

PUBLIC STATEMENT

13 September 2017

10th Anniversary of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*: Canada needs a legislative framework to fulfill the promise of this vital human rights instrument

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* provides a crucial framework to achieve reconciliation. Such a human rights-based approach is essential to address the racism and discrimination that has caused such profound harm to Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world. Violations include uprooting Indigenous peoples from their territories and resources, failure to honour Treaties, tearing Indigenous children from their families, and making Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people the targets of unimaginable violence.

The adoption of the *UN Declaration* ten years ago today – on September 13, 2007 – was a crucial victory in the evolution of international human rights law. This historic achievement was possible because Indigenous peoples persisted for more than two decades in advancing a strong and powerful vision of self-determination, decolonization and non-discrimination.

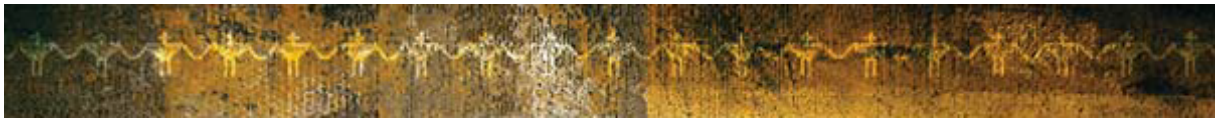
The adoption of the *Declaration* was also made possible because, by the end of this process, influential states including Canada had finally come to accept the necessity and urgency of a new relationship with Indigenous peoples.

The UN General Assembly has unanimously reaffirmed the *Declaration* on three separate occasions, calling for full implementation at national and international levels.

Fulfilling this commitment requires meaningful and lasting changes to eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and practices and to ensure Indigenous peoples make their own decisions about their lives and futures.

Yet, a decade after the adoption of the *Declaration*, Canada still lacks concrete and effective mechanisms to uphold its provisions. This is despite many positive statements from the current government committing to fully implement the *Declaration*.

Last month, the United Nations' top anti-racism body, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, strongly supported Indigenous peoples in urging



Canada to adopt a legislative framework and national action plan to implement the *UN Declaration*.

A private members bill expected to come before the House of Commons this fall for second reading – Bill C-262 introduced by MP Romeo Saganash – contains elements of such a framework. This includes: repudiation of colonialism and doctrines of superiority; affirmation that the standards set out in the *UN Declaration* have application in Canadian law; and review and reform of federal legislation to ensure consistency with the minimum standards set out in the *UN Declaration*. In addition, the Bill requires that a national action plan be developed in partnership with Indigenous peoples.

By approaching implementation of the *Declaration* through a legislative framework, there is greater assurance that crucial progress made will not be undone by a future government. Our organizations and Nations call on the federal government to embrace and build on the key elements of implementation already set out in Bill C-262.

We appreciate that full implementation of the *Declaration* requires long-term commitment and collaboration. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission repeatedly reminded us, “reconciliation is going to take hard work.”

This is the time to act. Public responses to the TRC’s Calls to Action demonstrate a profound desire among Canadians to build a just relationship between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians. As the TRC itself stated, the *Declaration* provides the framework for doing so. However, putting this framework into place requires more than fine words. It requires concrete, effective action.

The Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Statement endorsed by:

Amnesty International Canada; Amnistie internationale Canada francophone; Assembly of First Nations; Assemblée des Premières Nations Québec-Labrador and Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador; British Columbia Assembly of First Nations; Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers); Confederacy of Treaty 6; First Nations Summit; Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee); Indigenous Bar Association; Indigenous World Association; KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives; Métis Nation; MiningWatch Canada; Native Women’s Association of Canada; Nunavut Tunngavik; Oxfam Canada; Oxfam-Québec; Quebec Native Women/Femmes Autochtones du Québec; Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs