



September 12, 2008

Open Letter to all Political Parties

Tomorrow, September 13, 2008, we celebrate the one-year anniversary of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The *Declaration* was adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 13, 2007 after more than two decades of negotiation and debate. Despite having previously played a positive role in building international support for this human rights instrument, Canada was one of only four states to oppose the *Declaration*.

There are over 370 million Indigenous people worldwide. Indigenous peoples urgently require international affirmation and protection of their human rights. Their rights are routinely ignored and trampled by national governments, even when these rights are entrenched in domestic laws.

The *Declaration* affirms minimum human rights standards necessary for the “survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world.” These include the right of self-determination, protections from discrimination and genocide, and recognition of rights to lands, territories and resources that are essential to the identity, health and livelihood of Indigenous peoples.

The *Declaration* also explicitly requires that all provisions are to be balanced with the rights of others and interpreted in accordance with principles of justice, democracy, non-discrimination, good governance and respect for the human rights of all.

On April 8, 2008 the Canadian House of Commons passed a resolution to endorse the *UN Declaration* and calling on Parliament and the Government of Canada to “fully implement the standards contained therein.” Unfortunately, the minority Conservative government has persisted with its unfounded claims that the *Declaration* cannot be applied in Canada and should not be used as a standard of human rights protection in countries that voted against it.

Human rights declarations become universally applicable upon their adoption by the UN General Assembly, regardless of how individual states vote. To claim that countries should be exempt from principles and standards they vote against flies in the face of six decades of Canadian human rights advocacy at the United Nations and sets a dangerous example for other countries of the world.

Indigenous peoples and human rights organizations urge Canada to join the global community in implementing this long overdue and much needed universal human rights instrument. To continue in any other manner undermines Canada's commitment to human rights at both the domestic and international levels.

In June a private members bill was introduced in the House of Commons calling for concrete measures to advance the *Declaration* in Canada. This includes requiring the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to report regularly to Parliament on implementation. Regretfully, Parliament will not have the opportunity to vote on this Bill before the October 14 election. We recommend that this worthy initiative be re-introduced and embraced by all political parties in the new Parliament.

In February 2009, Canada's human rights record will be examined as part of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review process. As a sign of its commitment to respecting the human rights of all, Canada should endorse the *Declaration*.

Our organizations take the occasion of the anniversary of the adoption to call on all political parties to affirm their support for the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. In accordance with the April 8, 2008 Motion, all parties should commit themselves to take action to ensure effective implementation of the *Declaration* when the new Parliament begins its work.

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