

Canada officially adopts UN declaration on rights of Indigenous Peoples

Standing ovation at UN greets Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett's announcement

By Tim Fontaine, [CBC News](#) Posted: May 10, 2016 1:16 PM ET Last Updated: Aug 02, 2016 1:06 PM ET

There were cheers in the United Nations as Canada officially removed its objector status to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Tuesday, almost a decade after it was adopted by the General Assembly.

"We are now a full supporter of the declaration, without qualification," Bennett said, as she addressed the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the United Nations in New York City on Tuesday.

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

The declaration recognizes Indigenous Peoples' basic human rights, as well as rights to self-determination, language, equality and land, among others.

Bennett — who received a standing ovation for her statement — is at the United Nations with Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould.

"It was a very emotional moment for me," said Chief Wilton Littlechild, a Cree lawyer and former commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada who was at the UN on Tuesday. Littlechild has been involved with the UN for nearly 40 years and said he's rarely seen anyone receive a standing ovation.

Implementing the declaration

Littlechild said today's announcement marks a beginning to what could be a long process of "harmonizing" Canada's laws with the standards set in the declaration, and improving the country's relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

"The declaration is much like the treaties, it calls on us to work together," he said. "Today would not be too late to start the journey together."

Bennett told the UN that Canada is in a unique position to implement the declaration.

"Through Section 35 of its Constitution, Canada has a robust framework for the protection of Indigenous rights," she said. "By adopting and implementing the declaration, we are excited that we are breathing life into Section 35 and recognizing it as a full box of rights for Indigenous Peoples in Canada."

- [Métis leader applauds Canada's support of UN Declaration](#)

Bennett also said implementing the UN declaration in Canada will require the full co-operation of Indigenous Peoples and the support of all provinces and territories. Ontario Aboriginal Affairs Minister David Zimmer also attended the UN meeting.

"It can't be done unilaterally," said B.C. Grand Chief Edward John, who was also present for Tuesday's announcement.

John said that by adopting the UN declaration, more than ever Canada must now consult with Indigenous Peoples on any laws or administrative measures that affect them.

"Indigenous governments are not some inferior form of authority," John said. "They are the original form of authority over their lands, resources and territories."

Historic day

Shortly after the 2015 federal election, Bennett pledged that the new Liberal government would implement the UN declaration as part of its effort to rebuild its working relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

Canada actually officially endorsed the declaration in 2010, but the Conservative government of the day called it an "aspirational document" and not legally binding.



Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde — who will also be attending the Forum later this week — tweeted that it was a "historic day" as Canada moves toward reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

Corrections

- A previous version of this story said a standing ovation greeted Bennett in the General Assembly. In fact, it actually occurred in a conference room at the UN.

May 10, 2016 6:26 PM ET

Clarifications

- A previous version of this story incorrectly stated that the Assembly of First Nations would be part of a

delegation to the UN led by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett. In fact, AFN National Chief Perry Bellegarde will lead a separate delegation on Thursday.

May 10, 2016 4:02 PM ET

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