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Canada Persists in its Refusal to Comply with Human Rights

June 21st is the National Aboriginal Day. It's an important day for our peoples, not because of the official recognition by the federal and provincial governments of this celebration day but because of the historical and highly symbolic place that the summer solstice takes up in our culture. For thousands of years, our nations have been celebrating this longest day of the year which, according to our traditions, allows us to store the energy that we need for the upcoming year. I hope that the sun will be at its brightest this year, because we will need a tremendous amount of energy to face the numerous challenges that will be on our path within the next few months. The biggest of these challenges is probably the capacity to resist to the attacks of the federal government which continues to maintain its colonialist attitude towards us and whose policies threaten in the long run, the survival of our distinct peoples.

As evidence of what I am saying, are the recent answers of Canada to the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations Human Rights Council, in Geneva. In its response to the 68 recommendations of the Working Group, Canada, once again indicated that it would not sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which nevertheless, sets the minimum standards for the survival of indigenous peoples. We also remain very concerned about Canada's statement to the effect that it has absolutely no intention of adopting other conventions that protect the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples.

The Canadian government does not hesitate to adopt an anti-indigenous attitude on the International scene, choosing a position that is radically opposed to its image, as protector of human rights. If the government is able to display such a narrow-minded attitude on the international scene, one can imagine the situation at the internal level!

On more than one occasion, the government showed a contemptuous attitude towards us. The consultation process used at this Universal Periodic Review is, in fact, a striking illustration of the arrogance of this government. As a matter of fact, Canada tried to bring people in believing that the aboriginal peoples and the civil society had been consulted during the preparation of the report, when, in fact, the limited consultation was conducted after its report was written. The follow-up pertaining to the recommendations was equally controlled and limited. Numerous reports indicate that certain representatives of the government refused straight out to discuss a certain number of areas which the recommendations addressed.

Yet, I continue to believe that the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council is an important process that provides an opportunity to the Canadians and the First Nation Peoples to scrutinize and bring to light some very important questions related to human rights in Canada.

Even if we do not suffer excessive acts of violence as seen in certain other countries, where Aboriginal peoples lose their lives if they don't side with the State, we still suffer wrongs caused by the Canadian government, which paved the way to the extinguishment of the title over our lands, to the extinguishment of our languages and ultimately to the extinguishment of the First Nations. The challenge is very clear: it's a matter of fighting for our survival against a government which, in spite of its fine words, maintains its Aboriginal assimilation policy.

Ghislain Picard

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