

FEBRUARY, 2008



→ CUC IN ACTION →

Current Social Responsibility Letters, Events, Topics & Discussion

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE 10/09/07 CUC SR LETTER: *UN DECLARATION ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES*

December 4, 2007 States and third parties.

Jean Pfleiderer, Ph.D.
President, Board of Trustees,
Canadian Unitarian Council

Dear Doctor Pfleiderer:

The Office of the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister, has forwarded to me on September 11 and 13, 2007, copies of your letters concerning Canada's position on the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration). I regret the delay in replying to you.

On September 13, 2007, the Declaration was adopted by a vote at the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Canada, along with Australia, New Zealand and the United States, voted against its adoption.

For over 20 years, Canada worked for a strong and effective Declaration that would promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of every indigenous person and recognize the collective rights of indigenous peoples around the world. Canada sought, along with many other countries, an aspirational document that would advance the rights and promote harmonious arrangements between indigenous peoples and the States in which they live.

The text presented to UNGA did not meet Canada's expectations. The text is flawed and contains provisions that are incompatible with Canada's constitutional framework. In addition, the text does not address Canada's core concerns, including provisions relating to lands, territories and resources; free, prior and informed consent when used as a veto; self-government without recognition of the importance of negotiations; intellectual property; military issues; and the need to achieve an appropriate balance between the rights and obligations of indigenous peoples, member

Canada's concerns in these areas were well known and Canada repeatedly called for an open and transparent process with the participation of indigenous peoples to address these concerns. No formal negotiation process took place and the few modifications presented to UNGA did not take into account the concerns of the Canadian government.

The Government of Canada is acting on many fronts to improve quality of life and promote a prosperous future for all Aboriginal peoples. This agenda is practical, focuses on real results, and has led to tangible progress in a range of areas including land claims, education, housing, child and family services, and safe drinking water. The Government of Canada is also pushing to have section 67 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* repealed. This would ensure the protection of fundamental human rights for all Aboriginals people, including Aboriginal woman who are often the most vulnerable.

Canada regrets that UNGA was willing to adopt a Declaration that falls short of what is required to truly address the interests of indigenous peoples around the world. The explanation of vote provided by Canada can be found at the following website: http://geo.international.gc.ca/canada_un/new_york/whats_new/default-en.asp?id=10382&content_type=2

I can assure you that the Government of Canada will continue to take effective action, at home and abroad, to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples based on human rights obligations and its existing domestic framework.

Thanks you for taking the time to write.

Sincerely,
Maxime Bernier
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Cc: cims_oper@pco-bcp.gc.ca

Canadian Unitarian Council—conseil unitarien du Canada www.cuc.ca 1-888-568-5723

Want in on the discussion? Join the diversity discussion group by sending a blank email to: cuc-diversity-discussion-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES CONTINUED... ..

November 26, 2007

Ms. Jean Pfleiderer, Ph.D.
President, Board of Trustees

Dear Dr. Pfleiderer:

This is in response to your correspondence of September 10, 2007, in which you discuss Canada's position on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As you are likely aware, on September 13, 2007, the Declaration was adopted by vote at the General Assembly. Canada, along with Australia, New Zealand and the United States, voted against adoption. This decision was not an easy one, but it was the right one.

For over twenty years, Canada worked for a strong and effective Declaration that would promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of every Indigenous person and recognize the collective rights of Indigenous peoples around the world. We sought, along with many others, an aspirational document which would advance Indigenous rights and promote harmonious arrangements between Indigenous peoples and the states in which they live.

The text presented to the General Assembly, however, did not meet such expectations. This text is flawed, contains provisions which are inconsistent with our constitutional framework, and does not address Canada's core concerns, including provisions relating to: lands, territories and resources; free, prior and informed consent when used as a veto; self-government without recognition of the importance of negotiations; intellectual property; military issues; and the need to achieve an appropriate balance between the rights and obligations of Indigenous peoples, States, and third-parties.

Canada's concerns in these areas were well known, and we repeatedly called for a formal, open and transparent process, including the participation of Indigenous peoples, to deal with them. No such negotiation process took place, and the few modifications presented to the General Assembly did not take account of our concerns.

Critics have said that Canada's concerns are overstated, yet there could be attempts to use the

Declaration in negotiations, in Canadian courts and to demand that the Government of Canada bring policies in line with the Declaration. The precise wording, therefore, is very important. In this context, it is important to stress that the Declaration is not legally binding, does not represent customary international law, and has not legal effect in Canada.

Since taking office in 2006, this government has acted on many fronts to improve the quality of life and promote a prosperous future for all Aboriginal peoples. We will continue to do so. This agenda is practical, focuses on real results and is leading to tangible progress in a range of areas including land claims, education, housing, child and family services, and safe drinking water. We are also moving to repeal Section 67 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. This would help ensure the protection of fundamental human rights for all Aboriginal peoples, including Aboriginal women who are often the most vulnerable, by allowing persons to make complaints of discrimination arising from actions taken or decisions made pursuant to the *Indian Act*. In the recent Speech from the Throne, we promise to launch a commission for truth and reconciliation in relation to Indian Residential Schools. This government has committed to issue an apology to close this sad chapter in our history.

