

First Nations Summit

MEDIA STATEMENT

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
SEPTEMBER 13, 2017**

First Nations Summit statement on 10th Anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Coast Salish Territory, Vancouver, British Columbia – The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration) ten years ago today – on September 13, 2007 - was a historic achievement realized through the hard work and commitment of Indigenous Peoples over a span of two decades working collectively to advance international Indigenous human rights.

We are buoyed by commitments of the new provincial NDP government to implement the Declaration and the TRC Calls to Action as part of its efforts to reconstruct British Columbia's relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

We also see a shift in leadership at the federal level with Canada's new 10 Principles guiding its relationship with Indigenous peoples, as well as the recent dissolution of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and creation of two new ministries: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, and Indigenous Services. These are a hopeful sign that Canada is serious about decolonizing its approach to Indigenous issues and to building a new relationship from a more appropriate foundation.

While we welcome these commitments, we strongly urge both governments to adopt an approach to implementation that establishes genuine partnerships with Indigenous Peoples and organizations from the outset. Full collaboration, consistent with 46 articles of the Declaration, is the most productive and successful route to effecting positive change through implementation of the Declaration and a lasting path of reconciliation.

Our collective challenge is turning words and commitments into concrete action – to translate them into practical actions that lead to actual, tangible benefits on the ground within our communities. This involves meaningful and lasting changes to eliminate discriminatory domestic laws, policies and practices, seeking to support Indigenous Peoples to fully exercise the right to self-determination and to expose and counter any narrow interpretations of the Declaration that serve to create fear, misunderstanding and conflict where there should be collaboration, constructive dialogue and joint progress.

Further, to truly accomplish full implementation of the Declaration, we require strong, bold and steadfast commitment by leadership at all levels within the federal and provincial bureaucracies and within our communities.

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The survival, dignity and well-being of our communities is of critical importance and requires urgent and swift action. In August 2017, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged Canada to adopt a legislative framework and national action plan to implement the Declaration. A legislative framework to support implementation of the Declaration will provide a solid foundation for progress and much needed protection for Indigenous human rights.

The last 150 years, a time of “cultural genocide” for Indigenous peoples in this country, have not served us well. We must seize the historic opportunities before us and work together in partnership to achieve constructive and long-lasting solutions on a collective path to reconciliation.

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The First Nations Summit speaks on behalf of First Nations involved in treaty negotiations in British Columbia. The Summit is also a NGO in Special Consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Further background information on the Summit may be found at www.fns.bc.ca.

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