

10 March 2021

Open letter in support of Bill C-15

“The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.” – Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Principles of Reconciliation, Principle # 1.

Parliament has an historic opportunity to advance reconciliation.

The *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is a consensus global human rights instrument, elaborating minimum standards for the “survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples.” Implementation of these standards is vital to improving the lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world, and to upholding Canada’s solemn and urgent human rights commitments.

Members of the House of Commons and Senate must ensure that Bill C-15, An Act Respecting the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, passes into law before this session of Parliament concludes.

The *UN Declaration* affirms the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples and the corresponding obligations of States. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was right to put the *Declaration* at the heart of its vision for reconciliation. The *Declaration* condemns the racist and colonial doctrines, laws and beliefs that continue to cause so much harm to Indigenous peoples. It also provides the principles and mechanisms needed to redress these harms, as well as safeguards critical to ensuring these violations are never repeated.

Canada has repeatedly committed to implement the *UN Declaration*. The federal government has even stated this commitment in the preamble to recent Acts of Parliament like the *Indigenous Languages Act*. Bill C-15 is about putting these commitments into practice.

- Bill C-15 underlines and reinforces the *UN Declaration’s* rejection of racism and other forms of discrimination, colonialism, forced assimilation and destruction of culture.
- The Bill requires the Government of Canada to work with Indigenous peoples to establish priorities and processes for implementing the *Declaration’s* diverse provisions – and to report annually to Parliament on the progress made.
- The Bill provides clarity around the fact that the *Declaration*, like other international human rights instruments, is already being used by courts to interpret Canadian law.
- In particular, the Bill also requires a collaborative process of legal review and reform to bring federal laws into line with the human rights affirmed in the *Declaration*.

These are important, practical and achievable measures that deserve the support of all Canadians.

We are mindful that a previous effort to meet Canada’s implementation obligations, Bill C-262, died on the Order Paper after unnecessary delay and obstruction in the Parliamentary process. We do not want any further delays in meeting Canada’s obligations to implement the *UN Declaration*.

Some Indigenous peoples' governments and organizations, including some represented in this letter, are proposing or supporting amendments to clarify and strengthen Bill C-15. We believe that the Parliamentary process can accommodate a fulsome consideration of such amendments, while still ensuring that Bill C-15 is adopted before the end of the current session of Parliament.

Concrete measures to implement the *UN Declaration* in Canadian law and policy are necessary and overdue. Passage of Bill C-15 should be a top priority for all Members of Parliament and Senators.

Nations, Governments, and Organizations

Amnesty International Canada / Amnistie Internationale Canada	Conseil central du Montréal métropolitain – CSN	Nunavut Tunngavik Inc
Assembly of First Nations	Cooperation Canada	National Association of Women and the Law/Association nationale Femmes et Droit
BC Assembly of First Nations	First Nations Summit	OCASI - Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
British Columbia Treaty Commission	Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) / Cree Nation Government	Oxfam Canada
Canadian Arab Anti-discrimination Committee	The Hispanic Development Council	The Presbyterian Church in Canada
Canadian Arab Federation	Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group (Cowichan Tribes, Penelakut Tribe, Halalt First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Ts'uubaa-asatx First Nation)	Public Service Alliance of Canada / Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada
Canadian Council for Refugees / Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés	Human Rights Research and Education Centre at the University of Ottawa	Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights
Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)	Inuit Circumpolar Council	RAVEN (Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs)
Canadian Labour Congress	KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives	Regroupement des centres d'amitiés autochtones au Québec
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Yukon Chapter	Ligue des droits et libertés	South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)
Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic	McMaster Centre for Human Rights and Restorative Justice	Southeast Alaskan Indigenous Transboundary Commission
Citizens for Public Justice / Citoyens pour une politique juste	Mennonite Church Canada Indigenous-Settler Relations	
Colour of Poverty Colour of Change	Métis National Council	

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