

# Opposition to UN's Declaration on Human Rights of Indigenous People is shameful says AFN National Chief

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This International Day for Human Rights, on December 10th marks the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

"The United Nations theme for this year's anniversary is 'Dignity and Justice for All.' The Universal Declaration of Human Rights represents an international commitment to dignity and justice for every person, for all peoples, everywhere. Human rights are

not a luxury; they belong to everyone. Canada's denial of the rights of Indigenous people offends the core values, principles and rights the UN Declaration of Human Rights represents," said Assembly of First Nations National Chief Phil Fontaine.

This statement comes after Canada opposed the recognition of Indigenous rights in a new international initiative on climate change that was advanced this week. The climate initiative known as the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) at

the United Nations Conference on Climate Change is currently being held in Poznan, Poland.

The National Chief stated, "It is incomprehensible in an advanced democratic state as Canada to choose to ignore the rights of Indigenous people. We are physically, spiritually and culturally tied to our natural world. We are tied to the land, water, and all aspects of the physical environment. The denial of our rights in this important global climate change agreement violates our fundamental human

rights as Indigenous peoples."

Canada, the United States and Australia expressed interest in including reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in this agreement.

It aims to fight deforestation in developing economies by tapping emissions trading markets in a future climate agreement that will follow up on the first phase of the UN's Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.

However, as the text was being drafted yesterday, Canada joined the United States, Australia and New Zealand in insisting that references to Indigenous rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples be struck from the text.

"Canada's position at the United Nations Conference on Climate Change is the latest in a series of hostile decisions against Indigenous rights which continue to affect Canada's international reputation as a defender and promoter of human rights," said AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine.

The National Chief added that the refusal of the Canadian government to sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples despite a motion passed in the House of Commons on April 8, 2008, which called on Parliament to implement and adopt the principles in the Declaration offends Canadian law.

"Moreover the rights of

our children are also compromised in this country. The federal government has refused to address discrimination against First Nations children in the Child Welfare system and education. First Nations Child and Family Services agencies receive, on average, 22% less funding than provincial agencies, a point the Auditor General remarked upon in her May 2008 report," said National Chief Phil Fontaine.

The Auditor General criticized the program indicating that shortfalls in funding mean the federal government is not providing First Nations Child and Family Services agencies with adequate funding requirements to meet the number or the needs of children in state care.

In October, the Canadian Human Rights Commission decided to put the case before the Canada Human Rights Tribunal. However, the federal government recently filed for a judicial review on technical issues that will delay the hearing and stall justice for thousands of First Nations children who are living under state care.

"This is a complete contradiction of the Government's position, who in the last Parliamentary session insisted that the Canadian Human Rights Act apply to First Nations citizens on reserve. However, this inconsistent standard of human rights promotion and protection by the Canadian Government for First Na-

tions children violates the principles of equality, fairness and universality of human rights. The rights of our children or any children should not be suspended on technicalities," the National Chief remarked.

Similar to the Child Welfare issue, other core programs for First Nations children, such as education, have been capped at 2% a year, which does not keep pace with inflation or the growing First Nations population.

"The deepening gap in the quality of life and well-being for First

Nations compared to Canadians continues to widen and this is not acceptable for any person or child, including First Nations," Fontaine noted.

Currently, First Nations students receive \$2,000 less per child annually

for educational support than students in provincial schools. In 2007, INAC

identified a need for 69 new schools while another 95 schools needed major repairs. Approximately 40 First Nations communities do not have schools at all. INAC's current plan addresses only 27 of those sites, but the funding is on hold.

"On this day which celebrates human rights, I call on the Government of

Canada to do the right thing and uphold and promote the human rights of

Indigenous people and the human rights of our children."