

March 9, 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  
 Assembly of First Nations  
 BC Assembly of First Nations  
 British Columbia Treaty Commission  
 Canadian Arab Anti-discrimination Committee  
 Canadian Arab Federation  
 Canadian Council for Refugees / Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés  
 Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)  
 Canadian Labour Congress  
 Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Yukon Chapter  
 Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic  
 Citizens for Public Justice / Citoyens pour une politique juste  
 Colour of Poverty Colour of Change  
 Conseil central du Montréal métropolitain – CSN  
 Cooperation Canada  
 First Nations Summit  
 Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) / Cree Nation Government  
 The Hispanic Development Council  
 Hul’qumi’num Treaty Group (Cowichan Tribes, Penelakut Tribe, Halalt First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Ts’uubaa-asatx First Nation)  
 Human Rights Research and Education Centre at the University of Ottawa  
 Inuit Circumpolar Council  
 KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives  
 Ligue des droits et libertés  
 McMaster Centre for Human Rights and Restorative Justice  
 Mennonite Church Canada Indigenous-Settler Relations  
 Métis National Council  
 Nunavut Tunngavik Inc  
 National Association of Women and the Law/Association nationale Femmes et Droit  
 OCASI - Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants  
 Oxfam Canada  
 The Presbyterian Church in Canada  
 Public Service Alliance of Canada / Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada  
 Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights  
 RAVEN (Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs)  
 Regroupement des centres d’amitiés autochtones au Québec  
 South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)  
 Southeast Alaskan Indigenous Transboundary Commission

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