



Press Statement

“Our Peoples will not be Forgotten” - The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples brings the continued discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in Canada to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

April 26, 2019 (Ottawa, ON) – This week, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) hosted an event as part of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in New York City to call international attention to the struggles for recognition that Indigenous Peoples in Canada continue to undergo. CAP also made statements at the UN forum to draw attention to the issues that unrecognized Indigenous peoples are experiencing in Canada, such as barriers in education support for youth and lack of access to health benefits.

“CAP is here at the UN to deliver a strong message – we will not be forgotten,” claims National Chief Robert Bertrand. “The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) reaffirms that we should be free from any kind of discrimination based on our origin or identity.”

CAP’s event focused on the serious impacts that Canada’s ongoing exclusion is having on our communities, with presentations from some of CAP’s provincial and territorial affiliates and the National Youth Council.

Quotes

“I am here at the UNFPII to express my dissatisfaction with the Canadian government in relation to their continued discrimination of the off-reserve Indigenous peoples”, says Chief and President Lorraine Augustine, Native Council of Nova Scotia, “UNDRIP has been adopted by Canada but they are not following the declaration”.

“The one message I took away from this experience is that Indigenous Representative Organizations (IROs) are doing the best they can to address the high numbers of Indigenous children in care, violence against Indigenous women and girls, mental health and addictions, housing shortages and other key issues relating to poverty with little to no support from the Canadian Government.

As I listened to IROs, such as CAP, share their frustration and experience with the United Nations delegation and side events, Prime Minister Trudeau’s words echoed in my mind ‘no relationship

is more important to Canada than the relationship with Indigenous Peoples” said President and Chief Lisa Cooper, Native Council of Prince Edward Island. “Canada's colonial mindset on who represents who, who is an Indian, and who they consult with is continuing to do serious harm to all Indigenous peoples in Canada despite accepting UNDRIP without reservation”

“Too often we find off-reserve Aboriginal youth are excluded from consultation, and as a result, face barriers for accessing the same cultural programs and services that are provided to the on-reserve youth.” - National Youth Council Representative, Richard Cooper

“We are inspired by the forum’s overall theme of *Traditional knowledge: Generation, transmission and protection*. It speaks to the importance placed on traditional knowledge and the protection of Indigenous cultures and way of life,” said President Todd Russell, NunatuKavut Community Council. “In Canada, pervasive colonialist policies continue to discriminate against Indigenous peoples based on state-imposed categories of Indigenous identity and access to rights. There will only be meaningful change if the Government of Canada is willing to accept and honour, value and appreciate our own traditional Inuit knowledge and how we choose to preserve and pass it along to future generations. It is necessary in moving forward together in a spirit of reconciliation.”

The marginalization experienced by CAP’s constituency of off-reserve status and non-status Indians, Métis, and Southern Labrador Inuit is deep-seated in colonial administration structures and legislation, such as the *Indian Act*, that continues to govern who is recognized as Indigenous peoples in Canada today. In this time of reconciliation and a federal commitment to the UNDRIP implementation, CAP believes immediate action must be taken for the inclusion of our peoples in federal program and policy.

In 2016, CAP won a landmark victory in the Supreme Court of Canada’s unanimous decision in *CAP Daniels v. Canada*, which confirmed that Métis and non-status Indians fall under the federal government’s jurisdiction and fiduciary duty. The decision affirmed that Métis and Non-Status Indians are “Indians” under section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867. As stated in the decision, “[Métis and non-status Indians] are deprived of programs, services and intangible benefits recognized by all governments as needed.”

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For 48 years, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples has been the national voice representing the rights, interests and needs of Métis, status and non-status Indians, and Southern Inuit Indigenous People living off-reserve. Today, over 75% of Indigenous people live off-reserve.