

August 2010

Stand up for the human rights of Indigenous peoples

August 9th is the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. This month is a good time to speak out for people whose rights are widely violated.

There are more than 370 million Indigenous people in the world. They belong to distinct cultures and communities such as the Lubicon Cree in Canada, the Awá in Colombia and the Dongria Kondh in India.

Each society has its own unique traditions and ways of life that have been passed on from generation to generation. Indigenous people are proud of their cultures. All around the world, however, they often face terrible prejudice in the countries in which they live. Discrimination and mistreatment has made their lives extremely difficult and often dangerous.

This is why the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is so important. Almost three years ago, on September 13, 2007, the vast majority of the world's governments agreed to take a stand against discrimination against Indigenous peoples.

This Declaration states that Indigenous peoples have a right to maintain their traditions and ways of life, and that no one should take away that right. The various parts



A 24-hour drumming marathon in support of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Ottawa
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of the Declaration describe what governments should be doing to protect Indigenous peoples' rights. These include protecting Indigenous peoples' use of their lands, promoting Indigenous languages, and making sure that

they are able to make their own decisions about their lives and futures.

Unfortunately, the Government of Canada was one of a handful of states that voted against the Declaration. No one knows why the Government chose to oppose it. Government spokespersons have said that the Declaration is a threat to the rights of non-Indigenous people. But this makes no sense. Here is why.

The purpose of the Declaration is to overcome decades of injustice against Indigenous peoples. However, the

Declaration protects more than the rights of Indigenous peoples. It also includes specific statements that the rights in the Declaration are to be balanced with other obligations, including protecting the rights of non-Indigenous peoples. Canadian government officials actually helped write these parts of the Declaration. More recently, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said that he is prepared to support the Declaration, but perhaps not completely. Meanwhile, representatives of the Canadian government continue to oppose the use of the Declaration when the rights of Indigenous peoples are being discussed in Canada and around the world.



WHAT CAN I DO?

Please send a short, polite letter to Prime Minister Harper to let him know that you care about this issue.

In your first sentence, tell the prime minister where you are writing from (for example from your home in Halifax or your cottage in the Okanagan Valley).

Tell the prime minister that the Declaration is important to Indigenous peoples all over the world because their rights are being denied every day.

Ask him to give his full public support to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

WHERE DO I SEND MY MESSAGE?

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

By mail: No postage required
By fax: (613) 941-6900
By email: pm@pm.gc.ca
Via website: <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/contact.asp>

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

1. Send a copy to your Member of Parliament. To find your MP by using your postal code, click on this link: [Find my MP](#) or phone 1-800-OCanada (1-800-622-6232)
2. Ask a friend to also write to the Prime Minister.
3. Learn more at http://www.amnesty.ca/iwriteforjustice/take_action.php?actionid=149