



**National Chief Perry Bellegarde's Speaking Notes
Videoconference of Ad Hoc Table of
Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers and Indigenous Leaders ~
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

November 12, 2020

Check Against Delivery

****7 minutes****

- [Territorial acknowledgement, thanking of the Elder for opening prayer and acknowledgement of leadership present.]
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration) is a human rights instrument of which everyone can be proud.
- It is the product of decades of cooperative work by Indigenous peoples and countries all over the world - including First Nations and Canada.
- The Declaration has been re-affirmed by the UN General Assembly at least eleven times. And no country in the world opposes it.
- Its adoption by the UN in 2007 was a turning point from which there is no turning back.
- As National Chief, I have enjoyed working on implementation in partnership with many governments - Canada, the Government of British Columbia and States from around the world – such as the members of the European Union. And I am pleased to be with you today to discuss your partnership.
- The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) has ratified the Declaration and practically every Resolution of the AFN references it in some way.
- Implementation of the Declaration means respecting human rights - rights that have been denied and pushed aside for far too long. Implementation will support that important pathway to reconciliation - through implementation of Treaty, inherent rights and title, and First Nations' right to self-determination.
- Implementation of the Declaration is about addressing systemic racism. We know colonialism is alive and well. We need to understand the Declaration is about closing the social and economic gap that denies far too many of our young people the opportunity for healthy and happy childhoods.

- So many provisions in the Declaration focus on partnership and cooperation. Quite simply, Canada needs the UN Declaration.
- I lift up the Government of British Columbia for becoming the first jurisdiction in Canada to adopt implementing legislation in partnership with First Nations.
- This is an inspiring story of partnership and cooperation. The B.C. government worked with First Nations leadership to draft the provincial law and all parties gave it their support. That spirit of non-partisanship is a model for everyone. And major figures from industry and commerce came out to endorse the initiative.
- I thank Minister Lametti for his commitment and his work towards meeting the federal government's commitment to table implementation legislation before the end of this calendar year. I am also grateful for the broad support across several party lines, and from so many sectors of Canadian society.
- I have said that I'm looking forward to hearing two words: "Royal Assent." Federal implementation legislation has been delayed too often, and for long. It is time to get this work done.
- And I recall Chief Littlechild's words that Treaty and the UN Declaration are two wings on the same eagle that will lift us up.
- As with any change, there will be misinformation and fear of change. But we can work through that. We can plan together.
- Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told the General Assembly that the world expects Canada to adhere to the UN Declaration. It is time for Canada to be a role model for other nations on Indigenous peoples' human rights issues. And that can begin with the federal government and in each of your jurisdictions.
- Within the international human rights system, the Declaration is now a crucial point of reference. It is already used to assess whether Canada – at all levels of government – is fulfilling its human rights obligations.
- Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Vicki Tauli-Corpuz said that UN Treaty bodies are increasingly turning to the

Declaration as an authoritative source on State obligations when assessing human rights compliance.

- Implementation of the Declaration is moving ahead in Canada. Canadian courts and tribunals are already using the Declaration to interpret federal laws like the Canadian Human Rights Act as well as provincial child welfare legislation.
- There is real momentum and Canada has a lot of advantages when it comes to implementation.
- For example, there is increasing acceptance, and support, of the Declaration within the business community. This was evident at the recent Roundtables sponsored by NRCAN. Business is looking seriously at how to bring their practices in line with the Declaration.
- First Nations want to break the cycle of litigation. Canada's human rights framework cannot rely on an adversarial approach when it comes to the human rights of Indigenous peoples.
- That's why implementation legislation is so important.
- Compliance requires a collaborative process to review laws, identify those that are inconsistent with our rights, and a process to address those inconsistencies.
- This is a principled approach. This is a pragmatic approach.
- Implementation will not happen overnight but it is time to begin our joint work.
- It is obvious that there is a cost to ignoring First Nations rights. It's a cost that our people pay in daily hardship. It's a price that all Canada pays in lost opportunities and needless conflict.
- There is a better way. First Nations worked with Canada and nations around the world to secure this landmark human rights instrument. It sits in the larger body of international human rights law.
- Now is time to work together to deliver on Canada's human rights obligations to Indigenous peoples.