

Secrétariat
de l'Assemblée des
Premières Nations
du Québec
et du Labrador

Secretariat of the
Assembly of the
First Nations
of Quebec
and Labrador

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Open Letter –AFNQL

August 9, 2009 – International Day of the World's Indigenous People

We demand partnership in action and dignity!

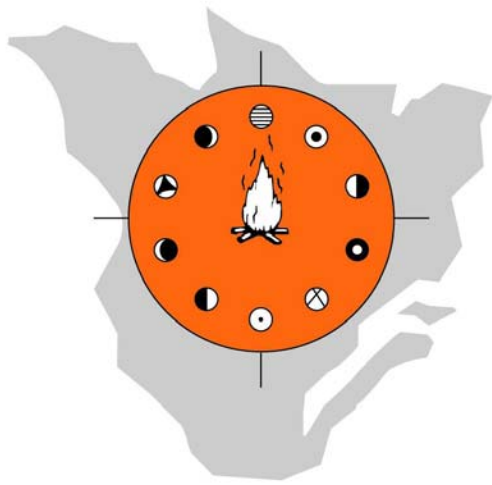
International Day of the World's Indigenous People.

Fifteen years ago, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared the 9th of August *International Day of the World's Indigenous People*. It is a crucial event for aboriginal people around the world, celebrated every year by the international community. This is the opportunity to commemorate the cultural richness of First Nations as well as the diversity they represent. This is also time to remember issues such as discrimination, poverty and marginalization moulding most of aboriginal communities' daily life.

Although highlighting some significant achievements over the recent years, such as the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights on the international scene, this fifteenth anniversary unveils, above all, what remains to be accomplished regarding indigenous recognition, justice and equity.

In Canada, aboriginals count for 4 % of the population, that is more than one million persons. However, in the communities, unemployment rate, infant mortality, lack of education and housing problems are higher than anywhere else in the country. This dreary reality results from a colonialist policy, based on the Indian Act that cannot go on any longer especially in the education, social services and economic development fields. In Quebec, just as in Canada, this dismal situation is even more obvious as it reveals an undeniable and unacceptable gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal living conditions.

Indeed, our communities' survival and welfare are threatened every day by serious and persistent violations of their fundamental human rights. In this sense, Canada' signature of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is absolutely imperative for our survival. We are offended by Canada's refusal to sign it. Along with the United States and New Zealand, Canada still denies the vital importance of this valuable document. We believe this attitude does not mirror the citizens' will. That's why we call for all the Quebecers to show their support to the First Nations by signing the petition regarding this issue, online at www.apnql-afnql.com.



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We question the real intention of the Canadian government over its so-called will to respect and honour indigenous rights without discrimination. It is time for both levels of government to fulfill their responsibilities regarding the First Nations. It is time for them to recognize our right to governmental autonomy in accordance with the UN Declaration. We, the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, represent distinct nations with the right to our own political status in order to implement freely our communities' economic, social and cultural development.

We demand partnership in action and dignity!

I wish you a memorable International Day of World's Indigenous People!

Ghislain Picard
Chief of the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador.