

MINUTE FOR RIGHT RELATIONS

April 2021

Meet Autumn Peltier

Autumn Peltier is a 16 year old Anishinaabe-kwe and a member of the Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory on Manitoulin Island. She is a water defender and the chief water commissioner for the Anishinabek Nation. After taking part in a ceremony in a village that had no access to clean, safe drinking water, Autumn was struck by the fact that people her own age didn't even know what a drinking water tap was. She began to take part in a number of water ceremonies across Ontario, inspired by her Great Aunt Josephine Mandamin, who was a water rights activist and founder of *Mother Earth Water Walkers* and, until her death in February 2019, was the Chief Water Commissioner for the Anishinabek Nation.

Autumn Peltier was nominated for an International Children's Peace Prize multiple times, named as Chatelaine's woman of the year in 2019 and has spoken at the United Nation Climate Action Summit in 2018 and 2019. A movie, *The Water Walker*, was made about Autumn, documenting her powerful journey from Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory to New York City as she prepared to speak in front of the United Nations with the hope of preserving the future of Indigenous communities for generations to come.

Autumn continues to advocate and give voice to the right to clean, safe water in Indigenous communities. In 2016, she had been chosen to present the Canadian prime minister with a ceremonial copper water bowl to symbolise his responsibility to protect the country's water. She told the Prime Minister, "I am very unhappy with the choices you've made."

Although some progress has been made – 106 advisories have been lifted since November 2015 – there's still a ways to go. There are 52 active long-term water advisories in communities across the country, and activists maintain that clean water should be a priority for the federal government, especially during a global pandemic.

Autumn says "We can't drink money and we can't eat oil. We shouldn't have to pay for water and everyone should have access to clean drinking water all around the world. Keep advocating, keep going and do this for the planet. We do this for the water and we do this for our future!"

How can we help?

- Write a letter to your MP and the Prime Minister's Office urging them to prioritize safe drinking water for First Nations' communities
- Fundraise or Donate to a water advocacy group such as "Water First" – Check out St. Peter's United Church in Sudbury's initiative - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEiJDiWu58>
- For updated information on where the Government stands with its promise to end drinking water advisories visit Government of Canada's "Water in First Nations' Communities" page at <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1506514143353/1533317130660>
- Make a personal pledge to reduce your GHG emissions and engage in acts of solidarity with justice-seeking communities. Check out <https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/>

Submitted by Lisa Blais, on behalf of the CSRC Right Relations Resource Team