



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY OF ENGLISH VERSION

**STATEMENT BY
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TO

**THE EIGHT SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS PERMENENT FORUM
ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

NEW YORK, MAY 20, 2009

Thank you Madame Chairperson,

Brothers and sisters, It is with great honour and humility that I take the floor today. I am here today along with grand chiefs and chiefs from the Quebec region of Canada. We have much compassion for the realities and situations of indigenous peoples across our mother earth. We sympathize with you and pray for you. Although we come from a country that is known for its wealth and human rights record, the experience that the majority of indigenous peoples from our region is not reflective of a country that is wealthy and a champion of human rights.

This was revealed when the UN Human Rights Committee in its 1999 report following the investigation on the Aboriginal Peoples Living in Canada stated, and I quote, “the Aboriginal peoples situation remains the most pressing problem facing Canadians”. This was 10 years ago, and since then very little has changed.

The indigenous peoples of our region have undergone 500 years of colonialism which has seen a variety of tactics used to extinguish the indigenous peoples of our region. We have survived proclamations that placed bounties on the heads of our peoples, we have survived biological warfare, the deliberate spreading of disease, we have survived the removal of our children to residential schools for the specific purpose of destroying the indigenous person and spirit, and we continue to live under the regime of the Indian Act and successive federal and provincial governments whose objective has been essentially the same as their previous colonial governments, which is the assimilation of indigenous peoples for the purposes of eventual extinguishment. I say these things because of the actions of these colonial governments.

What other conclusion can we come to when a country during its most economically productive years experienced billions in surpluses year after year, did nothing for indigenous people except to maintain the poor economic and social conditions in our communities. When during such a period economic development programs were cut by tens of millions of dollars. When resources to support indigenous communities have been frozen in all areas, housing, education, health, and when indigenous language programs which were already poorly resourced were cut by tens of millions of dollars regardless of the governments own studies which confirmed the precarious state and endangerment of our languages. How can we believe otherwise when the recent economic stimulus package provided an opportunity to establish standards that could raise indigenous communities out of poverty, but instead Canada chose to carry out highly publicized initiatives that provided a small percentage of the needed basic infrastructure for indigenous communities that had been suffering for decades? How can we believe otherwise when economic initiatives for indigenous peoples were focused on supporting the Canadian economy and not the development and sustainability of indigenous communities?

Actions by Quebec to implement laws that permanently remove indigenous children from their communities despite being clearly advised by our people of the negative impacts are not actions that reflect a concern for human rights. The continued actions by Quebec to ignore the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples and the continued colonizing of unceded indigenous territories without respect of their own due process established by the Proclamation of 1763, are actions that are counter to the Declaration adopted on September 13th, 2007, by 144 member states. The Assembly of First Nations Quebec Labrador congratulates Australia and Colombia for their current support of the Declaration which brings us one step closer to a unanimous support of the declaration. Canada has not assumed its fiduciary obligations in numerous matters where it clearly has the responsibility as fiduciary to protect the lands and rights of indigenous peoples. To the contrary it has since the beginning chosen to stand by and observe, and on numerous

occasions the indigenous peoples of Canada and Quebec have had to resort to legal actions to protect its rights and interests.

The establishment of laws requiring that indigenous peoples must meet several non indigenous tests demonstrating their territorial rights to lands upon which indigenous peoples have lived and exercised their sovereignty for thousands of years, is perverse. A justice system that continues to display the lack of concern for over the lives of 500 aboriginal women who has been murdered or has disappeared is a serious concern. These kinds of inaction and actions have resulted in the acceptance by the Canadian people of a lower standard for indigenous peoples in Canada.

These actions and in some instances non actions over the past 150 years have created a situation where life in indigenous communities has been made so miserable that over 50% of our population has been forced to live outside their communities and the numbers continue to increase. Assimilation has been made the only option, and enormous resources are targeted to initiatives that promote integration. In comparison there are very little resources for initiatives to promote the survival and sustainability of indigenous peoples and communities.

I am an Innu and there are many nations in the Canada/Quebec. We do not want to assimilate to eventually be extinguished. We want our children 7 generations from now to be proud members of our respective nations. We wish nothing more than to live in harmony with our non indigenous brothers and sisters, and to be a complete and equal part of humanity. For these reasons I make these recommendations to this Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples:

Recommendation: 1

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec Labrador strongly urges all appropriate UN Bodies through the Permanent forum on indigenous issues to study the effects of long term chronic underfunding of First Nations in Canada in order to identify the impacts on the sustainability of First Nations and the relationship of these impacts to their survival as distinct peoples.

Recommendation: 2

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec Labrador recommends that the Special Rapporteur Mr. James Anaya, as a follow-up to the 1999 Human Rights Report, visit the Quebec region of Canada to examine the living conditions of indigenous communities and the relationship between First Nations leadership and the governments of Quebec and Canada.

Recommendation: 3

The Assembly of First Nations of Quebec Labrador recommends that the Permanent Forum call upon all related bodies of the United Nations to network with First Nations in Canada and non Governmental Organizations to promote and develop strategies to educate the Canadian public and all governments on the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights.