



November 30, 2017

Dear Senator:

As National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), I wish to share my views on the crucial need for a legislative framework to support implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration)*.

The *UN Declaration* sets out minimum standards for the survival, dignity, security and well-being of Indigenous peoples. It affirms that Indigenous peoples' rights are human rights. It is also important to recognize that the *UN Declaration* is a consensus global human rights instrument. Canada is now part of that global consensus without qualification.

Just as importantly, a legislative framework to implement the *UN Declaration* in Canada will represent a significant response to Call to Action #43 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which calls upon federal and other governments to adopt the *UN Declaration* as "the framework" for reconciliation.

MP Romeo Saganash's Private Members Bill C-262 – An Act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the *UN Declaration* – will begin debate at second reading shortly. I strongly encourage all Members of Parliament to support C-262 at second reading and support its referral to the committee process.

It is important to understand that the *UN Declaration* does not create new rights; and Bill C-262 would not create new rights. Bill C-262 is about providing momentum for implementing the *UN Declaration* in Canada. It provides a framework for Canada to get on with working with First Nations -- as Canada has committed itself to do -- under several UN General Assembly Resolutions including the *UN Declaration* itself.

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You should also know that over the years, the AFN has passed numerous resolutions calling for the full and meaningful implementation of the *UN Declaration*. In one of these, passed in July 2016, Chiefs-in-Assembly called for the AFN to work with Canada in full and meaningful participation to see Canada adopt legislation that will incorporate and reflect the *UN Declaration* without qualifications. I have expressed the support of the AFN for Bill C-262 on numerous occasions, including in a letter to the Minister of Justice of September 20, 2017 (enclosed), and in discussions under the Canada-AFN MOU on Joint Priorities. I was pleased to be in attendance on November 20, 2017, to hear the Minister of Justice, the Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould announce the support of the government for this Private Members Bill.

First Nations have worked hard with our allies and supporters to get to this moment. There is significant support among First Nations across the country for an approach that is at least as strong as C-262; and there is also significant support among non-Indigenous Canadians. First Nations look forward to working together to see implementation of the recommendations to Canada in the September 2017 report of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as well as the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (another consensus document of the UN General Assembly).

The parliamentary committee at second reading provides an important opportunity to further examine C-262 and ensure its effectiveness and consistency with new or compelling advances in human rights standards. The AFN is aware that, in government and among First Nations, there is an interest in building further on C-262 as a floor. We look forward to building upon it as we work toward a reconciliation framework legislatively.

The AFN will be vigilant in examining any proposals for anything that could serve inadvertently or otherwise to undermine the global consensus on human rights standards expressed in the *UN Declaration*.

Support for the *UN Declaration* continues to grow throughout Canada and at all levels. Recently, the City of Montreal endorsed this human rights instrument and co-hosted celebrations for the *UN Declaration's* 10th anniversary in September. Also, in collaboration with First Nations, the new BC government is committed to adopting and implementing the *UN Declaration*.

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The formulation and negotiation of the *UN Declaration* were the subject of one of the most extensive standard-setting processes undertaken at the United Nations, lasting more than two decades. Collaboration between Canadian government representatives and Indigenous peoples' representatives during the final years of negotiation was a key factor in achieving the successful text.

A decade has passed since the UN General Assembly adopted the *UN Declaration*. It is time for a full and meaningful dialogue and joint action with First Nations to ensure full and effective implementation. Bill C-262 provides a framework for doing so in a way that is principled, systematic, cooperative, transparent and accountable. This approach deserves the support of all Parliamentarians, all Parties and all Canadians.

Working together on this initiative, I believe we can advance our joint commitment to peaceful co-existence, justice and well-being for all peoples in Canada.

Sincerely,



Perry Bellegarde
National Chief

Encl.