While Canada regrets that the United Nations was willing to adopt a Declaration that falls short of what is required to truly address the interests of Indigenous peoples around the world, we will continue to take effective action, at home and abroad, to promote and protect the rights of Indigenous peoples based on human rights obligations and our existing domestic framework.

Thank you for writing. I trust that this response addresses your concerns.

Sincerely,

Chuck Strahl
Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern
Development and Federal Interlocutor

cc: The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, PC, MP
Mr. Ed Bianchi
Mr. Bob Stevenson



CELEBRATING DIVERSITY: VISION STATEMENT

The Diversity Monitoring Group offers this statement for our congregations to consider adopting as a vision statement or in completion of the credentialing process.

We seek to build a congregation and a society made whole by the empowerment of all. We seek to be a people of diverse racial identities, diverse ethnicities, diverse cultures, diverse languages. We celebrate the presence of people of all ages, abilities, and economic levels. We are welcoming to people of all sexual orientations and gender expressions. We value and celebrate diversity. We endeavour to reflect the diversity of our society in our congregation and in our faith community. We strive to respect all people. We hope that all who visit, join, participate, or serve our congregation will extend the same respect to those they meet here.

In honour of the above, we seek to promote diversity, respect, and the inclusion of all, in our congregation and in our community.

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY: CUC WORKSHOPS

Following the 2007 Resolution on Racial, Religious and First Nations, Metis & Inuit Justice and Equity, the Canadian Unitarian Council's Diversity Monitoring Group has developed a credentialing process to recognize member congregations and societies for their work in "Celebrating Diversity".

The CUC has adapted and developed three workshops to help congregations learn about racial, religious and First Nations, Metis and Inuit justice and equity, and to work towards greater awareness and diversity. The outlines for the three programs can be found at: www.cuc.ca/social_responsibility/diversity.htm

Training and information sessions will be offered at Annual Conferences and Meetings, at Regional Gatherings, at cluster workshops, and by electronic means.

The three workshops are:

- (i) **Welcoming/Celebrating Congregational Diversity (WCCD)**, a workshop for the general membership of congregations wishing to consider their openness to diversity, both in membership and staffing, by addressing questions of race and ethnicity, including First Nations heritage;
- (ii) **Rainbowmaking Workshops (RBW)**, a six-session series of workshops on intercultural and interfaith outreach intended to help congregations build bridges to other community ethnic groups; and
- (iii) **Connecting the Canadas From Coast to Coast to Coast**, a half-day workshop to help us appreciate the mosaic which is Canada and to reflect on our personal sense of belonging to various communities.

Additional information about the workshops, the credentialing program, diversity issues and social responsibility resolutions regarding Racial, Religious and First Nations, Metis & Inuit Justice and Equity is available from the Monitoring Group's Web page at: www.cuc.ca/social_responsibility/diversity.htm or by sending an e-mail to diversity@cuc.ca

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY: CUC WORKSHOPS

Credentialing Process

The "Celebrating Diversity" credential will be given after the congregation has submitted an application showing that they have completed certain steps. Here are examples of a few.

A. Statement of Intent

1. Provide a statement of intent, a mission or vision statement, a resolution or other document which clearly states the congregation's openness to greater diversity within their midst and desire to build bridges to diverse groups in their local area, throughout Canada and around the world.
2. Include the name of a contact person or group responsible for the Action Plan.

B. Details on Workshops

Congregations should show that they:

1. have offered two of the following workshops:
 - (i) Welcoming/Celebrating Congregational Diversity (WCCD),
 - (ii) Rainbowmaking Workshops (RBW)
 - (iii) Connecting the Canadas: Coast to Coast to Coast (5 Cs); and
2. have at least one member trained as a workshop leader and available to give workshops to the congregation or a cluster of congregations; and
3. commit to offering at least one workshop on diversity each year; and
4. commit to providing lifespan learning activities to develop awareness of diversity among members of all ages and stages of faith development, including church school and youth groups where these exist. Congregations are encouraged to include details on when and how the workshops were offered, the names of the facilitators, the number of people who attended, and feedback from participants.

