

The Right Honourable Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, PC, MP
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

September 22, 2020

Re: Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

I am writing on behalf of the Council of Canadians to urge your government to prioritize legislation guiding the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Canada. You have promised to table such legislation by the end of 2020, and that former Bill C-262 would be the “floor” of this new legislation. We ask that fulfilling this promise be a priority as Parliament resumes this fall, and that it be a central commitment in your upcoming Throne Speech.

The Council of Canadians is a grassroots social action organization with more than 150,000 members and supporters and 50 community-based chapters across the country. Since 1985, we have organized to strengthen Canada’s democracy so that all who live within these borders can live a life reflecting their inherent dignity. For this to occur, Canadian law and policy must be brought in line with the rights of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples as defined by UNDRIP.

November 12, 2020 will mark a decade since Canada formally endorsed UNDRIP. Since then, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, alongside many Indigenous movements for human rights, have emphasized the centrality of UNDRIP to any real reconciliation. Canada’s laws and policies must be brought in line with UNDRIP, including self-determination and free, prior and informed consent if we are to speak of any future in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada share a future free of systemic racism and exploitation.

Indigenous Peoples in Canada are constantly fighting for recognition of their rights as described by UNDRIP. The federal government’s failures to adequately recognize and protect these rights leads to frequent disruptions to Canadian society, like the major clashes we are witnessing now over fishing rights in Mi’kma’ki, or the cross-country blockades earlier this year in solidarity with Wet’suwet’en.

Adopting and implementing UNDRIP is essential to building healthy communities and institutions for all of us. Indigenous knowledge in land and resource stewardship are key to building sustainable communities, a transition we will all need to make to avoid the worst possible outcomes of the climate crisis. Ensuring that the rights of Indigenous Peoples are protected will also remove long-standing systemic barriers and strengthen democratic processes and representation that will benefit everyone living under these more just institutions. Ensuring that all communities have equal access to health and sanitation practices like clean water, safe housing and public health care cannot be sacrificed to colonial systems of exclusion if we are to truly overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.



We ask that your government:

- Immediately table legislation that draws Canada’s laws and policies in line with UNDRIP;
- Ensure that Bill C-262 be the “floor” for such legislation, as previously promised;
- Apply UNDRIP and obtain free, prior, and informed consent for all existing projects, and ensure that no existing project be exempt from these principles;
- Support this commitment with accountability to First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples; and,
- Support these important changes with the necessary budget.

Sincerely,

Christina Warner, Director of Campaigns and Organizing
On behalf of the Council of Canadians

CC: Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations
Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
Hon. Erin O’Toole, Leader of the Official Opposition
Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada and Critic for Crown-Indigenous Relations and Indigenous Services
Elizabeth May, Parliamentary Leader of the Green Party of Canada
Marilène Gill, Bloc Québécois Indigenous and Northern Affairs Critic