important undertaking to understand the scope of impact that the child welfare system has had on Innu people. We are hopeful that this process will continue a path towards healing and that it will inform how we can best move forward in the future to avoid repeating mistakes of the past. Innu Nation fully supports this independent Inquiry and will work with all involved throughout the process.”

Grand Chief Etienne Rich

Innu Nation

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador News Release,  
April 29, 2022

# ***Relating: Addressing the problems of the past and creating a better path for the future***

## **Inquiry into the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System Established**

“Our path towards Reconciliation is through listening, understanding and mutual respect. We acknowledge the wrongs of the past and focus our attention on matters that are important to Indigenous people. Through this Inquiry, we will acquire a better understanding of the treatment, experiences and care that Innu children have received in the current system, and more importantly, how we improve for the future.”

Honourable Andrew Furey

Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador

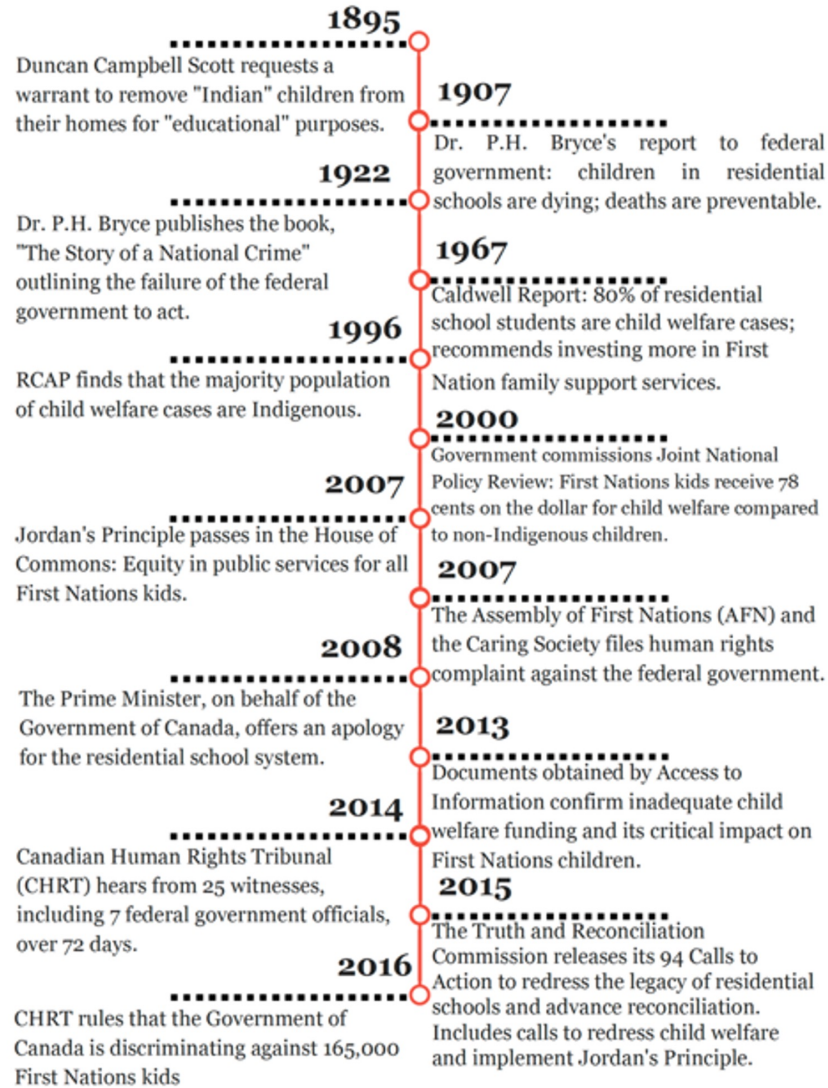
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# ***Restoring: Move forward together in a respectful way, along a new path, to achieve better outcomes***

It's **not enough to learn**. It's not enough to listen. We **need to** learn from the past and **actually make the changes** that are on the books to address contemporary injustice.

– Cindy Blackstock





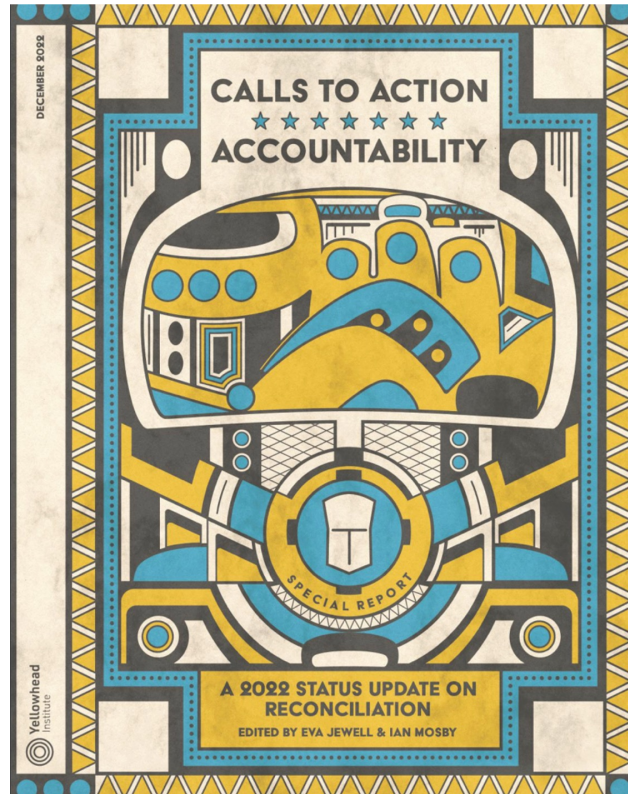
Barrier to reconciliation:

**Choosing not to do better** when we know better.

Somewhere between acknowledging, relating, and restoring, **change stalls.**

History of Inequity: [fncaringsociety.com/what-you-can-do/ways-make-difference/reconciling-history](http://fncaringsociety.com/what-you-can-do/ways-make-difference/reconciling-history)





Jewel & Mosby, Yellowhead Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University



Only 13 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action have been completed since 2005

New Brunswick

## Calls grow for Indigenous-led inquiry into systemic racism



Renewed calls come in wake of coroner's inquest into the killing of Chantel Moore

CBC News · Posted: May 27, 2022 6:00 AM AT | Last Updated: May 27

### Action needed

Palmater told CBC News that while she supports an Indigenous-led inquiry, it will be all for naught if action isn't taken afterwards.

"We do so many studies, investigations, inquiries, commissions, court cases, human rights complaints, tribunals, and we find out over and over and over again, 'Yeah, we still have the same problem and it's getting worse,' " said Palmater.

"But then everybody drops the ball instead of taking the next step, which is what do we need to do to fix it? It's not like there haven't been thousands of recommendations to say what to do about it. It's just that governments and society haven't taken up the call to do that."

## DEDICATION

To our ancestors who entrusted us with the care of this generation and the generations we will never know. Give us the strength to do what we know is right.

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