

Speaking Notes
for
The Honourable Carolyn Bennett
Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs

**Announcement of Canada's Support for the United Nations
Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

May 10, 2016

New York City

Check Against Delivery

Word count: 1,270 (10 mins)

Mr. Chairperson, Members of the Permanent Forum, before I begin, I want to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Lenape people.

I would also like to acknowledge elders Willy Littlechild, Sally Webster, and Oliver Boulette, who are a part of our delegation, and who are here with us representing Canada's three distinct Indigenous Peoples – First Nations, Inuit Peoples and the Metis Nation.

Distinguished guests and colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is an honour to gather with you this morning.

I am so pleased to be here representing the Government of Canada at this forum, and we welcome the important dialogue that will happen here over the next two weeks.

Yesterday, we were all inspired as the Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould, Canada's first Indigenous Minister of Justice and Attorney General, spoke at the opening of this 15th session of the Permanent Forum.

It was such an honour to be here with my colleague and friend.

She continues to inspire not only Canada, but the world.

She is truly a role model for so many, including women, indigenous youth, and all people who strive for social justice.

Canada has traditionally played a key role in the United Nations.

Indeed, Canada has a long history of multilateralism and respect for the values of internationalism and pluralism.

Canada recognizes that it is only when we come together as peoples, and as nations, that we can address issues of peace, conflict and resolution.

Former Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson, the 1957 Noble Peace Prize Laureate, embodied these principles.

The organizers of this year's session have chosen to focus on the theme, Conflict, Peace and Resolution, the very themes for which Lester Pearson was awarded the Peace Prize.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the result of the long struggles of Indigenous peoples for the recognition of their rights.

I would like to acknowledge their tireless efforts and resilience.

These efforts have resulted in a monumental shift in global will to protect the rights, culture, language, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples worldwide.

J'aimerais prendre le temps pour rendre hommage à tous ces leaders.

Allow me to single out Grand Chief Edward John and his long fight for this Declaration.

He would be the first to say, he was one amongst many.

He's right.

Last week, I had the chance to speak with some of the Canadians here today.

It was then that Chief Thompson of Akwasesne reminded us of Chief Deskaheh who, against incredible odds, lobbied the League of Nations nearly one hundred years ago for international recognition of Six Nations.

I was also reminded by Grand Chief John that the progress we are celebrating today also belongs to Member States who were early adopters of the Declaration.

Le Grand Chef John a aussi souligné la contribution de l'honorable Louise Arbour.

Justice Arbour, as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, pushed hard in Geneva to have the negotiations on UNDRIP completed and supported.

She shepherded its adoption at the UN Human Rights Council.

Today we honour all of their work as we continue the journey.

As the Minister of Justice indicated yesterday, our Prime Minister wrote to every minister and indicated in their mandate letters, and I quote,

“No relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous peoples. It is time for a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership.”

All of these mandate letters were made public and by doing so, the Prime Minister spoke to all Canadians.

Today we are addressing Canada’s position on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I am here to announce on behalf of Canada, that we are now a full supporter of the Declaration, without qualification.

We intend nothing less than to adopt and implement the Declaration in accordance with the Canadian Constitution.

Canada is in a unique position to move forward.

Le Canada est un des seuls pays au monde qui a déjà incorporé les droits des peuples autochtones dans sa Constitution.

In fact, through section 35 of its Constitution, Canada has a robust framework for the protection of Indigenous rights.

Section 35 of our Constitution, states, “The existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of Aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.”

Indigenous people, including Grand Chief John and so many others, fought hard to include these rights.

By adopting and implementing the Declaration, we are breathing life into section 35 and recognizing it as full box of rights for Indigenous peoples.

Canada believes that our constitutional obligations serve to fulfill all the principles of the Declaration, including “free, prior and informed consent.”

We see modern treaties and self-government agreements as the ultimate expression of free, prior and informed consent among partners.

Support for these principles was reaffirmed in articles 3 and 20 of the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, at the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples.

What does all this mean for Canada now?

It means nothing less than a full engagement on how to move forward with adoption and implementation, done in full partnership with First Nations, the Métis Nation and Inuit Peoples.

It will also include Canada's provinces and territories, whose cooperation and support is essential in this work.

Canada has already begun making real the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.

Our government believes that a nation-to-nation and Inuit to Crown relationship with Indigenous peoples means partnership on the world stage.

Last year Prime Minister Trudeau invited indigenous leaders to Paris for the conference of the parties on Climate Change.

In March, we were proud as Minister Hadju included Indigenous women in her delegation at the status of women commission.

We were all inspired as our Prime Minister spoke to the commission as a proud feminist.

At home, we have launched a national public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls

Nous investissons dans l'éducation et dans le maintien des langues et de la culture autochtones.

We are investing in housing, infrastructure, health, and child welfare.

While this is a good start, we know much more needs to be done.

Let's be honest, implementing UNDRIP should not be scary.

Recognition of elements of the Declaration began 250 years ago with the Royal Proclamation which was about sharing the land fairly.

UNDRIP reflects the spirit and intent of the Treaties.

Friends, this is an exciting time.

This conversation has begun.

From coast to coast to coast, Canadians are embarking on a journey of reconciliation.

The Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have helped shed light on a dark chapter of Canada's history, and on the impact of its sad legacy.

We believe the Calls to Action also inform the path forward.

What is needed is fundamental and foundational change.

It's about righting historical wrongs.

It's about shedding our colonial past

It's about writing the next chapter together as partners

I firmly believe that once you know the truth, you can't unknow the truth.

We now know the truth.

We know the reality of our shared history with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

We now need all Canadians to embark on the journey of reconciliation.

In closing, when speaking to legacy of residential schools, Hereditary Chief, Ray Jones told us of a Gixsan phrase, “Shed Dim Amma gauu dingu mel,” meaning, the canoe must be uprighted.

With our commitment to full adoption and implementation to the Declaration today, we are continuing the vital work of reconciliation and working to up right the canoe.

Thank you very much. **Merci, beaucoup, Masi Cho, Qujannamiik, meegwich, marsi.**