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Open Letter to All Candidates in the Federal Election

Implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* must be a priority for Canada's next government

The next federal government will have an historic opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation.

Fourteen years ago today, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (the "UN Declaration") as the "minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being" of Indigenous peoples in every region of the world. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has called the *UN Declaration* "the framework for reconciliation" for all sectors of Canadian society.

This summer, Parliament adopted national legislation to bring the *UN Declaration* to life in Canadian law, policy, and programmes. All candidates elected to the House of Commons in this election will have an important role in ensuring that the vital promise of this legislation is now kept.

The *Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (formerly Bill C-15) requires the federal government to work in cooperation with Indigenous peoples to fully implement the *UN Declaration*. This includes taking "all measures necessary" to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the *UN Declaration*. The Act also requires the federal government to "prepare and implement an action plan to achieve the objectives" of the *UN Declaration*.

Critically the new law requires that the action plan be completed within two years and requires annual reporting to Parliament on its progress.

During Parliamentary debate, Indigenous peoples successfully advocated for this deadline to be shortened from the three-year timetable originally proposed in the Bill. This change reflects the urgency of finally moving ahead with implementation of the *UN Declaration*.

Federal implementation of the *UN Declaration* should have begun 14 years ago when the *UN Declaration* was adopted by the world. Unfortunately, the *UN Declaration* has been politicized for partisan purposes, resulting in confusion about its meaning and years of needless delay in government implementation. Only in recent years has the federal government finally begun to move forward with its obligations.

The human rights protections affirmed in the *UN Declaration* provide a crucial framework for overcoming the profound injustices and inequalities faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada. Implementation is also necessary to fulfill Canada's legal commitments, including its Treaties with Indigenous peoples and the commitments it has made to the international human rights system. By working collaboratively with Indigenous peoples to bring the *UN Declaration* to life in laws, policies and programmes, Canada can set a positive example for the world in how to address such profound and pressing human rights violations.

The events of the last year have exposed the deep wounds of colonialism. Canadians have said that they want a new relationship with Indigenous peoples. Canada's next Parliament must act on that urgent need for justice.

The Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples is made up of organizations and individuals who were actively involved in either the development of the *UN Declaration* and/or its application in Canada. We strongly supported adoption of national implementation legislation as key to finally moving ahead in a principled, collaborative and non-partisan basis. Canada's next Parliament must move forward with implementation as required by the new law.

The Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples (www.declarationcoaliton.ca)

This statement was endorsed by the following organizations and individuals:

Amnistie internationale Canada francophone
BC Assembly of First Nations
BC Treaty Commission
Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)
First Nations Summit
Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)/Cree Nation Government
KAİROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
Union of BC Indian Chiefs
Chief Wilton Littlechild, former TRC Commissioner
Ellen Gabriel, Kanien'kehá:ka Activist
Cheryl Knockwood, Chair, Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission
Dr. Sheryl Lightfoot, Canada Research Chair of Global Indigenous Rights and Politics, University of British Columbia

Lea Nicholas MacKenzie, former Special Advisor on Indigenous Issues at the Canadian Mission to the UN
Laurie Buffalo, Councilwoman, Samson Cree Nation
Brenda Gunn, Academic and Research Director, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Manitoba
Dr. Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine, Présidente, Association Tinhinan Canada
Dr. Naomi Metallic, Chancellor's Chair in Aboriginal Law and Policy, Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University
Hup-Wil-Lax-A , Kirby Muldoe, Tsimsian/Gitxsan