C. Action Plan

Congregations should submit an Action Plan in which they show what projects they have already undertaken and what actions they

commit to, including as many of the following as possible:

1. Conduct awareness and educational programs about one issue a year
2. Add a "non-discrimination" policy or statement to the congregational by-laws, with explicit language about celebrating diverse origins, languages, religious backgrounds and beliefs
3. Establish a committee or task force to oversee the Action Plan, this could be: a combined Welcoming / Celebrating committee, a sub-committee of the Social Justice /Responsibility committee, or a Board-sanctioned ad hoc committee to ensure that the Action Items are completed as planned
4. Develop practices of "right relations" with other racial, religious and First Nations, Metis and Inuit groups in the local area (see Suggestions for Action).
5. Consider resources on cultural mis/appropriation and develop a policy on the respectful treatment of objects and stories belonging to other people and groups.
6. Organize activities to honour the contribution of members of various racial, religious and First Nations, Metis and Inuit groups to the local, national and international community.
7. "Follow" rather than "lead" outreach efforts to local First Nations, multicultural, and/or multifaith communities.
8. Consider whether your congregation reflects the racial, ethnic, class and linguistic make-up of the area in which it is located.
9. Offer rites of passage, ceremonies and other recognitions which celebrate and honour the diverse religious beliefs of members of the congregation, their families and friends.
10. Use language which is inclusive to people of all origins, classes and abilities, as well as to all sexual orientations and gender expressions.

D. Suggestions for Action

1. Stand with your local First Peoples on the Day of Action.
2. Mark Mother Tongue Day by inviting people of different languages to read poetry in their first language.
3. Invite your minister or a lay leader to attend an interfaith group.
4. Provide sanctuary or settlement services (newcomer orientations, community interpreting, partnerships with a multicultural association)
5. Invite a person whose ancestors were the First People of the territory on which your church or town is located to open significant events.
6. Invite people from diverse racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds to take part in your congregation's activities.
7. When including stories or readings from Aboriginal sources, ask for suggestions from local elders of First Nations, Metis and Inuit groups as well as permission to use them.
8. Ask people from various religious and faith communities to speak to your congregation about important traditions and celebrations.
9. Encourage members to attend Pow-Wows, lectures, artistic performances and other public cultural expressions.
10. Promote racial, ethnic and religious equity and justice initiatives offered by U*U or other groups.
11. Provide space in your building: to small religious groups, for worship services and meetings.
12. Pay particular attention to the needs of women, children, GBLTQ and other members of religious and ethnic groups.
13. In learning about cultural and religious issues, seek out the perspectives of women and GBLTQ writers and speakers.
14. Share material on linguistic, religious, cultural and social diversity in lifespan learning programs.
15. Use stories written by authors who are from the group they are discussing.
16. Use readings in different languages, read (if possible) by people of that language.
17. Encourage members to start a discussion or small group ministry program in a language spoken by 5 to 10 members of the congregation.
18. Encourage members to consider the impact their purchases and practices have on diversity: buy local, buy Canadian, buy "small".
19. Honour and respect the religious and spiritual homes and ceremonies of other groups and educate children and others to do the same.
20. Consider institutional systems or organizational practices which may have racist, ableist, classist or heterosexist effects, or may unnecessarily or inadvertently exclude people who speak other languages, have other religious beliefs or belong to minority groups.
21. Petition governments to ease immigrants' ability to transfer their professional credentials to Canada and the provinces.
22. Write a letter or issue a statement supporting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
23. Incorporate French readings and songs into services (the Side By Side bilingual worship resource created by the Montreal Congregation is a good place to start)
24. Support youth and young adults (and provide financial assistance) to attend conferences and workshops that include sessions on Racism and Oppression
25. Encourage your Director of Religious Education and other religious educators (and provide financial assistance) to take the Renaissance Module on Multicultural Education
26. Encourage the use of The Kit (anti-racism resource made by and for youth - but applicable to all ages - from the UN Association of Canada) within your congregation or fellowship

CANADIAN UNITARIAN COUNCIL

This motion will be coming to the May 2008 Annual Meeting of the CUC:

Proposal to Study:

Updating the 1999 Environmental Resolution

Issue: Whereas the 1999 Environmental Resolution provides a framework, broad in scope and focused on principles, almost a decade has passed and it would be prudent to review the content; **BE IT RESOLVED** then that the Environmental Monitoring Group undertake to update the 1999 resolution and propose revisions as appropriate for approval at the 2009 Annual General Meeting. Further in the interim, given the significance of "climate change", that the CUC adopt in principle as a 'framework for guidance' the UUA "Threat Of Global Warming/ Climate Change Statement of Conscience" dated 26 June 2006, recognizing the need to insert Canada where reference is made to United States; substitute CUC for UUA and appreciating that EPA/US standards are benchmarks.

Facilitating group: The national Environmental Monitoring Group, created as a result of the original resolution, has agreed to carry out the study "Updating the 1999 Environmental Resolution". Other members will be welcome. Margaret Insley, an Environmental Economist from Waterloo, has already agreed to join the group as a resource person.

Background: the 1999 Environmental Resolution along with the UUA Climate Change "statement of conscience" shall inform the review/study along with other relevant material that may arise in the course of the update.

UU Principles shall guide the study/update, in particular the seventh principle: "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are part."

Process: discussion groups and dialogue both face to face and via phone and internet are the principle means for exchange of ideas and seeking consensus and input, along with facilitated discussions such as World Café.

The Study Group is committed to surveying congregations, providing educational and discussion materials and compiling results. We expect to send a package to congregations at least twice between June 2008 and February 2009.