

Canada's Statement of Support on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Today, Canada joins other countries in supporting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In doing so, Canada reaffirms its commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples at home and abroad.

The Government of Canada would like to acknowledge the Aboriginal men and women who played an important role in the development of this Declaration.

The Declaration is an aspirational document which speaks to the individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples, taking into account their specific cultural, social and economic circumstances.

Although the Declaration is a non-legally binding document that does not reflect customary international law nor change Canadian laws, our endorsement gives us the opportunity to reiterate our commitment to continue working in partnership with Aboriginal peoples in creating a better Canada.

Under this government, there has been a shift in Canada's relationship with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, exemplified by the Prime Minister's historic apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools, the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the apology for relocation of Inuit families to the High Arctic and the honouring of Métis veterans at Juno Beach.

These events charted a new path for this country as a whole, one marked by hope and reconciliation and focused on cherishing the richness and depth of diverse Aboriginal cultures.

Canada continues to make exemplary progress and build on its positive relationship with Aboriginal peoples throughout the country, a relationship based on good faith, partnership and mutual respect.

The Government's vision is a future in which Aboriginal families and communities are healthy, safe, self-sufficient and prosperous within a Canada where people make their own decisions, manage their own affairs and make strong contributions to the country as a whole.

The Government has shown strong leadership by protecting the rights of Aboriginal people in Canada. The amendment to the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, the proposed Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act and the proposed legislation concerning matrimonial real property rights on reserve are just a few recent examples.

This government has also taken concrete and viable actions in important areas such as education, skills development, economic development, employment, health care, housing and access to safe drinking water. These are part of a continuing agenda focused on real results with willing and able partners.

At the international level Canada has been a strong voice for the protection of human rights. Canada is party to numerous United Nations human rights conventions which give expression to this commitment.

Canada has a constructive and far-reaching international development program that helps to improve the situation of Indigenous peoples in many parts of the world. Canada's active involvement abroad, coupled with its productive partnership with Aboriginal Canadians, is having a real impact in advancing indigenous rights and freedoms, at home and abroad.

In 2007, at the time of the vote during the United Nations General Assembly, and since, Canada placed on record its concerns with various provisions of the Declaration, including provisions dealing with lands, territories and resources; free, prior and informed consent when used as a veto; self-government without recognition of the importance of negotiations; intellectual property; military issues; and the need to achieve an appropriate balance between the rights and obligations of Indigenous peoples, States and third parties. These concerns are well known and remain. However, we have since listened to Aboriginal leaders who have urged Canada to endorse the Declaration and we have also learned from the experience of other countries. We are now confident that Canada can interpret the principles expressed in the Declaration in a manner that is consistent with our Constitution and legal framework.

Aboriginal and treaty rights are protected in Canada through a unique framework. These rights are enshrined in our Constitution, including our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and are complemented by practical policies that adapt to our evolving reality. This framework will continue to be the cornerstone of our efforts to promote and protect the rights of Aboriginal Canadians.

The 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games were a defining moment for Canada. The Games instilled a tremendous sense of pride in being Canadian and highlighted to the world the extent to which Aboriginal peoples and their cultures contribute to Canada's uniqueness as a nation. The unprecedented involvement of the Four Host First Nations and Aboriginal peoples from across the nation set a benchmark for how we can work together to achieve great success.

In endorsing the Declaration, Canada reaffirms its commitment to build on a positive and productive relationship with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples to improve the well-being of Aboriginal Canadians, based on our shared history, respect, and a desire to move forward together.

November 12, 2010