

CIPP's GOVERNOR, LLOYD AXWORTHY CALLS FOR ADOPTION OF UN DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

UWinnipeg President makes significant statement on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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WINNIPEG, MB - University of Winnipeg **President & Vice-Chancellor Dr. Lloyd Axworthy** today made the following statement about the final adoption of the ***UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples***:

In a matter of weeks, the United Nations General Assembly is expected to vote on the final adoption of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. This decision will have profound importance for 370 million Indigenous women, men and children whose rights are all too casually ignored and violated. This process could also have far-reaching implications for Canada's influence as a credible and influential voice for the protection of human rights.

The *Declaration* has been under development for more than two decades. In fact, today, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, marks the 25th anniversary of the process through which Indigenous peoples brought their demand for recognition to the United Nations.

Canada played a critical role in bringing this process to a successful conclusion, helping to broker agreement among states and Indigenous peoples around the key provisions. It was only fitting therefore that the *Declaration* first went for adoption before the newly created Human Rights Council. Canada had also worked hard to establish this Council as part of an overall program to make the international human rights system more efficient and more principled.

The *Declaration* is meant to foster and support a new relationship between Indigenous peoples and states to encourage the rule of law, democracy and good governance. For far too long not only have Indigenous peoples been denied the benefits of good governance and the rule of law but they have also been victimized by the misapplication of it. We must, as a global community, be willing to support the advancement of Indigenous peoples' cultural, economic and social survival and development. This *Declaration* is one step towards that reality.

Further, human rights declarations are not legally binding. They are intended to provide guidance and inspiration to governments and to society as a whole. They must always be interpreted in light of other human rights standards and state obligations. The *Declaration* makes this quite clear when it states that in

exercising any right in this instrument, the "human rights and fundamental freedoms of all shall be respected" and that the interpretation of its provisions must be "in accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and good faith."

It is true, that human rights declarations can and should provoke national debate about how national laws and policies should be interpreted and reformed. This is healthy and desirable. And it is very much in the spirit of our own Constitution and legal history.

When the *Declaration* comes before the UN again, governments will have to decide whether to answer the call of the world's Indigenous peoples to adopt a global human rights standard that will rise above and begin to refute the centuries of racism and discrimination faced by Indigenous peoples worldwide.

It is not too late for Canada to reaffirm its support for the *Declaration*. It is not too late for Canada to take a firm stand on strengthening the protection for Indigenous peoples around the world. When the UN takes the final decision this fall, it is my hope and expectation that Canada will vote in full favour of this important Declaration. This will demonstrate to the world that Canada is a country that believes in good governance, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and justice.

Sincerely,
Dr. Lloyd Axworthy
President and Vice-Chancellor