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FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First Nations Leadership Council Condemns Canada for Not Supporting UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver - The First Nations Leadership Council and many other First Nations leaders and human rights organizations sent an open letter to Prime Minister Harper today, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, urging Canada to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The open letter notes that the UN General Assembly is on the verge of adopting this historic declaration yet Canada is one of a handful of countries trying to redraft key sections of the Declaration. The UN Human Rights Council adopted the Declaration in June 2006, a move that Canada disgracefully voted against.

"The Canadian government has not substantiated any of their claims that the UN Declaration somehow undermines the Canadian Charter of Rights," said Grand Chief Edward John, a member of the First Nations Summit political executive and First Nations Leadership Council. "The purpose of the Declaration is to ensure uplifting human rights standards and not to reflect existing domestic policies and laws of specific States. In fact, States **cannot** invoke their constitutions or other domestic laws in order to avoid including human rights norms in a United Nations declaration consistent with their international obligations."

Canada is seeking to revisit issues in the Declaration such as self-determination, Indigenous governance, lands and resources and compensation, which have been discussed extensively for more than 20 years. Canada had been an active participant in the Working Group that developed the current text and, in recent years, had played a critical role in building state support for the principles of the Declaration.

A recent Angus Reid national public opinion poll reflected that 71% of Canadians want the federal government to speed up native land claims processes in Canada and nearly two-in-three (64%) think the federal government should do more to deal with poverty in Aboriginal communities. The Declaration is a critical international tool that sets minimum standards thereby encouraging governments to move away from their historically unilateral and arbitrary policy development.

"If Canada is serious about addressing the unacceptable levels of poverty on First Nations land and speeding up the land claims process, it should accept the minimum international standards in the Declaration. Canada should stop creating arbitrary and unilateral standards they have adopted in land claims and self-government negotiations," added Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and a member of the First Nations Leadership Council.

The First Nations Leadership Council agrees with the Special Rapporteur, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, who noted at the June 2006 Human Rights Council Meeting,

"In response to the concerns of some states regarding issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Special Rapporteur considers that no country has ever been diminished by supporting an international human rights instrument; rather the contrary is the case.

The adoption of the draft declaration... would signal...that the member states of the Human Rights Council share with them a comprehensive, positive and constructive view of human rights for the benefit of all."

Of significance to First Nations in Canada, are Declaration Articles 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 36 and 42. In particular, Article 36 references the right to recognition, observance and enforcement of Treaties and other Agreements and Article 42 signifies that the entire Declaration sets the minimum standards for Crown - First Nations relations. The complete text of the Declaration can be found at <http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/declaration.htm>.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

The Council works together to politically represent the interests of First Nations in British Columbia and develop strategies and actions to bring about significant and substantive changes to government policy that will benefit all First Nations in British Columbia.

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